

Corrective Action as a Crisis Response Strategy:

Examining Young Consumers Perceptions of Luxury Fashion Brands in The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, fashion brands have been occupied with restoring their brand image in the aftermath of scandals due to ethical controversies, cultural insensitivity, and public scrutiny online. These crises pose a unique threat to brand value, which in the luxury fashion industry relies on consumer trust and emotional resonance. While existing theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and image Repair Theory (IRT) offer guidance on the strategic messaging, they often overlook how younger, socially conscious consumers interpret brand image attributes like sincerity, authenticity, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) following a crisis. This thesis investigates how these perceived brand images influence brand trust and purchase intention among Dutch young adults aged 18 to 29 in response to a luxury fashion brand's rebuild strategy following a crisis. The central question is: To what extent does the perceived brand image of corporate social responsibility, authenticity, and sincerity resulting from a luxury fashion brand's rebuild crisis response strategy influence the brand trust and purchase intention among young adults aged 18 to 29 years in the Netherlands?

A quantitative methodology was employed by distributing a survey based on a hypothetical scenario experiment of the fictional luxury fashion brand Maison Elise. The survey ($N= 206$) measured respondents' perceptions of the brand's crisis response, brand trust, and purchase intention, using validated scales. Statistical analysis was used to examine both direct and indirect relationships between variables. The results indicate that sincerity has the strongest direct effect on purchase intention, followed by authenticity and CSR. Moreover, brand trust was found as a mediator between perceived brand image and purchase intention, suggesting that trust is a key factor through which consumers translate into behavioural intent. Additionally, educational level had a significant effect on purchase intention, with master's degree holders showing higher responsiveness than lower degree holders. These findings contribute to crisis communication theory by integrating affective and ethical dimensions into the SCCT and IRT frameworks. Practically, the results suggest that, next to corrective messages, luxury fashion brands must communicate sincerity and demonstrate value alignment to rebuild trust. The study also suggests that future research to focus on CSR typologies, brand equity, and consumer segmentation in post-crisis scenarios.

KEYWORDS: *Crisis Communication, Consumer Perception, Purchase Intention, Brand Trust, Luxury Fashion*

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1. Introduction

The luxury fashion industry has long represented exclusivity, heritage, and aspiration values. However, in recent years, luxury brands have been put under the glass due to today's socially conscious and digitally transparent environment. Public scandals ranging from cultural appropriation to unethical labour practices have surrounded luxury fashion brands, raising questions about the brand's image and consumer trust (Gálvez-Sánchez et al., 2024, pp. 8-9; Vladimirova et al., 2024, p. 189). Public scandals involving prominent fashion brands often lead to widespread discussions. Besides the nature of the crisis, the discussions involve topics like the credibility and sincerity of the brand's response. Consumers question whether such responses are authentic and reflect the brand's core values, leading to hesitations on future purchase intentions. For example, scandals such as Gucci's blackface sweater in 2018 or Balenciaga's inappropriate advertising campaigns in 2022 damaged the brand's reputation, but this was further intensified due to their delayed or tone-deaf responses. In such sensitive moments, the way a brand communicates during and after a crisis becomes just as important as the crisis itself.

Crisis communication was once considered a reactive and operational process, but has now evolved into a strategic imperative for brand management (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). It shapes public perception, influences stakeholder trust, and determines whether a brand emerges stronger from a crisis or is damaged. This is especially relevant in industries where emotional attachment and brand symbolism play a central role in significantly influencing purchasing behaviour, such as the luxury fashion industry (Shahid et al., 2022, p. 1399).

This research addresses these gaps by focusing on key theoretical models like the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and is further elaborated through the Image Repair Theory (IRT). This research specifically focuses on the rebuild strategy, which involves actions such as apologies and corrective measures aimed at preventing the crisis from happening again (Coombs, 2006, p. 109). It provides data-driven insights tailored to the perceptions of luxury fashion brands' crisis communications of young Dutch consumers, and how these affect brand trust and purchase behaviour.

The theoretical foundation of this research draws on the SCCT, which offers a framework for selecting appropriate response strategies based on the type of crisis and perceived responsibility, while IRT focuses on the rhetorical choices brands make to restore their image post-crisis. This study focuses on the perceived brand image following a rebuild crisis response strategy. To measure how these theories manifest in consumer perception, the study focuses on the construct of perceived brand image, which is operationalised in three subdimensions of authenticity, sincerity, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

While the strategic use of crisis response has been extensively researched in organisational communication literature in various industries, there is limited empirical research that focuses on how such strategies are interpreted by consumers. Most research has analysed crisis communication based on the effectiveness of organisational responses, yet empirical studies focusing on consumer interpretations of a specific response strategy such as the rebuild strategy within the luxury fashion sector are scarce, particularly in terms of emotional connection, brand image, stakeholder segmentations, and alignment with brand values (Grunwald, 2022, p. 417; Leung et al., 2023, p. 888; Park, 2017, p. 192; Philippe et al., 2022, p. 353).

This gap is worth applying to young adults aged 18 to 29, especially since they are considered emerging power buyers due to their growing influence, digital literacy, and value-driven purchasing behaviours (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022, p. 422; Espejo et al., 2025, p. 23). Within the Dutch market, this group demographic represents 39% of luxury fashion buyers and is expected to comprise one-third of global luxury consumers by 2030 (Fion, 2024; Noyen, 2024). As this group enters the workforce and increases purchasing power, brands are investing focus in long-term relationships rather than immediate sales. They aim to nurture the young consumers-to-be by strategically targeting this generation to build long-term emotional bonds and establish a “foundation of future loyalty” (Seth, 2024). Notably, 65% of Dutch consumers have increased expectations of companies when it comes to actively contributing to societal and environmental causes, while 90% of organisations are perceived to fall short of these expectations (Hérault, 2022). Therefore, it is important to highlight the urgency of understanding how crisis communication rebuild strategy affects brand perception among these socially conscious consumers.

More recently, research demonstrates the growing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a buffer during reputational crises, showing that brands with a strong CSR track record face less severe consumer backlash (Jung & Lee, 2022, p. 1643). However, while research has been conducted in various industries using these frameworks, within the luxury fashion sector, among younger segments, and European context, research often lacks empirical validation as it is most often qualitative and case-based (Tosun & Köylüoğlu, 2023, p. 500; Wut et al., 2022, p. 167). This gap is particularly evident in the Dutch context, where data-driven insights are limited regarding how young adults evaluate brand crisis responses.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how young adults in the Netherlands perceive a luxury brand’s rebuild crisis response and how this perception affects their trust in the brand and their intention to purchase from the brand in the future. Specifically, this study seeks to assess the role of sincerity, authenticity, and CSR in shaping perceived brand image after a crisis and determine whether brand trust mediates the relationship between brand image and purchase

intention. Moreover, it explores whether consumer demographics, such as educational level, influence purchase intentions in crisis communication. The research question guiding this study is as follows:

To what extent does the perceived brand image of corporate social responsibility, authenticity, and sincerity resulting from a luxury fashion brand's rebuild crisis response strategy influence the brand trust and purchase intention among young adults aged 18 to 29 years in the Netherlands?

Research Relevance

From a scientific standpoint, this research contributes to the fields of branding, marketing communication, and crisis management by applying well-established theories like SCCT and IRT to the relatively underexplored industry of luxury fashion in this context. While these theories have been applied predominantly in industries such as health, tech, or tourism, their application to the luxury fashion industry remains limited (Dhar & Bose, 2022, p. 161; Zhou et al., 2022, p. 21; Leung et al., 2023, p. 888). Furthermore, this research considers the call in recent literature for more consumer-centric research that studies take specifically consumer perception, and emotional and symbolic dimensions of brand communication into account (Grunwald, 2022, p. 417; Leung et al., 2023, p. 888; Park, 2017, p. 192; Philippe et al., 2022, p. 353). This study focuses on consumer perceptions, rather than examining organisational strategies by incorporating variables such as perceived sincerity, authenticity, and CSR. Consequently, it extends the theoretical boundaries of SCCT and IRT to better reflect the values and expectations of young consumers. In terms of methodology, the study adds quantitative analysis to a field that has largely relied on qualitative and case-based research (Gárgoles & Ambás, pp. 4-5, 2023; Philippe et al., 2022, p. 353; Tosun & Köylüoğlu, 2023, p. 500; Tu et al., 2023, p. 511; Wut et al., 2022, p. 167). This research advances both theory and methodology by measuring consumers' brand image perceptions through a structured survey and applying statistical methods.

The societal relevance of this research lies in its potential to offer marketing, branding, and PR professionals within the luxury fashion industry insights into the increasing demands for ethical transparency and responsiveness. Moreover, this gives advantages in protecting their brand image and helps to build a lasting customer relationship. The findings have the potential to influence how luxury fashion brands craft their rebuild communication strategies in times of brand crisis.

In a broader societal context, this research helps companies align their messaging with the values of a rising generation of luxury fashion consumers. Another potential is the sustainable relationships that can be created between brands and consumers. Sustainable branding extends beyond environmental messaging as it also builds on the emotional credibility and ethical actions

Jung and Lee, 2022, p. 1643). By showing how trust mediated the relationship between brand image and purchase behaviours, this study highlights the importance of ongoing emotional and ethical engagement. Brands that invest in transparent communications and credible CSR practices are more likely to develop long-term relationships with socially aware consumers (Coman et al., 2022, pp. 13–14). Highlighting how consumers perceive corporate responses can encourage brands to adopt more genuine and responsible communication practices. This supports the shift toward a more ethical and accountable brand behaviour and leads to a more informed consumer base and a sustainable brand-consumer relationship across the industry.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation of the research. The aim is to identify, explain, and evaluate the key concepts and models that are essential for understanding how luxury fashion brands can effectively manage crises and protect their brand image, particularly among young emerging luxury fashion consumers. A strong theoretical framework provides the analytical tools needed to interpret brand responses and consumer perceptions during crises. It also ensures that the research is grounded in established academic discourse while identifying areas where existing theories need extended attributes or refinement to fit the specific context of crisis management within the luxury fashion industry.

Given the growing demands of younger generational consumers and the reputational sensitivity of luxury fashion brands, it is important to apply a framework that captures both strategic crisis communication and the factors that impact consumers' perceptions. This section first introduces and critiques two foundational theories in crisis communication: Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory (IRT). These frameworks offer insight into how organisations choose their crisis response strategies and their effects on public discourse.

