

Navigating Crises during Sexual Harassment Allegations

A Quantitative Study Shedding Light on The Duality of Effects on Brand Attitudes, Purchase Intention, Message Credibility, and Brand Reputation during Crises

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ABSTRACT

Understanding consumer behavior helps brands identify strategies to better increase purchases. However, crises can have detrimental impacts on consumer behavior, especially on brand attitudes, which in turn affect purchase behavior. Specifically, value-related crises, such as sexual harassment allegations can destroy strong consumer-brand relationships and trust. Value-related crises usually affect a consumer's morals, ethical principles, and values. Consumers often view sexual harassment as an issue of gendered power inequality, in which the situation involves a predator and a victim, with the predator in most cases being male and the victim female. Thus, the abuse of power negatively affects a consumer's attitudes towards a brand and therefore their intent to purchase. Crises are unforeseen events that can destroy a brand when not quickly and appropriately handled by the brand. By using the ICM Model, by Jin et al., (2007), which proposes a cognitive and organizational engagement approach, the various variables involved in this research are better understood. Thus, the model allows for understanding both how the proposed variables – brand attitude, purchase intention, brand reputation, message credibility, and gender – which can be understood through the cognitive lens of the consumer, further explore emotions, and the organizational engagement of a brand and its effects. The aim of this research is to examine the relationships between the effects of gender (of the participant) and purchase intention on brand attitude when mediated by message credibility and moderated by brand reputation. Insights were gathered through distributing a survey in multiple Facebook Groups, which allowed for distinct perspectives of individuals from various backgrounds and nationalities. The data was collected through a statistical software, SPSS. The statistical insights disclosed that regardless of the participant's gender, the more credible a message was perceived the better the attitudes towards the brand. Results revealed that gender had no significant effect on brand attitudes after a sexual harassment allegation. However, lower purchase intentions are correlated with lower brand attitudes. Moreover, the analyses show that when brand reputation was low, so were purchase intention and brand attitudes.

KEYWORDS: *Sexual Harassment Allegation, Brand Attitude, ICM Model, Purchase Intention, Gender*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Topic of Research

Organizational crises can ruin brands, resulting in losing consumer ties or loyalty, a decrease in brand reputation, and negative brand attitudes. A significant challenge for such brands is restoring and maintaining a good reputation while attaining loyal customers (Li & Wei, 2016, p. 93).

Surveys to collect data on sexual misconduct in the workplace are annually conducted worldwide, however receiving precise data is challenging due to signed NDAs, underreports on the matter of fearing to lose one's job, or the belief that reporting is an ineffective use of time (United Nations News, 2022, para. 5). The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has through national data shown that between 2018 and 2021, 27.291 cases of sexual harassment have been filed, of which 78.2% incidents were reported by women alone, highlighting a significant increase of 13.6% to the previous year (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022, paras. 4,6). Moreover, the UN reports an internally conducted survey amongst UN employees, on which over 50% of the respondents had indicated experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace (Kirkpatrick, 2019, para. 4). Around two-thirds of the alleged perpetrators were male (Kirkpatrick, 2019, para. 9). However, the data does not indicate how many companies or institutions were affected as such information is confidential, therefore multiple sexual harassment reports can also be based on one employer only.

Although such data is shocking and “sober statistics and evidence” (Kirkpatrick, 2019, para. 2) of reality, it does not hide the fact that many employees and even customers can experience sexual harassment at the workplace or when purchasing a product or service.

Sexual harassment allegations (SHAs) can heavily alter brand attitudes, public perception, and purchasing behavior (Cheng et al., 2024, p. 2). Multiple sources including The New York Times and CNBC reported of a major sexual harassment allegation that Victoria's Secret was facing in 2020 resulting in several sexual harassment lawsuits (Silver-Greenberg et al., 2020, para. 2; Repko, 2020, para. 1). The already heavily critiqued environment at Victoria's Secret – lacking diversity, misogyny, and bullying – reached its peak when Ed Razed, former Chief Marketer, was accused of sexual harassment and even sex trafficking (Repko, 2020, para. 9). According to various sources (Silver-Greenberg et al., 2020, para. 3) multiple employees, as well as models reported inappropriate sexual misconduct experienced by Ed Razed. Moreover, the then CEO Leslie Wexner, was allegedly aware of the allegations and accusations, however denied them as false after which models reported being punished for reporting incidents, such as not being re-booked or being ignored (Silver-Greenberg et al., 2020, paras. 7). After reporting more than 30% losses in sales (Repko, 2020, para. 11), the brand attempted to re-build its reputation by publishing a more

inclusive line in their products, as well as hiring a new CEO, who formerly was employed by Savage X Fenty, due to her expertise in working in an inclusive environment (Fickenscher, 2024, para. 5). With certainty, substantial damage is expected on a brand's performance and reputation when sexual harassment claims occur. Moreover, the sensitivity on the subject is much higher when the public receives information on whether CEOs or other company spokespersons deny allegations that have been proven to have occurred. Although the negative effects on a brand cannot be avoided and the future of an organization is thus unknown.

Crisis situations expose vulnerabilities in organizational systems but can create opportunities for growth, provoking societal reflection and systematic improvement (Coombs, 2007, p. 21). Research divides crises into two categories: performance-related and value-related crises (Dutta & Pullig, 2011, p. 1282 and Chandrasekar & Rehman, 2023, p. 527). Sexual harassment allegations fall under the latter, value-related crises, as such do neither involve a product or service offered by a brand (Dutta & Pullig, 2011, p. 1282). A variety of contexts, such as organization, individual, or popularity of a brand can change consumer reactions, posing a difficult challenge for brands to create responses to crises (Shocker et al., 1994, pp. 149-150). Therefore, creating a suitable response, that soothes internal and external stakeholders, and also satisfies the brand's needs is becoming increasingly difficult (Vallaster et al., 2012, p. 38).

Crisis management does not only includes being able to mitigate the impact of a crisis after it has occurred, but also "minimizing [a] potential risk before a triggering event" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 66). Although no crisis is the same as another, a few overarching steps of crisis management that are vital to understanding the field can be defined. Researchers have identified a risk analysis, to evaluate the possibility of any crisis happening, considering environmental context – including possible performance- or value-related crises (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 66). Taking the necessary crisis management steps, when the crisis occurs, helps formulate responses to be formulated, resulting in either success or failure (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 66). Ineffective crisis communication can undermine organizations and harm any potential future success of brands, highlighting the importance of creating strategic responses. Crises can impose either danger or opportunity, making action planning crucial (Coombs, 2007, p. 21). Many organizations react to crises rather than proactively preventing them. Thus, the issue arises of how to assess potential reactions if prior communication strategies have not been realized, and how the lack of preparation in communication strategy can affect a stakeholder. Prompt communication between consumer and brand can alter any stakeholders' behavioral patterns when interacting with said brand, potentially lessen the negative effects, and restore brand reputation (Do & Nham, 2021, p. 146).

The interpretive nature and wide scope of this topic have both great societal and academic importance. While some authors focus on consumer responses to apologies, credibility of

communication and public perceptions of sexual harassment allegations (Cheng et al., 2024, p.1; Boman et al., 2024, p. 550; Rotundo et al., 2001, p. 914), others find irregularities and unclear links between those factors (Walsh & Beatty, 2007, p. 127).

A wide-range survey conducted by Franke et al., (1997) on “gender differences in ethical perceptions of business practices” (p. 920) shows that men generally have a lower tolerance for ethical practices compared to women, proposing significant differences in perceptions of sexual harassment allegations. Additionally, due to several factors, such as the nature of advertisements or prior brand knowledge, there are visible differences in men’s and women’s brand attitudes and thus concludes a different pattern in purchase intention (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2021, p. 6).