Next, the chapter conceptualises perceived brand image and deconstructs it into key dimensions like sincerity, authenticity, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). These dimensions are essential for analysing how consumers perceive brands' post-crisis communication. The chapter closes with a discussion on brand trust and purchase intention as mediating and dependent variables, linking corrective actions to long-term customer loyalty and engagement.

By critically evaluating these theories and concepts, this framework guides the development of the research hypotheses and sets the foundation for the empirical research analysis.

2.1. Crisis Communication and Crisis Management

Crisis communication and crisis management are both critical fields of study that focus on understanding how organisations respond to unexpected events that disrupt their operations or threaten their reputation. The term "crisis" itself can be defined as a sudden, significant, and often disruptive event that threatens an organisation's reputation, operations, and relationships with stakeholders (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). This study specifically focuses on "brand crisis" which is more public and media-driven, and typically involve reputational threat, stakeholder scrutiny, and a sense of urgency, where an appropriate response is expected from the organisation to manage perceptions, accountability, and future trust (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 179; Seeger et al., 1998, p. 30). While the concept of crisis management has been well established within organisational theory, crisis communication has emerged as a distinct field that focuses on the symbolic and

communicative aspects of dealing with a crisis. The different perspectives within these fields have led to various academic discussions and theoretical developments.

Crisis communication initially emerged as a subfield within the broader discipline of crisis management, which traditionally focused on operational risk, contingency planning, and organisational recovery (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). However, over time, crisis communication has gained recognition as an independent scholarly and strategic field. The field specifically is concerned with how organisations construct messages and frame narratives during and after crises to protect legitimacy and stakeholder trust (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 173). While crisis management aims to control damage on a structural level, crisis communication engages with the symbolic and perceptual dimensions of a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). In this sense, it moved beyond operational control and instead focuses on managing meaning.

Moreover, crisis communication in corporate contexts has been widely explored through theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory (IRT). Scholars such as Timothy Coombs (1999; 2007) have played a foundational role in shaping the field through the development of SCCT. It provides a foundation for categorising crises based on attribution of responsibility and recommends corresponding strategic responses such as Denial, Diminish, and Rebuild (Coombs, 2007). While other researchers argue that crisis communication should be considered a core strategic function rather than a reactive tool within crisis management (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Seeger et al., 1998, p. 30), Hearit and Courtright (2003) emphasise that crises are not merely objective disruptions, but socially constructed events shaped through discourse and public interpretation (p. 86). This view positions communication as central to both crisis perception and resolution, challenging the framing of communication as merely a reputational protection.

Consequently, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), as developed by Timothy Coombs (2007), provides a foundational framework for understanding how organisations should manage stakeholder communication during a crisis to protect their reputation. The theory posits that organisations should base their response strategies on perceived responsibility as assigned by the public. This attribution is shaped by the type of crisis, pre-crisis reputation, and the degree of crisis history or pattern associated with it (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 166).

2.2. Crisis Response Strategies

Coombs categorises SCCT into three different types to further build on this concept: victim, accidental, and preventable crises. Firstly, victim crises involve natural disasters or external attacks. In these situations, a sympathy-focused response, such as expressing concern or offering support, effectively minimises reputational damage as the crisis attributes low responsibility to the

organisation. Secondly, accidental crises involve situations where an organisation has limited control, such as technical failures. Therefore, explanations and assurances are needed. Thirdly, preventable crises are where the organisation is at fault. In this case, higher accountability measures should be taken, such as apologies and corrective actions, to rebuild trust (Coombs, 2007, p. 165). These different crises require different response strategies based on the perceived responsibility for the crisis. Coombs (2007) breaks these response strategies into the diminish, rebuild, and deny strategies.

2.2.1. Diminish Strategy

The diminish strategies are used to justify or excuse the crisis and are effective for accidental crises. It aims to minimise the organisation's perceived responsibility or the severity of the crisis (Coombs, 2007, p. 171). An example of this strategy is the case of Carolina Herrera. In 2019, the brand was accused of appropriating Mexican culture by using traditional Mexican patterns and designs in their collection without crediting the Mexican culture. As a response to the backlash, the creative director, Wes Gordon, responded that the collection was meant as an appreciation of Mexican culture (Jones, 2019). However, this response downplayed the criticism by framing the scandal as respectful inspiration rather than appropriation. As a result, the Mexican government and cultural critics called for clear acknowledgements and collaboration, while remaining unsatisfied with the initial response (Hogans & McAndrews, 2023, p. 506).

2.2.2. Rebuild Strategy

The rebuild strategy is used for apologies or compensation and is used for preventable crises. It focuses on restoring stakeholder trust and shows a willingness to change, improve, or repair harm (Coombs, 2007, p. 172). From an example case in 2019, Gucci faced backlash after the release of a turtleneck sweater that resembled blackface. Internationally, this sparked outrage and accusations of racism. As a response, Gucci issued a public apology, removed the product from stock, and launched a Gucci Changemakers initiative. This initiative focused on a new hiring strategy of global diversity and inclusion, funding for community-based programs, and internships and scholarships for underrepresented creatives. While the public had opposing opinions on the response, it was mostly viewed positively, and Gucci retained its brand equity (Whitehouse, 2023, pp. 117-118).

2.2.3. Deny Strategy

Whereas the deny strategy is used to reject responsibility for a crisis and disassociate itself from any connection to the crisis, and claims that the organisation is not responsible. It aims to remove blame or refocus public attention elsewhere (Coombs, 2007, p. 171). For example,

Balenciaga faced public backlash for a holiday campaign featuring children dressed in BDSM-inspired accessories, alongside another ad that included legal documents referencing child pornography, which sparked accusations of promoting inappropriate and exploitative imagery (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023, p. 3). As a response, the brand attempted to deflect blame onto external collaborators and the production team, distancing itself from responsibility, which intensified public backlash, resulting in brand damage (p.8).

Coombs' findings emphasise that consumer perceptions of responsibility strongly influence their judgements of a brand's trustworthiness and credibility during a crisis. Research by Langaro et al. (2024, p. 312) proves that a matching response strategy is crucial as it can limit exacerbated reputational harm and prevent consumers from spreading negative content online.

Limitations in the Luxury Fashion Context

Gen Z and young millennial consumers place heightened emphasis on authenticity, CSR alignment, and brand values (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021, p. 524; Jin et al., 2023, p. 2). SCCT alone may appear inauthentic if not adapted to reflect deeper emotional and ethical expectations. While SCCT provides a strong framework, it is limited in its ability to address the nuances that arise in the context of luxury brands. A brand can consider an ideal response strategy, but the effectiveness of such a response depends on whether it resonates with the target audience, as they are the ones interpreting the messages (Bentley, 2018, pp. 224-225). Therefore, consumers' perceptions of crisis communications from luxury fashion brands require a more nuanced understanding, as they offer more benefits compared to mass-market brands in terms of emotional, social, individual, and functional values (Vock, 2022, p. 575). Therefore, to explore the strategic use of crisis messaging and understand its influence on consumer perceptions, SCCT will be complemented with the Image Repair Theory (IRT), which offers a more nuanced exploration of message framing, emotional tone, and reputational repair in public discourse.

Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on the rebuild strategy, which is most used in preventable crises. The corrective nature of the apology aligns more directly with ethical and emotional expectations among the younger demographic of this research. Moreover, research focusing on a specific crisis response strategy is rare, while narrowing down the scope to the rebuild response strategy, the study can enable a more controlled and focused analysis of consumer perception (Holland et al., 2021, p. 8; Park, 2016, p. 192).

To address the limitations of SCCT, the study integrates the Image Repair Theory (IRT), as introduced by William L. Benoit (1997), to further unpack the rhetorical and emotional dimensions of crisis communication. IRT focuses on rhetorical strategies used to manage reputational damage,

including denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensive, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1997, pp. 179-182).

Consequently, the strength of IRT lies in its focus on discursive strategy. Whereas SCCT focuses on matching a response to crisis type, IRT analyses how messages are framed to achieve credibility and emotional resonance with audiences. This makes IRT particularly relevant for understanding consumer responses in industries such as the luxury fashion industry, where the public plays an important role in shaping crisis narratives, which can outweigh corporate messaging more than the crisis cause itself (Ban & Lovari, 2021, p. 326). Within the scope of this research, the combination of SCCT and IRT enables a more holistic understanding of how crisis communication shapes perceived brand image.

2.3. The Image Repair Theory (IRT)

Image Repair Theory (IRT), as theorised by William Benoit (1995), builds on the assumption that a brand's image is central to its survival during a crisis. IRT identifies specific strategies for repairing the reputation, such as denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. These strategies focus on influencing public perception by either shifting blame, downplaying the severity of the issue, or taking responsibility and outlining measures to prevent it from happening again.

In the context of luxury fashion brands, IRT is particularly relevant in addressing crises involving cultural insensitivity or ethical misconduct, as these incidents are often CSR-related and evoke strong reactions from consumers with a high value of social matters. For instance, Balenciaga failed to recognise the risk of severe reputational damage after their 2022 holiday campaign, which involved inappropriate imagery of children. The delayed and ambiguous response from the brand exacerbated the backlash, resulting in both financial and reputational losses (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). In such cases, Benoit's framework suggests that mortification and corrective action, such as acknowledging fault and committing to moral correctness, are more effective than defensive strategies like denial and justification (1997, pp. 183–184). This is further proven by the research by Ban and Lovari (2021), who analyse the 2018 Dolce & Gabbana incident and highlight how most theories do not consider the public's feedback to adjust communication strategies, suggesting that organisations should move beyond traditional perspectives that often view the public as passive recipients (p. 313). Instead, the study advocates for a shift towards public-oriented perspectives where organisations should investigate the influential role of the public when strategising their communicative behaviours and frames during crises (pp. 327–328). This is another reason why customer perceptions are essential to know, as this way organisations know how to respond and prevent brand damage.

To advance theoretical insight into how crisis communication shapes consumer perceptions, it is essential to integrate the concept of perceived brand image into the framework informed by SCCT and IRT. While these theories offer valuable guidance on selecting and framing crisis response strategies, they often overlook how such strategies are received and internalised by consumers. Recent literature identifies several research gaps, including the limited understanding of message framing on rebuild crisis response type within the luxury fashion industry (Ou & Wong, 2021, p. 2902). Furthermore, emerging scholarship on morally charged crises highlights that SCCT should expand to include moral and ethical evaluations to better capture stakeholder reactions (Coombs & Tachkova, 2019, p. 83). This unique crisis type is also referred to as *scansis* and marks perceptions of injustice and greed, which trigger moral outrage, distinct from anger (p. 72). These developments call for greater attention to how public perceptions form and evolve during crises.