Importantly, crises affect the consumer-brand relationship in one way or another. For instance, a sexual harassment allegation on a brand can influence a consumer's emotional connection with the brand negatively impacting their attitude and behavior towards the brand (Chandrasekar & Rehman, 2023, p. 526). Brand attitudes can enfold both positive and negative emotions in a consumer, meaning that it is a predictor for purchase intention (Park et al., 2010, p. 1). Brand attitudes are characterized by a complex dynamic, which may inherently shift or evolve at any given point in time. Thus, such are not confined by a given framework and show vulnerabilities to both positive and negative influences (Park et al., 2010, p. 2). Regardless of the consumer-brand relationships, this suggests that following crises, brand attitudes can at once be negatively affected (Park et al., 2010, p. 2).

Moreover, connected to brand attitudes are satisfaction towards product or service and or the brand itself, as well as brand loyalty, which can have negative effects when a client feels negatively towards a sexual harassment allegation. This can lead to changes in their brand behavior such as declining purchase intention, interacting with negative content online or loss of brand loyalty (Chandrasekar & Rehman, 2023, p. 526). Further, purchase intention can give significant insight into how consumers process information prior or post purchase, reassessing a potential repurchase, which can be afflicted by a sexual harassment allegation (Ajzen, 2018, p. 527). Identifying such behaviors can aid brands in evaluating future purchase behavior (Ajzen, 2018, p. 527).

Credibility, particularly the perceived credibility of a brand’s crisis communication strategy, is an added significant variable shaping brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

Consumers review brand communication prior or post crisis and can modify their attitudes depending on the extent of perceived communication credibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 40), acting as a mediator as consumers evaluate brand attitudes. Thus, perceived message credibility affects how consumers decode and process messages surrounding the allegations, ultimately translating into brand attitudes (Coombs & Holladay, 2014, p. 1).

Brand reputation is a crucial determinant for consumer responses to reputational risks. Research demonstrates the impact of brand reputation on purchase intention and a consumer's overall decision-making process (Bang et al., 2014, p. 285). "If an individual has positive feelings about buying a certain firm's product, [...] it strengthens the intention to purchase the product; [...]" (Bang et al., 2014, p. 284) and conversely. Lastly, consumers identify good brand reputation not only by a brand's products or service but also by how much a brand and its products or services are distinguishable from others. Hence, brand reputation either strengthens or weakens the influence on brand attitudes and purchase intention based on its existing reputation making it an expected moderator in this research (Bang et al., 2014, p. 286).

Therefore, this study examines *How do gender (of the participant) and purchase intention affect brand attitude after a sexual harassment allegation, when mediated by message credibility and moderated by brand reputation?*

1.2 Societal Relevance

Investigating the interplay of consumer trust, gender differences in perception of sexual harassment allegations, purchase intention, and message credibility; the credibility of a brand-issued apology, has various societal relevances.

Crises occur in multiple facets each day no matter their nature; they may be of personal, environmental, or social nature, yet they impact our perception of safety and security (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018, para. 2). Understanding how crises occur, how to work with them based on stakeholder desires and its impact on society is important to understand, in order to create strategies that require proactivity to prevent them before occurring (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018, para. 6). Accordingly, insights from this study will shed light onto what crisis managers need to take into account when handling a crisis response.

Consumers desire transparency, ethical communication, and brand accountability during crises (Faiaz, 2024, para. 7). Through the rise and accessibility of information on social media consumers have realized the power of their voice. Topics like sustainability or poor working conditions are becoming increasingly important to consumers leading them to speak up about brands that do not support such. Brands need to comprehend that only understanding what consumers criticize is not enough, alas "what makes your consumer tick" (Schaverien, 2018, para. 14) is of essence. Consequently, the matter of transparency is now more important than ever. It displays a brand's social responsibility and lets the consumer fully take part into their practices, creating consumer attachments fostering loyalty (Liu et al, 2023, pp. 518-519). It guides as a moral compass for both internal and external stakeholders. This indicates a consumer's desire for brands to take greater corporate responsibility.

Moreover, collecting data on gender-related perceptions of sexual harassment allegations aids brands to create improved, inclusive, and tailored crisis responses, which is especially challenging in today's diverse consumer environment (Charm et al., 2020, p. 3). During crises not only source credibility matter but message credibility. Consumers, in a time of concern, seek information they can rely on. This helps them create an opinion of the brand. Hence, which messages brands deliver during crises is important for consumers to evaluate (Van Zonen & Van der Meer, 2015, p.383). However, a diverse consumer environment complicates generalizing messages (Makarewicz, 2013, pp. 14-105). Such insights are useful for brands to manage reputational damage. A strong consumer-brand-relationship strengthens trust and loyalty, thus an increasing possibility of repeated purchases. Understanding how to uphold such relationships before, during and after crises affects both purchase intention and brand reputation (Shafiq et al., 2011, p. 10578), making insights of this study helpful for the sphere of crisis communication.

1.3 Academic Relevance

This research adds to the literature on crisis communication, ethical consumer behavior and brand communication. It addresses gaps in the nuanced effects of gender, purchase intention, message credibility, and brand reputation on consumer attitudes after sexual harassment allegations by integrating the *Integrated Crisis Mapping Model (ICM)* as a guiding framework (Jin et al., 2010, pp. 430-431). The Integrated Crisis Mapping Model measures organizational issue engagement with consumers' cognitive coping. The model suggests delving deeper into stakeholder emotions and crisis perceptions, therefore helping the analysis of emotions affecting brand attitudes through the interplay of gender, brand attitude, message credibility, purchase intention and brand reputation (Jin et al., 2010, pp. 430-431). ICM recommends tailored crisis communication strategies prioritizing transparency, and rebuilding trust (Jin et al., 2010, pp. 430-431). Previous studies suggest researching how diverse types of crises affect consumer behavior, as well as filling current gaps of understanding the different interplays of the variables presented.

1.4 Chapter Outline

This study investigates how gender (of the participant) and purchase intention affect brand attitudes after the occurrence of a sexual harassment allegation. These relationships will be analysed through a mediation of message credibility and a moderation of brand reputation. Following this introduction, a theoretical framework will be presented in Chapter 2. Prior literature linking to the topic at hand, by also connecting the insights to the Integrated Crisis Mapping Model will help create an understanding of this research. Chapter 3 outlines the chosen method for this

research and its results are covered in Chapter 4. Lastly, a conclusion in Chapter 5 presents an overview of the main findings, limitations, and implications of this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sexual Harassment – An Organizational Crisis

Sexual harassment allegations (SHAs) mirror internal gender inequality, causing repercussions in consumer behavior and brand reputation (Cheng et al., 2024, p. 2).

Organizational crises are low-contingency, high-impact events with uncertainties for organizational position and the demand for speedy responses (Simola, 2005, p. 181). Their effects are immeasurable, impacting organizational goals, reputation, and stakeholders.

Sexual harassment is a complex concept to define. Rotundo et al., (2001) explain differences in perception of “social-sexual behavior” (p. 914) making the concept challenging to define. The behavior of the sexual misconduct offense is crucial in building an understanding of the events, Rotundo et al., (2001, p. 914) propose. Katz et al., (1996, p. 36) add that the conceptualization of sexual behavior is dependent on gender, as women experience and include a multitude of behaviors as sexual harassment, as well as the context in which sexual harassment has taken place. Although research has not formulated a cohesive, unanimous definition of sexual harassment, the literature on the topic generally agrees sexual harassment is “pervasive and destructive” (Clarke, 2020, p. 544). Based on the complexity of the concept Clark (2020) has categorized sexual harassment into four categories including “sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, sexual hostility and sexist hostility” (p.545). The typologies proposed by the author range from physical, or job-related to even comments based on a person’s gender.

Aforementioned, sexual harassment is widely recognized as a systemic gender imbalance, grounded in power and gender dynamics, which have historically placed the male as the superior gender (Clarke, 2020, p. 547). When such systematic inequalities exist in various fields over an extended period, vulnerabilities are set up. The inferior party in sexual harassment incidents are usually women and experiences individualize (Clark, 2020, p. 546). In a majority of cases this results in males experiencing and perceiving less behaviors as sexual harassment compared to females (Katz et al., 1996, p. 40 and Clark, 2020, p. 545). Similarly, Clark (2020, p. 546) argues that men condone more behaviors of sexual harassment. Women on the other hand are affected not always only physically but more so emotionally and mentally, generating a higher likelihood of overlapping with the workplace. Although women are more likely to report sexual harassment, only a small fraction of incidents are reported in reality, posing difficulties in creating reliable data (Clark, 2020, p. 546 and Katz et al., 1996, p. 36).

In 1995 Fitzpatrick and Rubin explored the effects of legal or public relations strategies in tackling sexual harassment allegations (p. 21). Consequently, legal strategies to combat the issue were predominantly used, while public relations methods proved to be successful in keeping a

stable brand reputation. On the contrary, Clark (2020) contends that strategies with a strong focus on legal regulations are unsuccessful and lead to shortcomings on preserving brand reputation (p. 549). Shifting focus on ethical and employee-centered approaches would promote in a brand's favor, the author argues. Bull Schaefer and Crosswhite (2018, p. 153) do not focus on a specific approach in facing sexual harassment allegations but on the idea of quick and prompt executive responses, because the sensitivity and personal nature of such allegations are highly emotional and require thought-through communication. However, ignorance or scapegoating can result in further damage to organizational reputation Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995, p. 24) argue. Such reputational damage can further heavily affect internal and external stakeholders (Bull Schaefer & Crosswhite, 2018, p. 149). Subsequently, this can impact work morale leading to low productivity and frustration (Clark, 2020, p. 545).

Brand reputation and purchase intention are at stake when organizations face crises. Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) perceive sexual harassment allegations as the "red flag of crises" (p. 24), which can act as heavily destructive to brand reputation. Cheng et al., (2024, p. 2) support this claim, emphasizing an organization's reaction, as such claims can lead to immense consequences. The authors name three stages of a well-rounded and fast response: proactivity, accountability, and addressing long-term effects which can restore consumer trust (Cheng et al., 2024, p. 3).

Further, a multitude of studies investigated gendered reactions to brand messages during crises, recommending tailoring messages accordingly. Especially in today's diverse consumer environment, in which desires, values, and needs strongly differ amongst consumer profiles, finding the right balance to formulate crisis messages is becoming increasingly difficult. Understanding one's audience is key. Considering and making sense of what an audience desires, what they are criticizing and what their needs are in a time of crisis is highly crucial. Sellnow and Sellnow (2010) argue comprehending a target audience can be the turning point in crisis prevention (p. 124). This can help organizations create tailored responses more quickly and support the prevention of strong negative impacts (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2010, p. 124).

Further explained in the next sub chapter, 2.2 *Gender*, researchers such as Guo (2024, pp. 173, 176), Lee et al. (2016, p. 4) and Gligor et al., (2023, pp. 380-381) highlight women's greater sensitivity towards a brand's actions and responses during crises. This is due to women's higher emotional involvement with a brand while making purchase decisions and therefore their evaluation of brand messages. Thus, results of various research shows that females only perceive brand messages as credible when aspects of accountability, emotionality and responsibility are involved. Credibility is key in shaping consumer evaluations and trust around a brand. Messages that are perceived as credible create greater opportunities for brands to restore their damage during and after crises.

This implies an expected mediation, where message credibility acts as a mediator affecting the relationship between gender and brand attitude (Schumann & Dargotta, 2020, p. 3; Wu & Wang, 2011, pp. 453-454).

Therefore, RQ1 is formulated: *What is the relationship between gender (of the participant) and brand attitude after a sexual harassment allegation when mediated by message credibility?*

2.2 Gender

Gender inequality, based on hierarchical structures, is the perceived main cause of sexual harassment allegations. Hierarchical structures play into meaning-making processes. Those in hierarchically higher positions minimize the impact of sexual harassment, while victims view this as an issue of power dynamics in the workplace. Thus, gender is directly linked to organizational structures and brand reputation (Cheng et al., 2024, pp. 13–14).

Contrarily, Rotundo et al., (2001, p. 914) found that women perceive a wider variety of behaviors as sexual harassment, especially when experiencing derogatory behavior in the workplace. This indicates that women are more likely to interpret workplace interactions through the lens of gendered power imbalances. Similarly, Guo (2024, pp. 173, 176) found that women, more so than men, react more sensitively to a brand's unethical conduct and refrain from interacting with brands that disregard social norms or have poor brand ethics. In accordance with Guo (2024), Lee et al. (2016, p. 4) affirm that women in their research accounted higher for brand sensitivity as well as brand consciousness. On top of that, Gligor et al., (2023, p. 385) propose that although women are more active in purchasing products or services than men, they are also more susceptible to the perceptions of unfair brands. This means that higher perceptions of brand unfairness indicate lower brand attitudes for women (p. 385). This is due to female purchase characteristics: when purchasing, women have higher emotional involvement and analyze the extent of information they have acquired on the brand and its products, whereas men take a more rational perspective focused on practicality and simplicity (pp. 380–381). Gligor et al., (2023, pp. 392–393) further highlight a stronger and more present pattern of purchasing, customer engagement, and influence amongst women.

While Xue et al. (2020) generally agree with the perspectives and findings of Gligor et al. (2023) and Guo (2024), the authors add a psychological perspective. They explain consumer–brand relationships similarly to interpersonal relationships (Xue et al., 2020, p. 1). Like Gligor et al. (2023), Xue et al., (2020) also mention women's stronger emotional tendencies, while "men's trust depends on cognition" (p. 3). In connection to this, Lee et al., (2016, pp. 3–4) add that women are

more likely to take risks when seeking a new purchase, whilst men tend to make purchases impetuously. Taking brand credibility into account, Park and Lee (2013, p. 216) constituted that corporate crises decrease brand credibility and thus negatively affect brand attitude. However, women tend to regain trust when apologies are perceived as sincere.

As specified above consumer perceptions and emotional responses to brand messages are influenced by gender. Women have shown to decode brand messages more emotionally and individually compared to men therefore perceiving credibility differently. The *Integrated Crisis Management Model* (Jin et al., 2007) focuses on credibility as an essential aspect in cognitive response management during a crisis. High message credibility augments better brand attitude, thus negative consumer responses can be reduced. This perspective specifically applies to women. The findings of prior research supports that message credibility is expected to affect the relationship between the gender of the participant and brand attitudes, as a mediator. Therefore hypothesizing:

H1: Higher perceived message credibility corresponds with more positive brands attitudes, after a sexual harassment allegation, where the relationship is expected to be stronger for women.

Additionally, differences in empathy are a primary driver for gendered responses. Schumann and Dargotta (2020, p. 12) report that women value brands that take responsibility, fostering authenticity and trust. Nevertheless, due to varying interpretations of sexual harassment, women account for more behaviors as harassment and thus react more sensitively to the nature of sexual harassment allegations. Such claims concern ethical values creating a higher potential for negative reactions from the public. These theoretical observations lead to an expected outcome showing that women express increased amounts of negative brand attitudes compared to men hypothesizing:

H2: Responding to a sexual harassment claim, women will report more negative brand attitudes compared than men.

To sum up, research shows that there are clear differences between gender in terms of purchase intention and brand attitudes. While women are more emotional and consider information surrounding the brand and its products or services, men tend to take a more practical and analytical approach (Xue et al., 2020, p. 8). On the topic Van Zoonen & Van der Meer (2015, p. 374) highlight the importance of sensible apologies, while Schumann and Dargotta (2020, p. 22) note women's skepticism towards apologies compared to men's greater acceptance. The aligned perception concludes the need for tailored brand messages including gendered perceptions.