Specifically, this study does not evaluate matching the strategy response type but instead uses the theories SCCT and IRT as a lens to explore how perceptions of those rebuild responses affect brand image perceptions on brand trust and purchase intentions. Therefore, incorporating perceived brand image into the theoretical framework addresses these gaps by shifting analytical focus toward the consumer, thereby enabling more comprehensive evaluation of how a crisis communication strategy, in this study, the rebuild approach, affects brand meaning and stakeholder trust.

2.4. Perceived Brand Image

Brand image refers to the immediate mental picture, associations, and emotional connections that consumers form about a brand (Wijaya, 2013, p. 62). Brand image differs from brand reputation, which is a broader, long-term collective evaluation based on credibility (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993, pp. 20–21) and past behaviour (Fombrun, 1996, p. 144). (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). While reputation builds slowly over time, brand image is often more dynamic and can be influenced during the first impression through the cognitive, affective, and evaluative process in the consumers' mind (Lee et al., 2014, p. 8–9).

In the context of luxury fashion brands, perceived brand image plays a significant role. According to the research by Singh et al. (2020), social media plays a significant role in shaping consumers' perceptions during a brand crisis (p. 472). The research showed that influencers can buffer a negative consumer perception during a brand crisis. For many young consumers, this makes the initial brand impression highly influential in forming long-term attitudes. If a consumer's first exposure to a luxury brand is through a poorly handled crisis, it can result in a lasting negative image. Moreover, this demographic is mostly at the beginning stages of engaging with luxury fashion as either aspirational consumers or emerging buyers; therefore, their perceived brand image is

crucial to understanding how brands should present themselves in sensitive moments (Seth, 2024). Therefore, this research will focus on the perceived brand image of consumers rather than brand reputation.

2.4.1. Dimensions of Perceived Brand Image

All in all, perceived brand image is an essential factor influencing how consumers perceive and define brands at first sight (Parris & Guzmán, 2022, p. 198). It shapes purchase intentions and long-term brand equity (Parris & Guzmán, 2022, p. 219; Wang & Tsai, 2014, p. 35). In this research, brand image is conceptualised as an umbrella term comprising three subdimensions: sincerity, authenticity, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). These subdimensions are interrelated to how consumers perceive a brand's image in the context of crisis communication.

2.4.2. Sincerity

Aaker (1997, p. 351) conceptualises brand image through personality traits like sincerity, excitement, competence, and sophistication. Among these, sincerity emerges as particularly relevant in the context of crisis communication. Defined as the perception that a brand is honest, genuine, and caring, sincerity is closely tied to stakeholder evaluations of a brand's communicative authenticity and ethical stance during moments of reputational threat. The research by Ban and Lovari (2021, p. 323) shows how consumers react more critically to perceived insincerity or defensiveness in crisis responses, especially on social media. Within the luxury fashion industry, a brand's ability to influence consumer perceptions through tailored communication strategies is crucial for bolstering its reputation.

Research by Hu and Shi (2020) shows that when a brand is perceived as sincere, customers who view brands as relationship partners are more drawn to develop customer-brand relationships and intend to purchase from them (pp. 9–10). While another research found that non-users of a certain brand tend to rate the brand personality, including the perceived sincerity, as higher than non-users of a brand (Toldos-Romero & Orozco-Gómez, 2015, p. 473). This is interesting to know, as the demographic this study is researching is future customers. In this context, sincerity is based on Aaker's Brand Personality Scale and consists of whether the brand is perceived as honest, sincere, and original, making sincerity a critical subdimension of perceived brand image (Thomas & Sekar, 2008, p. 55).

2.4.3. Authenticity

Brand authenticity has become an important pillar in branding literature. Scholars have defined the concept as being genuine, real, and true to its values (Napoli et al., 2014, p. 1091; Moulard et al., 2021, p. 97; Morhart, 2015, p. 200). Scholars have highlighted that brand authenticity consists of relational components, such as reliability and consistency on the one hand, and

emotional or symbolic traits like originality and naturalness on the other (Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 567; Moulard et al., 2021, p. 97).

Bruhn et al. (2012) operationalise authenticity across four interrelated subdimensions: continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness (p. 567). Napoli et al. (2014) argue that authenticity is a key antecedent to consumer loyalty and attachment to a brand, as it strengthens consumers' emotional bonds and loyalty intentions (p. 1096). Furthermore, studies such as Morhart et al. (2015, pp. 206, 211) emphasise that authenticity enhances brand trust and attachment. A recent example illustrating this is that of John Galliano's renewed popularity on social media. Despite his public dismissal back in 2011 due to his antisemitic remarks, the luxury house Maison Margiela openly acknowledged his return by framing his comeback as a creative healing and accountability (Chrisafis, 2011). This narrative, which claimed self-reflection and emotional growth, resonated with many fashion enthusiasts. The brand's transparently managed approach helped reposition Galliano in a more authentic light, which contributed to a positive reception of his return to the fashion house (Cochrane, 2014). This case highlights how authenticity contributes to an appealing brand identity and acts as a reputational safeguard in times of crisis.

Authenticity, however, does not operate solely. It is evaluated alongside a brand's ethical stance and social contributions, which highlights the need to consider Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a complementary dimension of perceived brand image.

2.4.4. Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's initiatives that go beyond profit-making and are evaluated through corporate associations, which are the connections consumers make between a brand and its corporate behaviour, ethics, and reputation (Ellen et al., 2006, pp. 154–155). Within the scope of crisis communication, CSR plays a dual role as both a pre-crisis buffer to shield brand image and as a post-crisis solution to demonstrate brand commitment in restoring customers' brand trust (Jung and Lee, 2022, p. 1643; Maigain, 2001, p. 69; Milovan et al., 2024, p. 54).

There are different studies done on whether a brand's CSR involvement before or after a crisis impacts customer perceptions. For example, the study by Jung and Lee (2022, p. 1643) found that consumers are more likely to forgive a brand's misconduct or perceive the incident as less severe when the company is involved in CSR activities. Additionally, the research by Milovan et al. (2024, p. 54) found that engaging in CSR initiatives post-crisis can demonstrate a brand's commitment to ethical practices, which aids in improving brand reputation. However, another study by Chen et al. (2021, p. 13) nuances that ethical CSR activities enhance corporate image but do not

have a significant impact on customer trust. These insights add to the debate on whether CSR efforts align with a company's values and consumers' scepticism, where CSR is perceived as opportunistic.

These concerns are particularly important for younger generations as their heightened sensitivity to a brand's social and environmental commitments influences their purchase intention (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022, p. 422). This is further proven in the findings by Coman et al. (2022, pp. 13–14), who indicate that Gen Z consumers show greater trust in brands that demonstrate authenticity and accountability rather than issuing apologies. This is particularly relevant in cases of ethical labour controversies, where transparency in supply chain operations plays a crucial role in shaping consumer trust.

In sum, CSR is an important factor for the conceptualisation of perceived brand image. It is relevant across three primary dimensions relevant to crisis responses from luxury fashion brands: sincerity, authenticity, and social responsibility. In addition, perception does not determine consumer behaviour on its own. It is also relevant to gain insight into how purchasing decisions are dependent on brand trust. In this study, brand trust acts as a mediating variable that connects consumer perceptions of a crisis response to purchase intention. The following section explores the construct of brand trust.

2.6. Purchase Intention

Spears and Singh (2004) explain that intended future purchase behaviour refers to a consumer's planned or anticipated actions toward a brand following an evaluative event (p. 55). While actual behaviour may be shaped by multiple situational factors, intention remains one of the most reliable predictors of long-term consumer-brand relationships in marketing research (Foxall, 2002, pp. 22–26; Morwitz & Munz, 2021, p. 27). It functions as a proxy for brand equity and loyalty, reflecting the strength and durability of the consumer's psychological commitment to the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 83). In recent branding literature, intended behaviour in post-crisis contexts has been studied as an indicator of reputational recovery (Kang et al., 2021, p. 521). Similarly, Alshohaib (2024, pp. 5–6) conceptualises intended behaviour as part of a broader emotional and motivational system wherein positive brand associations generate emotional states that turn into behavioural intentions.

In addition, past research suggests that educational levels also play a significant role in purchase intentions. For example, research by Wang et al. (2022, p. 7) suggest that educational levels play a significant moderating effect when it comes to consumers' purchase intention. This is supported by another study by Aguilar-Rodríguez and Arias-Bolzmann (2023, p. 42), who saw a stronger relationship between lifestyle and purchase intention, with educational levels included as a moderating variable. Notably, Alhosseiny and Nabih (2024) found that trust played a significant

mediating role. Brands perceived as trustworthy following a crisis were more likely to secure continued consumer engagement (p. 8). Therefore, this research will examine to what extent purchase intentions are affected by positive brand image perceptions. Moreover, it will also analyse the mediating role of brand trust between purchase intentions and brand image perceptions.

2.5. Brand Trust

Brand trust is an important construct in marketing literature and is often used as a key mediator in the relationship between brand perception and consumer behaviour (Chaudhari & Holbrook, 2001, p. 90). In crisis communication research, trust is a core metric used to evaluate the effectiveness of brand responses. It captures both the emotional and rational evaluations of consumers in deciding whether they still want to support a brand that takes an unexpected action resulting in a negative outcome (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, pp. 22–23). It is defined as the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand's ability to deliver on its promises, act with integrity, and prioritise the consumer's best interest (Chaudhari & Holbrook, 2001, p. 90).

Multiple studies have confirmed that brand trust plays a mediating role between perceived brand image and consumer loyalty outcomes. For example, Benhardy et al. (2020) found that customers are more inclined to purchase from a brand when they feel the brand is reliable and trustworthy (p. 3431). Additionally, Ling et al. (2023) added to the conversation by demonstrating that a strong brand image and recognition determine the heightened willingness of consumers to purchase from the brand, which is due to the level of brand trust (p. 13). Their findings highlight the importance of trust as an effective response that bridges evaluations of the brand and behavioural buying intentions.

Furthermore, brand trust is highly sensitive to the consistency of crisis responses. A brand's ability to take corrective action and communicate transparently is crucial for re-establishing consumer trust, as emphasised by Bachmann et al. (2015, p. 1133). Their study shows that even when factual explanations are offered, they must be accompanied by an apology and transparency to have a meaningful effect on trust (pp. 1129, 1133). In this research, brand trust is treated as a mediating factor through which perceptions of authenticity, sincerity, and CSR influence behavioural outcomes.