2.3 Message Credibility

Effective crisis responses increase message credibility, benefiting consumer-brand trust and brand reputation. Here, message credibility defines affected parties decoding a message during a crisis as reliable, accurate, and trustworthy (Boman et al., 2024, pp. 553-554). Lee and Kim (2024, p. 638) state that analyzing consumer-brand relationships allow brands to tailor compatible apologies. During sexual harassment allegations, where the situation imposes a victim and offender, Schumann and Dargotta (2020, p. 2) highlight the need for moral accountability in apologies. Credibility serves as a fundamental actor in crisis resolution, mediating the effect on gendered brand perceptions, according to Van Zoonen and Van der Meer (2015, p. 377). Moreover, Van Zoonen and Van der Meer (2015, pp. 376-377) and Mansor and KaderAli (2017, p. 64) accentuate that credible messages increase the chances of resorting to brand reputation.

Nonetheless, public apologies face scrutiny because of their detached nature. Unlike personal apologies, which focus on distinct gestures and expressions, public apologies rely on drafted texts, seeming insincere and dishonest (Schumann & Dargotta, 2020, p. 2). The authors have discovered that crisis responses, in answer to sexual misconduct, are more positively perceived when feelings of responsibility, accountability, or compassion are conveyed (Schumann & Dargotta, 2020, p. 3). Similarly, Boman et al. (2024), in their study investigated perceived credibility and sincerity as a mediator of crisis response outcomes (p. 550). The findings show equivalently to Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) scapegoating and blame shifting to be perceived as insincere and untrustworthy (p. 24). Moreover, the effectiveness of sincerity or honesty has positive effects on the evaluation of crisis messages of stakeholders (Boman et al., 2024). This is due to an increased perception of the portrayal of emotions in the message, which appeals to audiences (Boman et al., 2024, p. 552).

Additionally, Stephens et al. (2019, p. 1) identify, by utilizing linguistic analysis, a variety of emotions, how those are best employed in crisis response, and how the public evaluates the message. Their research unveils a prepared statement to be more useful than a spontaneous speech given by a brand representative, which seems conflicting with Schumann and Dargotta's findings (2020, p. 2) displaying the unnatural nature of public apologies. Despite the disputable nature of public apologies, Stephens et al. (2019) suggest anger, surprise, and sadness are the three most influential emotions when speaking of perceived credibility in crisis communication (p. 2). According to the authors, sadness when shown little of in apologies including a variety of words expressing sincerity, was perceived as more credible by audiences (Stephens et al., 2019, p. 1). As with emotions like anger or surprise, exaggeration of the emotions can mitigate how much positive

or negative effect the apology can have (Stephens et al., 2019, p. 7). Creating a balance of emotion and professionalism in apologies is highly challenging.

Finally, Van Zoonen and Van der Meer (2015) highlight the increasing usage of social media channels during crises (p. 372). Brands also make use of a variety of channels to distribute messages and hope to reach a wider audience. Nevertheless, this complicates the evaluation of audience engagement with the message and the overall perception of information sources. Prior to the rise of social media, during crises special company spokespersons spoke to the media to release an official company statement; nowadays that is different, “hence; stakeholders have to determine the relevance, newsworthiness, and credibility of the information they receive” (Van Zoonen & Van der Meer, 2015, p. 374). Credibility can be divided into source, and content or message credibility. Source credibility evaluates the perceived credibility of the source of the message, whereas content also called message credibility focuses on the essence and meaning of the message itself (Van Zoonen & Van der Meer, 2015, p. 375).

The sensitivity and gravity of sexual harassment allegations make message credibility even more important as it is the sole option in mitigating the possible negative outcomes between stakeholders and the brand. Stakeholders can react highly sensitively in times of crisis, where sincerity and accountability should be particularly authentic in crisis communication. Insights presented in this sub-chapter helped conceptualize message credibility and its importance. Thus, it presents message credibility as a mediator between the gender of the participant and the connected brand attitudes following a sexual harassment allegation.

2.4 Consumer Behaviour

Understanding consumer behavior patterns allow organizations to tailor campaigns and responses aligning with the consumer perspective. The modern consumer desires authentic, transparent, and sincere brands. Based on ‘t Hart and Phau’s (2022), study, 51% of consumers lack confidence that they can connect and relate to branded content (p. 327). Such feelings create increasing consumer-brand detachment, harming the brand and its reputation. Due to this, brands need to strive for better strategies to foster consumer-brand loyalty, which is even more challenging during times of crises (‘t Hart & Phau, 2022, p. 329). In addition to that, crises pose threats and uncertainties in which a consumer anticipates an action plan, as research shows silence, denial or late responses damage the relationship with the brand (Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021, pp. 1048, 1063). On top of that Santos and Casais (2019, p. 112) add the amplified importance consumers put on values much more than the products or services provided by a brand. Company values, ethics as well as values conveyed during crises is a focal point for the modern consumer.

2.4.1 Brand Attitude

Brand attitudes reflect consumer perceptions and relationships with brands (Jahng & Hong, 2017, p. 150). Firstly, brand attitude can be understood as the extent to which consumers assess a brand's capabilities, in terms of product or service quality, quantity, brand image, brand reputation, and word-of-mouth (WOM) as a potential to purchase from (t'Hart & Phau, 2022, pp. 327-328; Halima et al., 2021, pp. 170-171; Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021, p. 1048). Attitudes are formed based on the aspects previously mentioned including a consumer's own experiences with a brand.

Additionally, Griffith et al., (2018, p. 113) elaborate that strategic consumer brand attachment fosters identity and loyalty, intensifying the likelihood of enhanced purchase intention. A strong consumer-brand relationship can mitigate crises and their negative impacts. As cited by Hess and Story (2005, pp. 314-315) a consumer's belief in a reliable company that can satisfy their needs and desires with the products or services offered, strengthens attitudes toward the brand and therefore establishes a consumer-brand bond. When such bonds are set up, a brand needs to act consistently to keep the relationship up. Once a crisis occurs, as with a sexual harassment allegation for example, which is considered a value-related crisis, the consumer brand bonds can potentially start to crumble.

How brands can manage the inconsistencies in consumer emotions during crises constitutes a complex issue. Firstly, managing crises does not only include reaction once a crisis occurs, but it includes "preemergence planning, response, and postcrisis recovery" (Gkouna et al., 2023, p. 91). In other words, brands need to be pro-reactive, responsive, and reactive during the distinct stages of crises. Based on these behavioral patterns, crises can even be seen as opportunities rather than threats, however that is up to a brand's response.

As previously established, crises negatively affect the customer, leaving them unhappy and dissatisfied (Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021, p. 1058). When a consumer is faced with a value-related crisis brand attitude can swiftly change to the perception of negative brand attitudes. However, research on this particular topic suggests that brands who have well-established strong relations with their stakeholders, especially customers, have the chance to navigate through a crisis, as existing brand attitudes are strong pre-crisis (Gabrielli et al., 2021, p. 1576). Amine (1998, p. 314) reiterates that brand attitude functions as an indicator of how loyal and strongly a consumer feels for a certain brand. Not only the crisis itself is essential to evaluate a consumer-brand relationship, but the chosen response strategy of a brand plays a key role. According to Jahng and Hong (2017, pp. 147, 154-155), and other academic researchers (Van Zonen & Van der Meer, 2015; Stephens et al., 2019; Boman et al., 2024) crisis responses need to be quick and emotionally charged, however only to a certain extent as too emotional or impersonal can have negative effects on brand attitudes. The authors investigated how prior positive or negative brand attitudes affected

preferences in response strategies (Jahng & Hong, 2017). Thus, preceding positive attitudes show a preference for a defensive response style rather than an apology, whereas preceding negative brand attitudes prefer an apology which shows brands taking responsibility (Jahng & Hong, 2017, pp. 154-155).

Similarly, Dutta and Pullig (2011, p. 1283) emphasize that the choice of response strategy has varying effects on the type of consumer based on prior brand attitudes. Moreover, when a crisis revolves around the very aspect that made a consumer bond with the brand in the first place consumers are less likely to forgive and recover from a crisis even when the brand uses a consumer's preferred apology method, so Dutta and Pullig (2011, pp. 1285-1286). Interestingly, Park and Lee (2013, pp. 216-217) find that consumers who strongly identify or are attached to the brand can have a much more severe negative impact on brand attitudes. Gabrielli et al., (2021, p. 1575) moreover mentioned that with brand attitude comes brand credibility. This means that consumers who perceive a brand to act capable during crises seem more credible, which can foster positive brand attitudes. In a brand's favor, high perceived brand capability enhances attitudes and reputation simultaneously functioning as a protect shield, making crisis recovery easier.

Further, authors agree that brand attitudes affect consumer and attitudes, that is purchase decision and perception of brand reputation (Park & Lee, 2013 Gabrielli, 2021; Chung & Lee, 2022).

Halima et al., (2021) and Pangaribuan and Wijaya (2020) reiterate that a consumer's favourable brand attitudes is reflected in their willingness to purchase. Conversely, consumers whose express higher purchase intentions commonly do so due to favourable brand attitudes. Yet, crises such as sexual harassment allegations can disrupt positive consumer-brand relationships, such that external factors can influence how strongly the stability of consumer-brand relations is affected. Similarly to brand attitudes, positive perceptions of brand reputation leads to higher purchase intention and positive brand attitudes, whereas low brand reputation leads to negative attitudes and lower purchase intentions. How consumers emotional reactions to brand responses affect consumer trust is explained through the ICM model by Jin et al., (2007). During crises favourable and stable brand reputation acts as a shield for damage. Thus, brand reputation is expected to act as as a moderator in the interplay of purchase intention and brand attitudes, suggesting that postivie brand reputation will have positive effects on purchase intention and brand attitudes.

Following is the formulation of research question 2: *To what extent is the relationship between purchase intention and brand attitude after sexual harassment allegations moderated by brand reputation?*

2.4.2 Purchase Intention

This sub-chapter explores a variety of aspects related to purchase intention such as the influence of consumer-brand relationships as well as crisis and corporate social responsibility (CSR) behavior shaping consumer perception and therefore altering purchase intentions.

As demonstrated in the previous sub-chapter, *2.4.1 Brand Attitude*, a strong consumer-brand relationship enhances the likelihood of re-purchase; therefore, it acts as a predictor for purchase intention (Pangaribuan & Wijaya, 2020, pp. 2350-2351). Halima et al., (2021, p. 1) indicate the essence of consumer behavior to be purchase intention. All brands and corporations are highly dependent on the drivers of purchase intention. Mansor and KaderAli (2017) define purchase intention as “the willingness of a consumer to buy a certain product or certain service” (p. 64). Their findings show direct impacts of crisis communication on purchase intention. While purchase intention is often based on brand attitudes, crisis communication can shift consumer perceptions, possibly soothing brand reputation (Mansor & KaderAli, 2017, p. 72).

Baghi and Gabrielli (2021, p. 204) emphasize the importance of distinguishing between crises, such as value-related crises (e.g., SHAs) or performance-related crises. Particularly, value-related crises substantially damage brand reputation and consumer trust, thereby weakening purchase intentions, considering that consumers view reputational crises critically. Lin et al. (2011) have conducted research on how negative publicity during crises altered purchase intention and views on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In their article, the authors present that strong CSR has positive effects on purchase intention and brand attitudes, as it fosters trust and helps the consumer build an emotional attachment (p. 94).

Similar to their findings, Yakut and Bayraktaroglu (2020, p. 557) find that despite a strong consumer brand attachment and strong brand attitudes, the effects on purchase intention vary and are more so dependent on the context of the crisis as well. Yakut and Bayraktaroglu (2020, pp. 528-529) elaborate that it is important to distinguish between intentional and unintentional crises. They discover that the highest purchase intention and best perceived attitudes towards a brand occur when a crisis is considered unintentional with the brand upholding a powerful reputation. On top of that, when a crisis was perceived as intentional, the backlash on the brand was even greater, even when reputation was strong (Yakut & Bayraktaroglu, 2020, p. 557). Thus, researchers like Lin et al., (2011), Yakut and Bayraktaroglu (2020), as well as others (Jung & Hur, 2024; Yu et al., 2018; Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021), agree and prove that negative information has strong negative impacts on

purchase intention, brand attitudes, and brand reputation, posing a difficult challenge for brands to attempt to repair and rebuild.

The information presented above indicates that particularly sexual harassment claims heavily vitiate brand attitudes, brand reputation and thus negatively affects purchase intention. Through the findings presented in this sub-chapter this research predicts results to show that negative brand attitudes are associated with lower purchase intention hypothesizing:

H3: After a sexual harassment allegation more negative brand attitudes are associated with lower purchase intentions.

2.4.3 Brand Reputation

Brand reputation shapes consumer trust and influences purchase behavior, which Greyser (2009, p. 600) defines as the basis of brand reliability. Using the various definitions proposed by authors like Coombs (2000), Frombrun and Van Riel (1997), and Weigelt and Camerer (1988) in Kiambi and Schafer (2016, p. 130), brand reputation can broadly be explained as an overall stakeholder opinion evaluation of a brand. This includes product and service quality, consistency, reliability, communication transparency, and a brand's prior behavior. As brand reputation is always based on an outside perspective, it works as a mirroring function of a brand's capabilities in satisfying stakeholders. Overall, research concludes that positive brand reputation is correlated with increased purchase intention and stronger brand attitudes (Jung & Seock, 2016, p. 4). Similarly, negative brand reputation reduces consumer trust and brand loyalty (Jeon & Baeck, 2016, p. 11), as previously mentioned.

Existing literature shows that brand reputation moderates the impact of crises on consumer behavior (Jahng & Hong, 2017, p. 150). A compelling reputation can mitigate credibility loss, while weak reputation amplifies negative effects (Wang & Yang, 2010, pp. 184-185). The basis for brand reputation is a solidified brand attitude and previous consumer experiences. Jung and Hur (2024, p. 208) as Pangaribuan and Wijaya (2020, p. 2349) point out that factors such as reliability, truthfulness, prominence, attractiveness to the consumer, and a sustainable brand image have substantial effects on consumer brand relationships. However, the authors add that brands with strong, consistent brand reputations suffer even more when crises arise, as consumers feel like their brand relationship was betrayed and violated (Jung & Hur, 2024, p. 208).

Thus, considering the factors mentioned above, as well as word-of-mouth (WOM) and other brand experiences, a positive brand reputation is formed, leading to attracting possibly both internal and external stakeholders (Kiambi & Schafer, 2016, pp. 130-131; Pangaribuan & Wijaya,

2020, p. 2350). Vice versa, a bad reputation complicates appealing to new internal and external stakeholders (Kiambi & Schafer, 2016, pp. 130-131). Yu et al., (2018, p. 441) agree and add that the greater the degree of negative coverage a consumer is exposed to, the higher the likelihood of an impact on the relationship between brand attitude and brand image. Furthermore, Adams et al., (2010, p. 40) affirm that negative information acquired through media publicity or co-workers, for example, creates corporate distrust within stakeholders, which causes cracks in a strong brand reputation.

Most literature focuses on the negative outputs of crises on brand reputation, which is why findings on positive brand reputation are limited. Yet, Halima et al. (2021, p. 2) and Jahng and Hong (2017, p. 150) claim that both previous brand attitudes and thus a strong brand reputation act as a puffer to negative publicity during crises. Jahng and Hong (2017, p. 153) suggest that individuals with preceding positive attitudes prefer defensive communication, whereas when brand attitudes were negative, individuals promote an apology-style response. Hence, rebuilding brand reputation can be facilitated. Finally, as previously stated negative publicity and information damage brand reputation, hence negatively impacting purchase intention. Jung and Seock (2016, pp. 561-562) find that negative information outweighs consumer impacts compared to positives, as the effects are more detrimental.