Additionally, it captures consumer judgement in a brand's crisis management, as well as its moral standing and relational worth. Moreover, it enables a practical interpretation of whether brands succeed in rebuilding their image along the dimensions of sincerity, authenticity, and social responsibility; they are more likely to retain the loyalty and advocacy of young consumers, especially in a highly competitive market.

This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: High levels of perceived corporate social responsibility of a brand's rebuild crisis response are strongly associated with brand trust.

H2: Perceived brand image is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.

H2a: Perceived authenticity of a brand's rebuild crisis response is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.

H2b: Perceived sincerity of a brand's rebuild crisis response is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.

H2c: Perceived corporate social responsibility of a brand's rebuild crisis response is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.

H3: Purchase intention following a brand's rebuild crisis response differs significantly across educational levels.

H3a: Consumers with a bachelor's degree differ significantly from those with some college degree in their purchase intention.

H3b: Consumers with a master's degree differ significantly from those with a bachelor's degree in their purchase intention.

H3c: Consumers with a master's degree differ significantly from those with a bachelor's degree or lower degrees in their purchase intention.

H4: Brand trust mediates the relationship between consumers' brand perceptions and purchase intention.

H4a: Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived authenticity of the rebuild crisis response and purchase intention.

H4b: Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived sincerity of the rebuild crisis response and purchase intention.

H4c: Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility of the rebuild crisis response and purchase intention.

2.7. Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical and conceptual insights, this study proposes a model in which perceived sincerity, authenticity, and CSR influence purchase intention, mediated by brand trust. This framework, as seen in [Figure 1](#), serves as both a visual and analytical representation of the theoretical relationships identified in the literature. In Chapter 3 ("Methods"), these constructs are further operationalised and translated into measurable variables using validated scales within a scenario-based research design. The following chapter builds the bridge between theory and empirical investigation by showing how the abstract concepts introduced here are applied in

practice. In doing so, it becomes clear how the theoretical foundations presented in this chapter directly shape the hypotheses and guide the methodological choices of the study.

The following Chapter 4 (“Results”) will provide an overview of testing and analysing the hypotheses. It aims to provide answers and interpretations of the hypotheses using statistical analyses in SPSS. The results of these data will be further interpreted and discussed in the final Chapter 5 (“Discussion and Conclusion”).

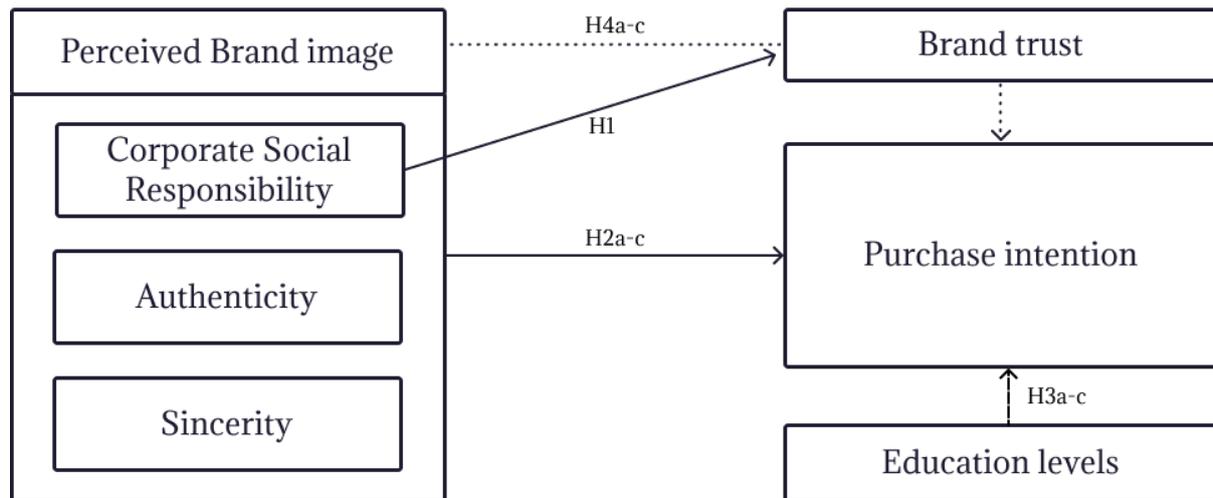


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: visualisation of hypotheses

3. Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology and design used in this research. The research objective is to examine customers' brand perceptions (sincerity, authenticity, and CSR) after a corrective crisis response by luxury fashion brands, and to analyse the extent of the relationships between these brand image perceptions and purchase intentions mediated by brand trust and affected by educational levels. In order to answer the research objective, a quantitative research survey was conducted using the online platform *Qualtrics*. Moreover, this research conceptualises and operationalises the subdimensions of perceived brand image and the variables of purchase intention and brand trust into specific measurement scales.

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, scenario-based survey research design was employed to explore customer perceptions of brand image systematically. This approach is most suitable when the research aims to describe, explain or explore a certain phenomenon, such as the customer brand image perception dimensions of sincerity, authenticity, and CSR (Babbie, 2017, p. 256). Moreover, it enables the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to identify and test relationships and differences using controlled scenarios, such as a hypothetical scenario where a brand uses a corrective action as its crisis response (Babbie, 2017, p. 286).

Consequently, a survey as the data collection instrument enables the gathering of standardised responses from young consumers and measures attitudes in a large population (Babbie, 2017, p. 256). The generalisation of the findings within the target population is made possible as a survey method ensures consistent and comparable data across the participants (2017, p. 286). This way, the relationships of the hypotheses can be tested.

Another reason for this chosen method is that recent studies on similar subjects have already been conducted qualitatively; therefore, this study seeks to granulate those findings within a quantitative framework (Gárgoles & Ambás, pp. 4–5, 2023; Philippe et al., 2022, p. 353; Tosun & Köylüoğlu, 2023, p. 500; Tu et al., 2023, p. 511; Wut et al., 2022, p. 167). Furthermore, the survey approach investigates attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, such as purchase intention and brand trust. Testing variables quantitatively helps to identify significant differences and comparisons in traits across subgroups that would be more difficult to establish through qualitative methods (Babbie, 2017, p. 434). Moreover, the Likert-scale items support the collection of data on perceptions, trust, sincerity, authenticity, and social responsibility.

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection Method

The study employed a purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of participants who are most relevant to the research question (Babbie, 2017, p. 200). The target population of this research

consists of young consumers aged 18 to 29 who live in the Netherlands and who are familiar with luxury fashion brands.

Before the full-scale data collection, a pre-test was conducted with 9 participants from the researcher's network. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram were used to distribute the survey, reaching out to people who reflect the intended target group of Dutch young residents between 18 and 29 years old. This pre-test aimed to assess the survey on clarity, logic, and functionality. Based on feedback, minor adjustments were made in the wording and layout to improve readability and flow.

After the pre-test and adjustments were made, the respondents for the full-scale data collection were recruited through *Prolific* (N = 235), and 8 people filled it in via *SurveyCircle*, both online research platforms specifically designed for academic and scientific studies. This approach offers access to high-quality, targeted participants with tools to ensure ethical and reliable data collection tailored for academic research (Peer et al., 2022, pp. 1643–1644). Using *Prolific* is considered credible due to its high-quality of participants, as the respondents are real people who tend to take research seriously since they are paid for their time. Also, due to the pre-screening capabilities, the platform targets specific populations that match the sample size of this research. Predefined demographic filters were incorporated, targeting Dutch adults living in the Netherlands aged 18-29. Next to that, the platform is used and trusted by academics, as thousands of peer-reviewed publications use data from *Prolific* (Palan & Schitter, 2018, p. 23).

Furthermore, a sample size of approximately 250 respondents was targeted to ensure sufficient statistical power for gathering significant relationships between variables while remaining manageable in terms of data collection. According to the Methodological Guidelines of Thesis Research (Janssen & Verboord, 2024, p. 11), a minimum of 150 to 250 respondents is needed for a valid sample size for a master's thesis. After the data collection period, a total of 252 respondents were recruited (N = 252). Consequently, the inclusion criteria included participants who fall within the specified age range, reside in the Netherlands, and have some familiarity with luxury fashion brands. Exclusion criteria eliminated individuals who are not part of the target demographic, as their responses may not provide meaningful insights into the study's research question (N = 46). This sample size is appropriate because it ensures that the sample comprises individuals with the knowledge and experiences needed to evaluate crisis response strategies in the luxury fashion sector.

Eventually, the total number of responses consisted of 252, of which 46 were invalid. Specifically, 9 responses were from the pilot test, 9 participants did not meet the sample criteria, 3 had missing responses, and the remaining 25 respondents either did not complete the survey or

stopped halfway through. A total of 206 valid responses were retained for analysis following the data cleaning procedures ($N = 206$). The final sample size consisted of young adults living in the Netherlands aged between 18 and 29 years. The average age of the participants was 24.33 years ($SD=2.89$). The gender distribution of those who participated was 44.2% Males ($n= 91$), 54.9% Females ($n = 113$), and 1% non-binary ($n = 2$). There were 7 educational levels presented to the participants. Furthermore, the highest levels of education completed from the demographic ($n = 96$) had a bachelor's degree (46.6%), followed by a master's degree (29.6%) and a High school diploma (13.1%). The remaining had some college degree (9.7%) or a Professional degree (1%).

Moreover, the mean value of the respondents who received the crisis response of the brand as sincere was 4.32 ($SD = 1.44$) on the 7-point Likert, ranging from 1.00 to 7.00. The perceived authenticity had a mean of 4 ($SD = 1.17$), and the perceived CSR had a mean of 4.68 ($SD = 1.28$). The intention to purchase from the brand in the future after having seen the crisis response strategy had a mean of 3.34 ($SD = 1.49$) on the 7-point Likert scale. While the trust in the brand was higher, as it had a mean score of 4.03 ($SD = 1.25$) on the 7-point Likert scale.

3.3. Measurements and Operationalisation

The primary variables have been constructively operationalised based on the theoretical framework. The study examines the brand image as the independent variable, with its subdimensions of perceived authenticity, sincerity, and CSR. The dependent variable is the purchase intention and is assessed on how the independent variables impact it. In order to assess how the independent variables influence the dependent variable, brand trust was used as the mediating variable. Moreover, the strength and direction of the relationship between brand image and the effect on purchase intention were assessed through the variable of educational levels. Participants rated their perceptions of the brand's crisis communication using a 7-point Likert scale (Babbie, 2017, p. 182). This consisted of 1 as Strongly Disagree to 7 as Strongly Agree or 1 as Strongly Likely to 7 as Strongly Unlikely. A 7-point Likert scale was used instead of a 5-point scale, as it allows for a higher probability score of people's responses due to it having more varieties of options (Joshi et al., 2015, p. 398).