The discernible role of brand reputation in the interplay of brand attitude and purchase intention displays the interrelation of these variables. Brand reputation aids consumers in creating a stable loyal relationship to the brand, which is influenced by brand attitudes and purchase intention. With regard to previous research establishing that negative brand attitudes are reflected in purchase intention and a consumer's recognition of a brand's credibility and position, lower brand reputation is expected when brand attitudes and purchase intentions are negative. This aguments the following hypothesis:

H4: Purchase intentions and brand attitudes are predictors of brand reputation, such that lower perceived brand reputation is associated with lower purchase intention and more negative brand attitudes, following a sexual harassment allegation.

2.5 Integrated Crisis Mapping Model (ICM)

In order to tie the contributing components of this research together the *Integrated Crisis Management Model* proposed by Jin et al., (2007) will be utilized. This model suggests that the public is the highest distressed body during crises, generating crisis results and long-term brand reputation. According to the authors emotions play a crucial role in consumer decision-making,

helping consumers analyze crisis-related emotions. Jin et al., (2007) evaluate “anger, fright, anxiety and sadness” (p. 431) as the most assertive emotions involved in crisis responses. Within the model cognitive coping explains emotions as a coping mechanism, while organizational engagement displays a brand’s crisis management approach.

When conducting research on sexual harassment allegations and their effects on an organizations, looking into the *Integrated Crisis Management Model* benefits such organizations to assess which crisis engagement and cognitive coping approaches to take. This perspective highlights the use of emotions in brand messages. As proposed by Schumann and Dargotta (2020, p. 2) credible and useful brand messages during crises benefit from the display of responsibility, accountability and compassion. Alike, the ICM model enhances the perception of credibility when the use of constructive emotions, such as accountability, honesty and understanding are presented. This fosters an increased possibility for positive consumer perceptions to the threat posed, by also mitigating reputational threats. On the contrary, a lack of credibility is constituted by triggering negative emotions such as “anger, fright, anxiety and sadness” (Jin et al., 2007, p. 431) leaving the consumer unhappy and dissatisfied.

Consequently, the model reaffirms that credible crisis-brand communication shapes and alters various stakeholder perceptions and emotional responses. Closely related to message credibility are brand attitudes. Negative emotions account for negative brand attitude, as per Kapoor & Banerjee (2021, p. 1058). Here, the ICM model helps understand how the meaning making processes of stakeholders following a crisis and a brands assessment thereof is formed. This perspective supports brands to grasp the extent to which similar crises can have detrimentally different outcomes.

Purchase intention defined according to the ICM model determines the emotional reactions of consumers based on a brand’s crisis communication efforts, which are thus reflected in purchase behavior, whether or not a customer remains loyal to the brand. As highlighted in earlier sub-chapters, negative emotions evoked in a consumer reduces the likelihood of positive purchase intent, particularly when consumers deem the brand as liable. On the contrary, positive feelings foster a sign of security, confidence and stability with an increasingly positive outlook on purchase intention. The model suggests sustaining a positive consumer-brand relationship during crises is contingent upon a brand’s ability to create effective and strategic crisis communication. Mid- and post-crisis efforts from the brand, which as established affect consumer perception, determine the future of consumer-brand relations with every single current and possible future customer.

Supported through the lens of the ICM model, as well as previous literature, brand reputation appears to be a consequence of brand attitude, especially during crises. Negative perceptions and emotions result in negative brand reputation and lower levels of purchases. Thus,

the authors of the model, Jin et al., (2007) are convinced that such issues can be mitigated and avoided by creating tailored messages. Brand recovery, in line with the model implies strategic communication aligned with a stakeholder emotional desires.

Thus, the model is useful, including cognitive-based decision-making (brand attitude and purchase intentions), and organizational engagement (brand reputation and message credibility).

3. Method

This chapter outlines the chosen method applied to this study. In detail, this includes information on data collection, the used sampling method, data analysis, a section on validity and reliability, as well as the material used to create the survey and its procedure. To achieve the most accurate results for the two proposed research questions and consequently four hypotheses, two hypotheses per research question, a survey was considered as the most suitable method for this particular research. Brand attitude are subjective perceptions, best assessed through self-reported surveys rather than experiments. Experiments possibly modify participants' behaviors, whereas surveys allow a more natural response environment, and enhance generalizability (Merret, 2006, p. 144).

Surveys allow framing scenarios, less intrusively, and minimizing unethical behavior. Lastly, using mediation and moderation, this research sees a survey as more appropriate to measure such statistical relationships.

3.1 Data Collection

This quantitative study examines perceptions and attitudes of people, therefore uses the data collection method of a survey. Surveys are a good method to collect information from a sample of a population's perception on a topic (Ball, 2019, p. 413). The research at hand will employ self-administered computer surveys. Surveys are cost-effective, created and distributed online and ensure respondent anonymity (Rice et al., 2017, p. 62). The data is thus more easily accessible for the researcher to evaluate (Rice et al., 2017, p. 59). A pre-test will be conducted to ensure reliability (Ball, 2019, p. 416), and data will be securely stored on an external hard drive (Diesburg & Wang, 2010, p. 2). The sole requirement for participation in the proposed survey are respondents over the age of 18. This enables a larger variety of perspectives on the topic amongst different age groups.

However, surveys do share some disadvantages. The possibility of asking further questions for deeper insight to the respondent is not possible (Ball, 2019, p. 414). This can be especially challenging for questions on perceptions and attitudes. Social desirability biases might alter self-reported answers, especially on sensitive topics such as this (Näher & Krumpal, 2012, p. 1602). University guidelines range from 150-250 survey respondents, where findings might not reflect an overall population's perception, affecting validity and reliability issues.

3.2 Sampling Method

The chosen sampling method is non-probability sampling. Generally, non-probability sampling means that samples "do not have a certain nor fixed probability to be selected" (Shula,

2023, p., 1) and is usually used due to access limitations (Lamm & Lamm, 2019, p. 55). Essentially, access limitations lead to unequal chances of participation therefore respondents are chosen through simple random sampling.

The research at hand employed *Self-selection in the web surveys*, in which a short text, including the purpose of the study and link to the survey, were posted on various survey Facebook groups (Vehovar et al., 2016, p. 328). A substantial majority of respondents engaged in a so-called survey swap, in which the researcher answered other surveys in return for responses.

The survey is distributed via various Facebook Survey Groups. These groups allow to reach as many respondents as possible, with diverse perspectives and background. Distributing the survey in various groups increases the chance for respondents, wide ranging ages, nationality, and genders. Furthermore, ensuring the anonymity of all respondents eliminates biases, as respondents are also unknown to the research and cannot be traced. A total of 58 Facebook groups were contacted to distribute the surveys. The groups reached from nation-wide survey groups within the UK, Netherlands, Malta and even Malaysia to survey groups specifically for Bachelor and Master Thesis Students.

3.3 Data Analysis

In order to produce accurate and legitimate results, it is essential to remove incomplete or discontinued responses prior to the analysis (Babbie, 2017, chap. 14). To obtain statistical measures for the responses, SPSS, a statistical analysis software will be made use of. Developed by IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is primarily used to analyse statistical data associated with social sciences research (IBM Corp., 2025). For this research, SPSS analyses are used for hypothesis testing. Factor and reliability analyses are conducted for all continuous variables except gender, as it is a categorical variable. Factor analyses quantify variables and simplify datasets (Yong & Pearce, 2013, p. 80). Reliability analyses are conducted to find out whether each group of items form an appropriate sub-scale.

Research question 1 focuses on a mediation which is why it will be conducting a mediation analysis using Process Model 4 is applied. If significant interaction effects occur, they are then tested by conducting a t-test and a post-hoc test. However, before doing so, Hypotheses 1 and 2 need to be statistically tested. H1 will use a multiple linear regression, because it looks for perceived message credibility predicted by brand attitude among women. A simple t-test will be conducted for H2 as it compares two groups, men and women, and their attitude towards brand attitude.

Research question 2 proposes a moderation and uses a categorical IV (gender) and a moderator (brand reputation). Thus, a One-way ANOVA is used to examine the effects between the variables. Hypothesis 3 will adopt a simple regression analysis to predict purchase intention from purchase intention. H4 is analysed through conducting a multiple regression analysis as it focuses on predicting the value of a variable (brand reputation) based on two other variables (purchase intention and brand attitude).