Perceived Brand Image. The brand image acted as the independent variable and is conceptualised as consumers' overall evaluation of sincerity, authenticity, and social responsibility following a crisis. The independent variables were measured with the 7-point Likert scale (1 as Strongly Disagree to 7 as Strongly Agree). The perceived brand image is divided into three subdimensions:

Perceived Brand Image: Sincerity. Aaker's (1997, p. 351) Brand Personality Scale was designed with five distinct dimensions, of which each can be analysed independently. This study uses

adapted items to scale, measuring brand 'sincerity' ($M= 4.32, SD= 1.44$) as a subdimension of perceived brand image (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). The other dimensions were excluded because they were not relevant to the research context. To measure this variable, statements like "The brand seems honest in its communication", "The brand comes across as sincere in handling the issue", "The brand seems original in its response", and "The brand comes across as real in its response" were made in the survey based on a 7-point Likert Scale (Aaker, 1997, p. 345).

Perceived Brand Image: Authenticity. Consequently, the factor authenticity ($M= 4.01, SD= 1.17$) was included as a dependent variable to capture the behavioural implications of consumer perceptions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$). Authenticity was measured through survey items such as "The brand seems like it will deliver on its promises," and "The brand makes reliable promises.", "The brand seems unique in how it handled the issue", and "The brand seems like it maintains its core values", as constructed by Napoli et al. (2014, p. 1931).

Perceived Brand Image: Corporate Social Responsibility. Finally, the factor of social responsibility ($M= 4.68, SD= 1.27$) captured the perceived genuine intention of the actions that will follow the brand's statement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). The measurement scales were adapted from different studies analysing the perceived CSR of consumers (Liechtenstein et al, 2004; Madrigal and Boush, 2008; Maignan, 2001). Example statements like "The brand demonstrates support for social problems" (Maignan, 2001, p. 64), "The brand takes responsibility for its actions in society" (Madrigal and Boush, 2008 as seen in Grohmann & Bodur, 2014, p. 396), "The brand's response reflects strong Corporate Social Responsibility" and "The brand shows commitment to ethical and responsible behaviour" (Lichtenstein et al., 2004, p. 30) were asked. The operationalisation ensures that the key relationships as outlined in the research question are accurately captured.

Brand Trust. In order to measure brand trust ($M= 4.68, SD= 1.27$), the four-item index measurement scale as constructed by Chaudhari and Holbrook (2001) was used p. 87) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). The statements used were: "I can trust this brand", "I can rely on this brand", "This is an honest brand", and "This brand is safe". This variable was measured using the 7-point Likert scale (1 as Strongly Disagree to 7 as Strongly Agree).

Purchase Intention. The intended future purchase behaviour ($M= 3.34, SD= 1.49$) is conceptualised by Aaker (1997) as consumers' long-term collective behavioural intentions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). To measure purchase intentions, the survey items consisted of "I would purchase from this brand in the future", "I intend to purchase products from this brand in the future", and "I am inclined to purchase from this brand in the future". These scales were adapted from Chen & Branes (2007, p. 36) as seen in Hsu et al. (2017, p. 339). This variable was included to capture how shifts in perceived brand image, influenced by a corrective action, may impact

consumers' future intended behaviour and was measured with the 7-point Likert-scale (1 as Extremely Unlikely to 7 as Extremely Likely).

3.4. Procedure

The data was collected using a survey that was made using Qualtrics. Collecting the data took over a span of 4 days, from the 12th of May to the 16th of May 2025. It was a relatively short survey that took less than five minutes to complete. In the survey, vignettes were used to simulate a realistic crisis response of a fictional brand. The hypothetical crisis scenarios involved a made-up luxury fashion brand, 'Maison Élise' was presented to the respondents based on the Rebuild strategy. The scenario was fictionally constructed using examples from real-world cases. This scenario was inspired by real brand responses to scandals of luxury fashion brands. The survey scenario was then visualised using ChatGPT. The example of the 2018 Dolce & Gabbana incident showed that customer perceptions are essential to know, as this way organisations know how to respond and prevent brand damage (Ban and Lovari, 2021, pp. 327–328). Taking this example, the scenario consisted of what Dolce & Gabbana could have done to consider their response as a corrective action. Moreover, the fictive scenario was complemented with the rebuild crisis response strategy that was used by Gucci, taking corporate social responsibility into account and promising a new hiring strategy of global diversity and inclusion, funding for community-based programs, and internships and scholarships for underrepresented creatives (Whitehouse, 2023, pp. 117–118).

During the survey, the participants were first given information on what they could expect in the survey, what the research is about, and assurance of the confidentiality and anonymity of the survey. In order to motivate the respondents to fill out the survey, an incentive such as a song recommendation was promised after finishing the survey. Lastly, at the end of the survey, the respondents were debriefed. Here, a short explanation of the crisis response strategies was given. Furthermore, the purpose of the research was reiterated, and contact details were provided in case of questions and concerns.

Participants then had to give consent and confirm that they fit the sample size. An exclusion criterion was applied in the survey, which meant that if they did not fit the criteria, the survey would end. Then, the hypothetical crisis response scenario was shown. Based on this scenario, the participants had to state on a 7-point Likert scale how much they (dis)agreed with the statement, or how (un)likely they were to purchase from the brand. The survey ends by thanking the respondents for their participation, and the duration was less than five minutes to make. All the variables that were mentioned in the survey are operationalised with related scales in order to make them measurable for conducting the statistical analyses and testing the hypotheses. The full survey can be viewed in [Appendix A](#).

3.5. Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 28 based on a cleaned dataset of N= 206 valid responses. After the cleaning of the dataset, a reliability check was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to create composite scores. The composite scores for the constructs of brand image perceptions (authenticity, sincerity, corporate social responsibility), brand trust, and purchase intention were created.

First, descriptive statistics of the participant demographics and overall trends in the data are summarised. For example, mean scores and standard deviations are calculated for key variables of perceived brand image (authenticity, sincerity, and CSR), purchase intention, and brand trust.

Then, the factor analysis (FA) is conducted to validate the survey instrument and ensure that the constructs are measured appropriately. Construct validity is ensured by grounding the survey items in established theoretical frameworks (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003, p. 609; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955, p. 16). Moreover, Factor Analysis (FA) verified that the survey items are appropriate to the intended constructs (Kim & Mueller, 1978, p. 9). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was assessed, measuring the sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Internal consistency is considered adequate when each construct shows KMO values of $\geq .70$ (Watkins, 2018, pp. 226, 235). To identify outliers and patterns in the data, the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Direct Oblimin Rotation (with a maximum of 25 iterations for convergence) were performed. Factors with an eigenvalue of 1 or higher are retained, and one-third of the factor loadings above 0.3 are regarded as meaningful for the interpretation (Yong & Pearce, 2013, p. 81; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 58). Assessing whether the concepts are measuring the intended measure contributes to the construct validity. Once the FA was conducted, the reliability analysis was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for the internal consistency of the items within each factor, indicating they measure the same underlying construct (Watkins, 2018, p. 235). According to Nunnally's (1978) criteria, Cronbach's alpha is indicated as acceptable when the threshold is 0.7 or higher (p.245).

Consequently, a simple linear regression was first used to explore the individual effect of CSR on the dependent variable, brand trust. The multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct effects of perceived brand images of authenticity, sincerity, and CSR on the dependent variable of purchase intention. This method is most appropriate as it tests the multiple predictors of the independent variable to evaluate each contribution while controlling for shared variance between predictors (Roediger et al., 2001, p. 389). Standardised beta coefficients, R^2 values, and significance levels were reported to assess the model fit and contributions of each predictor. Multicollinearity diagnostics, such as Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), were examined to ensure intercorrelations were low among predictor variables (O'Brien, 2007, p. 673).

Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the differences in educational level on perceived sincerity. ANOVA is the most suitable method as it allows for the comparison of the mean scores across multiple independent groups to identify the existence of significant differences in the dependent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 69). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was tested using Levene's test (Gastwirth et al., 2009, p. 348), and post hoc comparisons were conducted where appropriate using Tukey's HSD to test if the relationship between the data is significant (Nanda et al., 2021, p. 60).

Lastly, the mediation analysis using PROCESS was conducted to test the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between perceived sincerity and purchase intention. This method allows for testing indirect effects on whether perceived sincerity influences purchase intention mediated by brand trust (Hayes, 2007, p. 3). The PROCESS tool by Hayes (2007, p. 567) allows the inclusion of bootstrap confidence intervals.

Factor Analysis and Reliability

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted with Direct Oblimin rotation to explore the underlying factor structure of the 19 survey items measuring Sincerity, Authenticity, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified sampling adequacy ($KMO = 0.94$), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(171) = 3622.53, p < .001$, indicating that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. The results are presented in [Table 1](#).

Based on the criterion of Eigenvalues > 1.0 , five factors were extracted, explaining a total of 59.34% of the variance. However, the factor solution did not fully align with the theoretical structure of the constructs. For instance, items from CSR and Sincerity loaded onto the same component, which was inconsistent with the hypothesised groupings. A possible reason for this deviation may be due to contextual differences in the study population (young adults aged 19 to 29 years in the Netherlands) or item interpretation. For instance, a study by Beavers et al. (2013, pp. 1, 6) emphasises the importance of assessing the factor structure in new contexts to ensure the scale's validity.