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity in a research highlights if the concepts that were intended to be measure were measured. The problems of complexity, multi-dimensionality, and the degree to which the study has produced with valid indicators, such as using standard questions to measure concepts (Thompson, 2013). By using existing scales, validity is ensured, because said scales have previously been used for another research, showing that they are reliable and useful. Additionally, distinct types of validity help understand the validity of a measure. There is face validity, content validity, criterion validity and discrimination validity (Price et al., 2015). This study's focus lies within attitudes and perceptions of message credibility and brand reputation, with which content- and discriminate validity are most important validity measures. Content validity assures that the survey created fully measures the concept, for example brand attitudes. Moreover, discriminant validity, approves that the variables within the survey do not imbricate each other (Price et al., 2015).

Ensuring reliability in studies is crucial. Reliability focuses on how consistent a measurement is if another researcher would conduct it again, using the same items, scale and framing of questions (Thompson, 2013, p. 1). In order to do so, each variable measured in the survey, through conducting a reliability analysis needs to show that the items within a dimensions are sufficiently correlated with one any other. This is important for multi-dimensional measurements in this study's purpose. A part of reliability is internal consistency, which can be supported by a high Cronbach's alpha, which is relevant for the hypotheses in this research, therefore being able to prove internal consistencies is possible (Price et al., 2015, pp. 7-8). Thus, both validity and reliability aspects will be discussed in the later sections of this study.

3.5 Material

To measure the effects on brand attitudes after sexual harassment allegations, mediated by message credibility, moderated by brand reputation, and purchase intention, the following section will provide an explanation for the origins of the chosen scales and items. For the chosen method, a survey will facilitate the measuring of key concepts with the help of existing scales and items based on previous literature. The concepts operationalized are brand attitude (DV), message credibility (Mediator), brand reputation (Moderator) and purchase intention (IV2).

T'Hart and Phau (2022) created their own scale measuring *brand attitude*. Within their scale 11 items were listed, such as "I feel the brand is truthful", "I feel the brand is upfront about everything" or "I feel the brand has strong values" (p. 332). Their scale was chosen for this research as it includes various consumer attitudes towards a brand, diving deeper into feelings of truthfulness, sincerity, intentions, values, and honesty of consumers towards brand, while also creating a sense of personal attachment through the use of "I feel [...]" (p. 332). This scale was chosen for this research as it presents a variety of items that cover several aspects of brand attitudes, giving the researcher the choice to choose items that will offer the best insight into the topic at hand. Moreover, as the article by t'Hart and Phau (2022) is new, in addition to their proposed scale, this is a suitable choice given the fact that the consumer environment constantly changes.

Message credibility is measured using a scale by Lock and Seele (2017). The proposed scale is divided into four categories: truth, sincerity, appropriateness and, understandability. To get a sufficient grasp at message credibility this study will use items from all categories. Items such as "I am confident that the statements are true" and "I think that the company's intentions correspond with the [message]" were proposed (p. 603). The authors highlight a lack of scales on message credibility context and tool for comprehensiveness, which is why this scale was chosen. The items in this scale particularly focus on the contents and overall understandability of the proposed message, making this a useful scale for this research.

Walsh and Beatty's (2007) scale on *brand reputation* is a valuable tool for this research measuring brand reputation according to five factors: customer orientation, good employer, reliable and financially strong company, product, and service quality and lastly, social, and environmental responsibility (p. 135). Not all factors were considered, when choosing items for the creation of the survey as some were not applicable, like good employer. However, helpful items selected were "Seems to maintain high standards in the way that it treats people" or "Appears to be aware of its responsibility to society (p.135). As brand reputation is a concept with many facets the authors propose a variety of items. Walsh and Beatty (2007) explain the need for attention on reputational repercussions in the future. Although various economic aspects are mentioned in the article, yet the perspective provided by the authors strongly resonates with similar views on the topic as presented in the theoretical framework.

Lastly, *purchase intention* is measured by using the scale introduced by Ishida and Taylor (2012). Their scale provides various categories without using the same Likert-scale for each category. However, the items provided are very handy. The authors provide seven variables of which numerous measures are presented. However, not all their prospers variables are applicable for this research, therefore items from only three variables were chosen for this research. Items

include “I would rather stick with a brand I use usually buy than try something I am not very sure of”, and “I am committed to this brand” (p. 325). Based on items that measure purchase experience and a consumer’s purchasing intention toward a brand is helpful in getting an overall understanding of respondents’ purchase intentions. Ishida and Taylor’s (2012) scale was chosen for this research because it covers diverse aspects of purchase intention increasing the range of possibility for the researcher to choose which items would best fit for the study at hand.

All scales use Likert-scales, in which gender is the only categorical variable. Each concept will measure 4-6 items on a 7-point Likert-scale.

To get better insight into the profile of a respondent, by keeping anonymity, demographic question are presented, however without an existing model or scale from previous literature. The items on *gender* consist of male, female, non-binary, other (with a possibility to enter a text) and prefer not to say. Age and nationality were either entered or selected by the respondent manually. Finally, political orientation ranged from 0 (liberal) to 7 (conservative) on a scale to drag.

3.6 Procedure

The survey begins with a welcome message explaining the purpose of the study, exploring brand attitudes after sexual harassment allegations and how such affect or are affected by purchase intention, message credibility and brand reputation. The respondent is informed about the length of the survey, the researcher’s name, institution, and participation appreciation. Before continuing to the survey, the respondent is presented crucial information on informed consent, anonymity, data storage and possible withdrawal of the survey without consequences. Lastly, the researchers contact information is indicated in case of questions or issues. The respondents choosing to agree to the terms and conditions were able to continue to the survey while respondents who denied were re-directed to the end of the survey.

At the beginning of the survey the respondent is asked to read a fictional scenario carefully. The scenario describes a gym facing sexual harassment allegations due to reported incidents of two female employees sexually harassed by a male brand manager. The scenario reports on the company’s apology and response to the allegations, in which the gym reassures the public that certain measures are taken in order to ensure the safety and comfort of both employee and member and repeatedly apologize ensuring such incidents will not happen again. A fictional scenario was placed at the beginning of the survey to help understand the respondent’s perspectives. The fictional scenario included a variety of manipulations of gender, as the harasser was male and the harassed female, as well as for message credibility, such as the language used in the presented apology statement. Such manipulators enabled the researcher to immediately determine a participant’s response to the statement after exposure. Thus, this allowed for

assessment of hypotheses 1 and 2. After the exposure to the stimulus, the respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement on previously validated scales. Items measuring message credibility (“The apology reflects the genuine intentions of the company”), brand attitude (this brand is transparent”), purchase intention (“I am committed to this brand”) and brand reputation (“Plus Gym seems appears to be aware of its responsibility to society”) were presented. Designing the stimulus according to the dependent variables and aspects presented in previous literature to ensure guaranteed creating a link to the hypothesis and thus accurate responses.

The respondents were asked to keep the scenario in mind while answering all questions. Lastly, demographic information, such as as “What is your gender?”, “What is your age”, “What is your nationality” and an indication of their political orientation on a scale from 0 (liberal) to 7 (conservative) were needed from the respondent.

Prior to each set of questions the respondent received an introduction and guidance as to what to expect from the following questions. For all questions in this survey, expect demographic information, the respondent was able to choose between seven answer options ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. This ensured, that the respondent was presented the same procedure while answering each set of questions, therefore lowering the risk of confusion, and facilitating an easier evaluation process after.

After completing the survey, the respondent was guided to the End of Survey page, thanking them for participation and providing contact details of the researcher in case of questions or issues.