Despite these results, the reliability analysis showed that each of the original scales had high internal consistency: Sincerity $\alpha = .91$, Authenticity $\alpha = .90$, CSR $\alpha = .92$, Brand Trust $\alpha = .95$, and Purchase Intention $\alpha = .89$. Given these strong Cronbach's alpha values ($\alpha > .80$), the original theoretical structure was retained, and mean scores were computed for each scale. This decision is supported by past literature in psychometrics research, which emphasises the importance of reliability in establishing construct validity (DeVellis, 2017, p. 29; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 1. Factor and Reliability Analysis for Perceived Brand Image, Purchase Intention, and Brand Trust (N=206)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Sincerity</i>	<i>Purchase Intention</i>	<i>Authenticity</i>	<i>Brand Trust</i>	<i>CSR</i>
The brand seems like it will deliver on its promises	.85				
The brand makes reliable promises	.76				
The brand takes responsibility for its actions in society	.72				
The brand demonstrates support for social problems	.70				
The brand comes across as sincere in handling the issue	.57			(-.33)	(-.33)
The brand seems honest in its communication	.56			-.30	
The brand's response reflects strong Corporate Social Responsibility	.55				(.38)
The brand shows commitment to ethical and responsible behavior	.49				(.37)
The brand comes across as real in its response	.40			(-.31)	(-.38)
I am inclined to purchase from this brand in the future		.94			
I intend to purchase products from this brand in the future		.93			
I would purchase from this brand in the future		.92			
The brand seems unique in how it handled the issue			1.0		
The brand seems original in its response			.66		
The brand seems like it maintains its core values			.34	(-.32)	
This brand is safe				-.85	
I can rely on this brand				-.71	
This is an honest brand				-.58	
I can trust this brand				-.57	
χ^2	.94				
Cronbach's Alpha ∞	.92	.94	.81	.91	.89

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

This chapter presents the results of statistical analyses used to test the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 2. Before running regression, variance and mediation analyses, to test the hypotheses, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed for all constructs to understand their distribution and associations. This step ensures transparency, checks for expected relationships, detects errors, and provides insights into the strength and direction of bivariate associations (Denis, 2018, pp. 41–62, 69, 183).

The descriptive statistics for all items included in the five constructs: Sincerity, Authenticity, CSR, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention. Respondents rated all items on a 7-point Likert scale. The mean scores of the items across constructs ranged from $M = 4.03$ to $M = 4.68$, with standard deviations ranging from $SD = 1.17$ to $SD = 1.49$. All the variables had sufficient variability, suggesting a good spread of responses with no indication of floor or ceiling effects.

The strength and direction of the correlations between the variables were assessed using Pearson correlation coefficients (r) with values of .1, .3, and .5 indicating weak, moderate, and strong effects, ranging from -1 to 1 (Cohen et al., 1999, p. 325). The results as shown in [Table 2](#), visualises the relationships of the variables, which were all significant at $p < .01$. As expected, sincerity, authenticity, and CSR all show a strong significant positive correlation with brand trust ($r = .76, .75, .77$). This provides bivariate support for H1 and H4a-c. Moreover, it suggests that higher brand image perceptions of a rebuild crisis response are associated with greater brand trust.

Consequently, all three perceptions of sincerity ($r = .54$), authenticity ($r = .75$), and CSR ($r = .55$) showed a strong positive correlation with purchase intention, supporting H2a-c. This supports the idea that brand image perceptions of a rebuild crisis response correlate with purchase intention. Notably, brand trust was also strongly associated with purchase intention ($r = .69$). This reinforces its mediating role as proposed in H4.

Notably, the strongest correlations were found between sincerity and authenticity ($r = .82$) and between CSR and brand trust ($r = .77$). This indicates that these perceptions are closely aligned in consumer evaluations. While this supports the convergent validity of constructs, the high correlation between sincerity and authenticity suggests potential concerns about multicollinearity in regression models. However, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values suggested that the multicollinearity of sincerity and authenticity was within acceptable limits of below 10 ($VIF = 3.37, 3.56$) and all tolerance values were greater than .10 ($TOL = .30, .28$), ensuring that this does not distort the estimates significantly (O'Brien, 2007, p. 673).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix (N=206)

Correlation Matrix							
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sincerity	Authenticity	CSR	Brand Trust	Purchase Intention
Sincerity	4.32	1.44	1	.82**	.74**	.76**	.54**
Authenticity	4.01	1.17		1	.75**	.75**	.58**
CSR	4.68	1.27			1	.77*	.55**
Brand Trust	4.03	1.25				1	.69**
Purchase Intention	3.34	1.49					1

**Correlation significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

4.2. Linear Regression Analysis

To test hypothesis 1 (H1), a simple linear regression analysis was conducted where the dependent variable was brand trust, and the independent variable was one of the brand image perceptions: CSR. Both were measured as continuous composite scores based on the same Likert scales (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 13). Before interpreting the results, assumptions were tested, such as the normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and linearity.

The assumption of normality of residuals was checked using a histogram and P-P plot of the standardised residuals. Both plots showed no major deviations; therefore, the residuals were approximately normally distributed. Moreover, the assumption of homoscedasticity was also supported: no funnel-shaped patterns were observed in the residual scatterplot. Additionally, multicollinearity was not a concern, since the model included only one predictor ($TOL 1, VIF 1$). Therefore, the data met the OLS regression assumption.

The results show that CSR significantly predicts brand trust, and the outcome was statistically significant ($F(1, 204) = 291, p < 0.001$). The model explained 58.9% of the variance in brand trust ($R^2 = .589$). This presents a very strong positive effect (Cohen, 1988, pp. 77–82), suggesting that as perceived CSR increases, brand trust also increases. Moreover, CSR indicated a strong positive partial effect on brand trust ($b^* = .77, t = 17.06, p < .001, 95\% CI [.665, .839]$). This means that higher levels of perceived CSR would be positively associated with brand trust. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

4.3. Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis has been conducted in order to test hypothesis H2, which are to examine the extent to which consumers' perceptions of a brand's sincerity, authenticity, and CSR predict their intention to purchase products from that brand. Multiple regression is appropriate here because the variables are measured as continuous composite scores using the same Likert scale, allowing for testing direct linear effects and relative predictor strength (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 13). The independent variables consisted of sincerity ($M= 4.32, SD= 1.44$), authenticity ($M= 4.01, SD= 1.17$), and CSR ($M= 4.68, SD= 1.49$), with purchase intention as the dependent variable ($M= 3.34, SD= 1.27$). The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 202) = 65.32, p < .001$, and explained 49.2% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = .492$). This shows a moderately strong predictive power according to social science standards (Cohen, 1988, pp. 77–82). This means that sincerity, authenticity, and CSR collectively explain nearly half of the variation in consumers' intention to purchase from a brand following its crisis response. This analysis is important as it assesses the most significant factors, the effect of the brand perception variables on purchase intention, and the total variance (R^2).

As shown in [Table 3](#), all three predictors made a statistically significant unique contribution to the model based on their effect sizes (Cohen, 1988; Fey et al., 2023, pp. 182–188). The strongest predictor of purchase intention was brand sincerity, with a medium-to-large effect on purchase intent ($b^* = .45, t = 6.89, p < .001$). This suggests that participants who rated the brand response as more sincere were significantly more likely to report intention to purchase its products. Moreover, authenticity showed a moderate effect size and contributed significantly ($b^* = .28, t = 4.53, p < .001$), indicating that authenticity is somewhat less influential than sincerity. Finally, CSR was a significant, though weaker, predictor ($b^* = .19, t = 3.12, p < .001$), suggesting that socially responsible behaviour is still relevant but less influential than sincerity or authenticity in driving purchase intention. Since all three predictors had a positive significance to purchase intention, hypotheses H2a-c are accepted.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Purchase Intention from Brand Perception Variables (N=206)

Predictor	B	SE B	b*	t	p
Sincerity	0.52	0.08	0.45	6.89	< .001
Authenticity	0.38	0.08	0.28	4.53	< .001
CSR	0.25	0.08	0.19	3.12	.002
Constant	0.92	0.36	-	2.56	.011

Note. R^2 adjusted= .484, $F(3, 202) = 65.32, p < .001$

4.4. ANOVA

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the association of educational level with the customers' purchase intention following a brand's rebuild crisis response strategy. Participants were grouped based on their reported level of education: high school graduates ($n= 27$), some college degree ($n= 20$), bachelor's degree ($n= 96$), master's degree ($n= 61$), and professional degree ($n= 2$). The dependent variable was the mean score of purchase intention. Since the groups are not equal in size, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's test. This was found to be non-significant, $F(4, 201) = 1.27, p = .283$. This indicates that the assumption of equal variances across groups was met (Cohen, 1988, pp. 77–82).

The results from the ANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant, small to moderate main effect of educational levels on purchase intention, $F(4, 201) = 3.14, p = .016, \eta^2 = .059$. This indicates that the purchase intention of customers differs across educational backgrounds. Table 4 shows the mean scores per group: Master's Degree $M = 3.71, SD = 1.55$, High School Graduate $M = 3.84, SD = 1.40$, Some college $M = 3.00, SD = 1.45$, Bachelor's Degree $M = 4.20, SD = 1.41$, Professional Degree $M = 3.0, SD = .00$.

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed that participants with a master's degree had significantly higher purchase intention than those with a bachelor's degree ($Difference = 0.68, p = .040$), supporting H3b. However, no other pairwise differences were seen to be statistically significant. For example, the difference between bachelor's and some college degree did not differ ($Mdifference = 3.03, p = 1.000$), therefore rejecting H3a. Moreover, the difference between master's degree holders and degrees lower than a Bachelor's was not statistically significant, therefore rejecting H3c.

Table 4. One-Way Analysis of Variance for Purchase Intention by Education Level, Means, and Standard Deviations ($N=206$)

Education Level	M	SD	N
High School Graduate	3.84	1.40	27
Some College	3.00	1.45	20
Bachelor's Degree	3.03	1.41	96
Master's Degree	3.71	1.55	61
Professional Degree	3.00	.00	2

4.5. Mediation Analysis

To test the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and purchase intention, a mediation analysis was performed using PROCESS macro v5.0 (Model 4; Hayes 2022), with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals.

The analysis showed that perceived authenticity significantly predicted brand trust, $b = 0.79$, $SE = .050$, $t = 15.93$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.69, 0.89]. This suggests that perceived authenticity is strongly associated with increased trust in the brand. Moreover, brand trust also significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = .55$, $SE = .090$, $t = 7.71$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.73]. However, the direct effect of perceived authenticity on purchase intention was not statistically significant, $b = .18$, $SE = .096$, $t = 1.89$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.0074, 0.370]. While the indirect effect of authenticity on purchase intention via brand trust was statistically significant, $b = .44$, $BoostSE = .095$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.63], as the confidence interval does not include zero.

These findings support a partial-to-full mediation, with most of the effect of perceived authenticity on purchase intention being affected through brand trust, supporting H4a.

The results showed that perceived sincerity significantly predicted brand trust, $b = 0.66$, $SE = .040$, $t = 16.47$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.58, .73]. This indicates that respondents who rated a brand as more sincere also reported significantly higher trust in the brand. Furthermore, brand trust was found to be a strong, significant predictor of purchase intention, $b = 0.78$, $SE = .092$, $t = 8.44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.60, .96]. However, the direct effect of sincerity on purchase intention was not significant, $b = 0.05$, $SE = .080$, $t = .59$, $p < .559$, 95% CI [-.11, .21]. The indirect effect of sincerity on purchase intention via brand trust was statistically significant, $b = .51$, $SE = .072$, 95% CI [.37, .66], indicating that the confidence interval does not include zero. Together, these results support a full mediation, meaning the effect of perceived sincerity on purchase intention operates through brand trust directly, which supports H4b.

For the perceived CSR, the results showed that this significantly predicted brand trust, $b = .75$, $SE = .044$, $t = 17.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.67, .84], indicating that participants who rated the brand higher on CSR were more likely to trust the brand. In turn, brand trust significantly predicted purchase intention, $b = .78$, $SE = .094$, $t = 8.22$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.59, .96]. However, the direct effect of CSR on Purchase intention was not significant, $b = 0.06$, $SE = .092$, $t = .63$, $p < .530$, 95% CI [-.12, .24]. Important here to note is that the indirect effect of CSR on purchase intention through brand trust was significant, $b = .58$, 95% CI [.40, .76], meaning that the confidence interval did not include zero.

This pattern of results supports full mediation, indicating that brand trust fully mediates the relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility and purchase intention. Therefore,

H4 is supported as brand trust mediates the link between CSR perceptions and purchase intention, and H4c is supported as well, as CSR affects purchase intention through brand trust. [Table 5](#) shows the full overview of the evaluations of the hypotheses.

Table 5. Overview of hypotheses evaluations

Hypotheses	Accepted/rejected
H1 High levels of perceived corporate social responsibility of a brand's rebuild crisis response are strongly associated with brand trust.	Accepted
H2 Perceived brand image is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.	Accepted
H2a Perceived authenticity of a brand's rebuild crisis response is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.	Accepted
H2b Perceived sincerity of a brand's rebuild crisis response is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.	Accepted
H2c Perceived corporate social responsibility of a brand's rebuild crisis response is positively associated with consumers' purchase intention.	Accepted
H3 Purchase intention following a brand's rebuild crisis response strategy differs significantly across educational levels.	Accepted
H3a Consumers with a bachelor's degree differ significantly from those with some college degree in their purchase intention following a brand's crisis response strategy.	Rejected
H3b Consumers with a master's degree differ significantly from those with a bachelor's degree in their purchase intention following a brand's crisis response strategy.	Accepted
H3c Consumers with a master's degree differ significantly from those with lower degrees than bachelor's degree in their purchase intention following a brand's crisis response strategy.	Rejected
H4 Brand trust mediates the relationship between consumers' brand perceptions and purchase intention.	Accepted
H4a Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived authenticity of the rebuild crisis response and purchase intention.	Accepted
H4b Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived sincerity of the rebuild crisis response and purchase intention.	Accepted
H4c Brand trust mediates the relationship between perceived corporate social responsibility of the rebuild crisis response and purchase intention.	Accepted

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings and addresses the research question: “To what extent does the perceived brand image of corporate social responsibility, authenticity, and sincerity resulting from a luxury fashion brand’s rebuild crisis response strategy influence the brand trust and purchase intention among young adults aged 18 to 29 years in the Netherlands?” This chapter synthesises and discusses the key findings of the preceding chapters, integrating prior research and literature. Following, it reflects on the theoretical, empirical, and societal implications. Finally, this chapter integrates the findings to critically assess contributions to existing theory and practice and outlines directions for the limitations and future research.

5.1. Summary and interpretations of the main findings

This study aimed to examine how young adults in the Netherlands perceive a luxury fashion brand’s crisis response. Through a quantitative, scenario-based survey design, this research focused on the roles of perceived sincerity, authenticity, and corporate social responsibility and how they contribute to the overall effectiveness of crisis responses by examining their effect on brand trust and purchase intention. In line with the expectations established through theoretical frameworks such as the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007) and the Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1997), the findings demonstrate that the perceived brand image serves as a strong indicator to predict purchase intention. Notably, brand trust acts as a full mediator in the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. This means that high brand image perceptions of sincerity, authenticity, and CSR translate to purchase intention when they succeed in generating trust. Additionally, educational levels were found to influence purchase intentions among master’s degree holders, suggesting that consumer segmentation may moderate the effectiveness of a crisis response.

Furthermore, validated measures were used in this study, relying on quantitative analyses, including factor analysis, regression, ANOVA, and mediation using PROCESS v5.0. The factor analysis revealed a structure that only partially aligned with theoretical expectations. Items from the sincerity and CSR scales loaded on the same component, suggesting conceptual overlap in how young Dutch consumers interpret these constructs. Some deviation from the hypothesised model was observed, which is likely due to the contextual influences, such as cultural or demographic differences in interpretation of the constructs (Beavers et al. 2013, pp. 1, 6). However, the original scale structure was retained due to the high internal consistency of the constructs (all Cronbach’s $\alpha > .89$). This decision is justified by psychometric standards that emphasise internal reliability as a condition for construct validity (DeVellis, 2017, p. 29; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Moreover, the statistical analyses revealed several key insights into the relationship between crisis communication and consumer perceptions. The linear regression analyses showed that perceived CSR was significantly and positively associated with brand trust. This means that the higher the perceived CSR, the higher the brand trust. These findings align with prior research indicating that CSR is a key driver of brand trust, which in turn influences consumer behaviour (Jung and Lee, 2022, p. 1643; Maigain, 2001, p. 69; Milovan et al., 2024, p. 54). At the same time, it proves the opposite of the findings of Chen et al. (2021, p. 13), who stated that CSR does not have a significant impact on customer trust. In the context of young Dutch consumers, CSR signals can be interpreted both as reputational management and as substantive moral commitments that build confidence in the brand's intentions. First of all, considering that these young consumers are beginning or soon to be entering the workforce and are a demographic who value corporate transparency and ethical accountability, brands must manage a reputation that involves CSR commitments and start building relationships with this demographic.

Moreover, multiple linear regression revealed that all three components of perceived brand image were significantly and positively associated with purchase intention. Together these results show that consumers' purchase intention are most influenced by how sincere they find the brand's response, followed by how authentic, and then how socially responsible they perceive it to be, just as what prior research also demonstrated (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022, p. 422; Hu and Shi, 2020, pp. 9–10; Napoli et al., 2014, p. 1069). Although the results of the effect on authenticity partially deviated from findings from Morhart et al. (2015, p. 97) and Moulard et al. (2021, pp. 206, 211), who described authenticity as a cornerstone of brand trust and attachment. Although Bruhn et al. (2012, 567) argued, authenticity often relies on an established relationship between brand and consumer, which in this study was not possible to test due to the hypothetical nature of the fictional brand used. However, this analysis still shows interesting insights about authenticity as an indicator of pre-crisis relationship management, as it can yield positive brand positioning in future customers' minds.

Furthermore, the expectations as shown in the ANOVA analysis resulted in significant differences in purchase intentions between participants of different educational backgrounds. These findings suggest that evaluations on purchase intentions from young adults with a master's degree are more attuned to ethical messaging and may possess more nuanced evaluations for corporate responsibility (Aguilar-Rodríguez and Arias-Bolzmann, 2023, p. 42). However, consumers with a lower degree than a bachelor's did not differ significantly in their purchase intentions following a brand's crisis response. Regardless of their background, this may reflect shared cultural values or a homogenised perception of brand messaging among this demographic.

Consequently, the mediation analyses confirmed that brand trust serves as an important mediator, translating positive brand image perceptions into behavioural intention. Brand trust consistently emerged as a full or partial mediator between the perception constructs and purchase intention. This implies that even if CSR or sincerity alone are not strong direct predictors of behaviour, their impact is activated through trust. This is in alignment with earlier study that suggests trust to be an important role in crisis communication (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, pp. 22–23). Although it also adds to theories of SCCT and IRT, trust should not only be treated as a byproduct for image restoration, but both as an outcome and a mediator in pre-crisis management and post-crisis recovery solutions.

5.2. Theoretical, Practical, Societal Implications

5.2.1. Theoretical Implications

The result of this study makes several contributions to the branding and crisis management literature by advancing the understanding of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory (IRT) within the underexplored context of luxury fashion. For instance, SCCT provides a robust framework for categorising crises and prescribing suitable response strategies (e.g. rebuild, diminish, and deny); however, it often fails to consider how these responses are received by customers. This study demonstrates that SCCT alone may be insufficient in contexts where brand image is symbolic and emotional, especially for a demographic that places high value on social and ethical values. In addition, support calls from scholars such as Coombs and Tachkova (2019, p. 83), Park (2017, p. 192) and Philippe et al. (2022, p. 353), who argue that consumer interpretation is shaped by moral affective evaluations. Therefore, it is essential to include sincerity and CSR in eliciting trust and incentivising purchase intentions for enriching SCCT with these dimensions.

Furthermore, the empirical findings of this research add relevance to IRT as it deepens the understanding of how brand responses are discursively negotiated in the consumer mind. The integration of IRT enhances the explanatory power of SCCT by focusing on rhetorical framing, emotional tone, and symbolic meaning in brand responses. The theoretical approach highlights two views of interpreting crisis responses: on how a message is delivered (tone, framing, commitment), and what is said in the message (apology, CSR action). Image repair is dependent on how consumers interpret the intent behind corrective messaging. This also supports the view of Hearit and Courtright (2003, p. 86) that image repair is dialogical and not only strategic. Therefore, the study supports the growing academic shift from interpreting crisis communication from a strategic point of view to incorporating consumer evaluations.

Additionally, this study contributes from a methodological contribution by operationalising perceived brand image as a three-part construct of sincerity, authenticity, and CSR. While these

variables are frequently studied independently, their combined use enables a more holistic analysis of how consumers interpret crisis messages from brands. This approach allows for more granularity on crisis communication research, as the quantitative nature of this study offers empirical validation of theoretical claims in a field predominantly explored through qualitative studies (Gárgoles & Ambás, pp. 4–5, 2023; Philippe et al., 2022, p. 353; Tosun & Köylüoğlu, 2023, p. 500; Tu et al., 2023, p. 511; Wut et al., 2022, p. 167).

5.2.2. Practical implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer several takeaways for luxury fashion brands and professionals. The findings offer actionable insights into how to maintain and restore trust and purchase intention following a crisis. The empirical findings of this research show evidence that image repair is not something to consider only after a crisis has occurred but should act as a relational strategy tool as well. Especially considering the demographic that is yet to become consumers, brands should be focusing on reputation management and peacetime relationships with stakeholders. This is especially confirmed due to brand trust acting as a mediating mechanism as a relational bridge between crisis perception and purchase intention. For instance, authenticity showed as an indicator of pre-crisis relationship management, which can yield positive brand positioning in future customers' minds. Therefore, crisis messages which appear honest and genuinely aligned with their core values can be more effective in restoring consumer confidence. Furthermore, since brand trust fully mediated the effects of CSR and sincerity, it shows that efforts to enhance trust are important during crisis communication. Trust also enhances message credibility: once a brand is trusted, its future claims are more readily believed and can recover from brand damage faster (Wang & Yang, 2010, p. 178).

5.2.3. Societal implications

From a societal perspective, this study adds relevance in light of current demands for ethical brand behaviour. The fashion industry continues to face criticism for greenwashing, labour exploitation, and cultural and ethical insensitivities. By investigating how crisis responses are perceived by a socially conscious generation, this study offers brands an empirical basis to evolve from insincere crisis communication to more transparent communication practices. Furthermore, public discourse is becoming of more importance in shaping perceptions of a brand. The public is a co-creator of crisis narratives, so the public should not be viewed as just a passive recipient, but brands should aim for a more participatory strategy (Ban & Lovari, 2021, pp. 313, 326). This will also enhance brand-consumer relationship management. It should be considered that when a brand is positioned positively in the customer's mind, the damage to the brand post-crisis will also be

significantly lower, as the brand image perceptions are considered high. Therefore, public feedback should not be an afterthought but should be an integral part of brand strategy as a preventive tool.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, this study focused on the rebuild strategy following a crisis response, which represents one part of the three strategies proposed by SCCT. Future research could focus on examining the impact of perceived brand image under the diminish and deny crisis response strategies. This will offer comparative insights into how each response type affects customer perception, trust and purchase intentions.

Second, the use of a fictional brand (Maison Élise) helped isolate key variables and reduce confounding biases related to existing brand perceptions, but this may limit ecological validity. The hypothetical scenario shown did not account for real-world dynamics. For example, media coverage (Holladay, 2009, p. 208) or influencer involvement (Singh et al., 2020, p. 472) can play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions during an actual crisis. Future studies could use real-world cases or apply field experiments with known luxury brands to validate findings in a setting closer to reality.

Third, this research analysed how brand image is constructed in consumers' minds based on their interpretation of crisis responses. This can be examined further by putting nuance on brand equity as a variable. Brand equity is a concept that captures the long-term value and strength of a brand as perceived by consumers (Aaker, 1992, p. 28). Future research could introduce this as a key variable to examine how prior familiarity and positioning influence consumer judgements during a crisis. Specifically, it would be worthwhile to investigate how perceptions differ between consumers who are unfamiliar with a brand, those who are neutral, and those with established opinions. Such comparative insights could clarify how pre-existing associations interact with crisis communication to influence purchase intention.

Furthermore, the overlap between CSR and sincerity in factor loadings suggests that some survey items may not have been interpreted distinctly. The high correlation between sincerity and CSR suggests a potential redundancy in measurement. This shows the need for more context-sensitive scale validation in future studies. While supported by previous literature (Moulard et al. 2021, p. 97), future research might explore whether these constructs are better treated as overlapping or distinct in a broader conceptual framework, such as "ethical brand character". Also, the study relied on self-stated behavioural intentions rather than actual purchasing behaviour. While intention is a strong predictor of action (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 55), it does not guarantee follow-through, particularly in influencer-based media where aspirational consumption plays a role in shaping behaviour.

Consequently, this study focused on the general term of corporate social responsibility, while the concept is much more nuanced as it includes philanthropic, legal, or ethical labour initiatives (Maignan, 2001, p. 58). Scholars should consider focusing more deeply on the concept of CSR by examining the different types, as each can resonate differently with consumer segments. As Chen et al. (2021, p. 13) already suggested, ethical CSR may enhance brand image, but not necessarily trust. This research opens the path to evaluate CSR based on the different dimensions and examine the aspects that resonate most with different audiences.

Additionally, although the sample was appropriately targeted using Prolific and was representative of Dutch consumers aged 18-29 years, the findings may not generalise beyond this age group or cultural context. The Netherlands has a relatively high media literacy and ethical awareness among youth (National Policies, 2023), which may not be present in other markets. Further (cross-cultural) research is needed to determine whether similar patterns exist in non-Western, older, or emerging-market populations. Moreover, attention for vulnerable and marginalised groups is needed as their experiences and needs are often overlooked in mainstream crisis communication research (Nero et al., 2023, pp. 1–2). Because most often, when an ethical crisis occurs, these are the groups who are at play. Adopting an inclusive and participatory approach, future studies can contribute to the development of more equitable and effective communication strategies.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that luxury fashion brands can rebuild consumer trust and safeguard purchase intentions after a reputational crisis. The perceived sincerity, authenticity, and CSR play an important role in their communication efforts. However, these perceptions are not enough on their own. Building brand trust is essential in bridging perception with action. As such, this study positions crisis communications as more than an operational tool to control damage. Crisis communication should also be practised as a relational strategy that requires emotional resonance and ethical consistency. Moreover, the consumer-centred, affective, and ethical dimensions are no longer supplementary but central to determining the effectiveness of post-crisis response strategies. The findings advocate for a model of crisis communication that is both responsive and responsible in order for luxury fashion brands to build a strong brand image that can survive crises before and after they happen. Brands will be stronger, respected, and better aligned with the future where ethical commerce stands central.

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Appendix A – Survey

Start of Block: Intro

Dear participant, Welcome, and thank you for your willingness to participate in a research study about how young consumers perceive luxury fashion brands based on their responses during crises.

PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS To participate in the research, you need to **live in the Netherlands**, be **between 18 and 29 years old**, and be **familiar with luxury fashion brands**. You will be asked to complete an online survey about your perceptions of a crisis response by a luxury fashion brand. This survey should take **less than 5 minutes** to complete.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE DATA Your participation is completely voluntary, you can refuse to participate at any time without reason. Your input will be anonymous and used solely for academic research purposes.

BONUS As a little bonus, you'll receive a **song recommendation** once you complete the survey—perfect for your summer playlist!

CONTACT INFORMATION Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please feel free to reach out to me via 708417zk@eur.nl. Thank you!

Consent I consent to participate in this research survey, I confirm that I understand that participating in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time, and I confirm that I understand that my data will be anonymised for publication, educational purposes and further research.

- Yes, I consent (1)
- No, I don't consent (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If I consent to participate in this research survey, I confirm that I understand that participating... = No, I don't consent

End of Block: Intro

Start of Block: Applicability

This research is based on people living in the Netherlands born between 1996 and 2007. Do you fall into this category?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If This research is based on people living in the Netherlands born between 1996 and 2007. Do you fal... = No

End of Block: Applicability

Start of Block: Case

You are about to read a crisis response strategy by the luxury fashion brand Maison Élise. Maison Élise is a well-known French luxury fashion house, known for its high-quality craftsmanship, Corporate Social Responsibility, and bold minimalist designs. Recently, the brand faced backlash when a media outlet revealed that one of its overseas factories was

involved in unethical labor practices, including underpayment and poor working conditions. Three days after the news broke, Maison Élise issued the following statement:



End of Block: Case

Start of Block: Attention-check

This is an attention-check: Select '**Maison Élise**'.

Maison Élise (1)

Mucci (2)

Zior (3)

End of Block: Attention-check

Start of Block: 1: Perceived Brand Image

Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements after reading the company's response.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The brand seems honest in its communication (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand comes across as sincere in handling the issue (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand seems original in its response (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand comes across as real in its response (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand seems like it will deliver on its promises (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand makes reliable promises (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand seems unique in how it handled the issue (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The brand seems like it maintains its core values (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The brand demonstrates support for social problems (9)

The brand takes responsibility for its actions in society (10)

The brand's response reflects strong Corporate Social Responsibility (11)

The brand shows commitment to ethical and responsible behavior (12)

End of Block: 1: Perceived Brand Image

Start of Block: 2: Brand Trust

Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements after reading the company's response.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I can trust this brand (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can rely on this brand (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This is an honest brand (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This brand is safe (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: 2: Brand Trust

Start of Block: 3: Purchase Intention

Please state how likely you are to engage in the following actions after reading the company's response.

	Extremel y unlikely (1)	Moderatel y unlikely (2)	Slightly unlikel y (3)	Neither likely nor unlikel y (4)	Slightl y likely (5)	Moderatel y likely (6)	Extremel y likely (7)
I would purchas e from this brand in the future (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I intend to purchas e products from this brand in the future (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am inclined to purchas e from this brand in the future (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: 3: Purchase Intention

Start of Block: 4: Demographics

Almost there, last questions!

What is your gender?

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

What is your age (indicate your age in numbers, e.g. 23)?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school graduate (1)
- Some college (2)
- Bachelors (3)
- Masters (4)
- Professional degree (5)
- Doctorate (6)

End of Block: 4: Demographics

Appendix B – Declaration on the use of Generative AI in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Zeynep Kiliç

Student ID: 708417zk

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Sergül Nguyen

Date: 26 June 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)~~
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically Grammarly, and ChatGPT, in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: Zeynep

Date of Signature: 26 June 2025

Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: Zeynep Kiliç

Date of Signature: 26 June 2025

Prompts:

Me: can you provide the key takeaways / finding of this article:

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2046147X211026854?casa_token=CRIIFNy08DoAAA-AA%3AQqJTH8GyNJWLMWmzXbdA5i3K6QN96H-IU7pSu5oBygA9i8mXPRtD2P2DFmWPOzILe8fUAeV9NSZIIw

Me: can you provide the findings of this research:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296313000295?casa_token=2ovVubc9-3YAAAAA:trVnTe142wikf3ZJinWJZSgBuOQgpsDLMA_DdO4HG9r5vrCvSbdIO_uUIZrzP9zPV3UjuAuojaW

Me: design an Instagram post by Maison Élise using a generic luxury fashion aesthetic (e.g. minimalist layout, serif font, neutral colors. The message in the post should state: “Maison Élise takes full responsibility for failing to ensure ethical labor practices. We sincerely apologize and are taking immediate action by cutting ties with the supplier, launching internal audits, and funding initiatives to improve labor conditions.”