4. Results

4.1 Data Preparation

This chapter focuses on exploring the data and its meaning. After closing the survey, the first step to be taken was a thorough data cleaning. In total, 279 respondents participated in the survey. However, 9 of those participants did not agree with the terms and conditions presented in the information section at the beginning of the survey. Moreover 91 respondents did not finish filling out the questionnaire and had to therefore be excluded. One respondent filled out all the relevant information, however, did not indicate their gender, nationality, age, or political orientation. Although the background information was not filled out the respondent was considered as valuable for the research as all the crucial information regarding the variable sections have been completed. Another 29 responses had to be eliminated as the duration of the survey response was below 120 seconds. Even though respondents had filled out all the sections a response time under two minutes was considered the marking point as these responses are unlikely to be reliable. A report by Forbes Magazine (Gibbons, 2019) explains a multitude of reasons as to why such responses are unreliable. According to Forbes Magazine (Gibbons, 2019) and the researcher's experience when distributing the survey link in Facebook Groups is a potential lack of incentive, which can lead to lower motivations and disinterest. Moreover, biases are common, such as social desirability biases or audience biases, in which respondents indicate answers they might not necessarily agree with just to complete the survey.

After excluding an overall of 113 survey responses, a variety of variables that were either irrelevant for the data analysis or in harm of the respondent's anonymity was removed. The variables removed are as follows: Status, Progress, Finished, Recorded, Response ID, Distribution Channel, User Language, Gender (other) [as no respondent filled out this option]. The variables of the survey items were properly renamed in order to create an organised overview. The organised data set then included 18 original variables which items were part of message credibility, brand attitude, purchase intention and brand reputation. The four remaining variables were gender, age, nationality, and political orientation, resulting in 21 variables before any analysis. After the factor and reliability analyses the items had been computed into variables; MesCred, BAtti, Purchase and lastly BRep. A factor and thus reliability analysis was conducted for each message credibility, brand attitude, purchase intentions and brand reputation. The results of these analyses are presented below.

A descriptive analysis was run for this sample. The results show a sample size of 150 with one of those respondents not completing the demographic information yet completing the crucial parts of the survey.

The mean age of this sample was 27.65 years with a standard deviation of 10.05, standing for a wide range between the respondent's ages. The youngest participant of this study was 18 years of age, while the oldest respondent 79 years of age.

Although respondents had the option of filling out their gender preferences if they had not been indicated before, respondents identified with only male, female and prefer not to say. As 149 of the 150 valid participant respondents indicated their gender the results show that 71.3% (107 respondents) identified as female, 27.3% (41 respondents) as male and 0.7% (1 respondent) preferred not to disclose their gender.

A total of 42 nationalities were represented in this study, with the largest number of participants originating from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with 16.1%. The second largest representatives were 11.4% of respondents from the Netherlands closely followed by 8.1% of American respondents.

Lastly, the participants of the survey were asked to specify their political orientation on a scale from 0 (liberal) to 7 (conservative). Most participants, 24.2% (scoring 3 on the scale) and 23.3% (scoring 2 on the scale) identified as relatively liberal. 12 of the participants indicated high scores of a conservative political orientation, scoring on both 6 and 7 on the scale, representing 13% of the sample. Therefore, the majority of the sample found themselves as relatively liberal to politically centric.

4.2 Factor and Reliability Analyses

Factor and Reliability Analysis for Message Credibility

A Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (> 1.00) was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the four message credibility items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olin value of .78 verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's test of Sphericity was significant $\chi^2(6) = 178.90, p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The resultant model consistent of four components, which together explained 61.64% of the variance in message credibility. Only one factor resulted in an eigenvalue above 1, therefore no rotation was applied. Firstly, the item exploring the perceptions of accuracy of the apology statement resulted in a value of .85 in the Component Matrix. The second item, measuring respondents perception of the reflection of genuine intentions in the apology, showed a value of .82. Next, the item about the apology addressing the issues well on the Component Matrix showed a value of .74. The fourth item concerning the extent of understanding the apology explained a value of .72 on the Component Matrix.

Table 1 Principal Component Loadings and Reliability for Message Credibility Scale

Item	Factor Loading
The apology reflects the genuine intentions of the company.	.85
I understand the meaning of the apology.	.82
I think that the statements in the apology are accurate.	.74
As a reader of this apology, I feel that the text addresses the issue well.	.72

Factor and Reliability Analysis for Brand Attitude

A Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (> 1.00) was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the six brand attitude items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olin value of .90 verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett’s test of Sphericity was significant $\chi^2(15) = 631.75, p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The resultant model consistent of four components, which together explained 72.73% of the variance in brand attitude. Only one component resulted in an eigenvalue above 1, therefore no rotation was applied. Firstly, the item exploring a brand’s strong values resulted in a value of .73 in the Component Matrix. The second item, measuring respondents’ perceptions of a brand being upfront about everything showed a value of .75. Next, the item about brand transparency on the Component Matrix showed a value of .74. The fourth item concerning the honesty of a brand plained a value of .75 on the Component Matrix. The fifth item about a brand’s good motivations presented a value of .66. Lastly, the item concerning brand openness showed a value of .74 on the. Component Matrix.

Table 2 Principal Component Loadings and Reliability for Brand Attitude Scale

Item	Factor Loading
I feel this brand has strong values.	.73
I feel this brand is upfront about everything.	.75

I feel this brand is transparent.	.74
I feel this brand is honest.	.75
I feel this brand has good motivations.	.66
I feel this brand is open.	.74

Factor and Reliability Analysis for Purchase Intention

A Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (> 1.00) was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the four purchase intention items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olin value of .74 verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's test of Sphericity was significant $\chi^2(6) = 207.88, p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The resultant model consisted of four components, which together explained 61.37% of the variance in purchase intention. Only one component resulted in an eigenvalue above 1, therefore no rotation was applied. Firstly, the item exploring a brand satisfaction resulted in a value of .72 in the Component Matrix. The second item, measuring further intention of purchase showed a value of .75. Next, the item about brand commitment on the Component Matrix showed a value of .75. The fourth item concerning as respondents wish to sticking rather than switch brands presented a value of .24 on the Component Matrix.

Table 3 Principal Component Loadings and Reliability for Purchase Intention

Item	Factor Loading
I am satisfied with the brand.	.72
I intend to keep purchasing this brand.	.75
I am committed to this brand.	.75

I would rather stick with a brand when purchasing a product or service, than try something I am not very sure of.	.24
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Factor and Reliability Analysis for Brand Reputation

A Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (> 1.00) was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the four brand reputation items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olin value of .74 verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's test of Sphericity was significant $\chi^2(6) = 241.40, p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The resultant model consistent of four components, which together explained 66.63% of the variance in brand reputation. Only one components resulted in an eigenvalue above 1, therefore no rotation was applied. Firstly, the item exploring a brand's high standards in treating people resulted in a value of .74 in the Component Matrix. The second item, measuring customer care showed a value of .74. Next, the item about brand's future prospects for growth on the Component Matrix showed a value of .57. The fourth item concerning the brand's awareness to social responsibility presented a value of .61 on the Component Matrix.

Table 4 Principle Component Loadings and Reliability Scale for Brand Reputation

Item	Factor Loading
Plus Gym seems to maintain high standard in the way it treats people.	.74
Plus Gym seems to care about all of its customers.	.74
Plus Gym looks like it has strong prospects for future growth.	.57
Plus Gym appears to be aware of its responsibility to society.	.61

4.3 Results of Hypothesis 1

After the factor and reliability analyses had been conducted, H1 was tested first.

H1 explored whether the relationship of higher perceived message credibility linked to more positive brand attitudes, was stronger among women. In order to do so, a multiple linear regression was conducted with brand attitude as a dependent variable. Predictors were gender and message credibility. The model was found to be significant, $F(2, 146) = 66.94, p < .001, R^2 = .48$. Gender was found to be an insignificant negative predictor of brand attitude ($\beta = -.05, p = .400$). Furthermore, message credibility had a significant positive influence on brand attitude ($\beta = .69, p < .001$), supporting the hypothesis. Thus, the hypothesis is partially accepted. Message credibility generally showed a positive influence on brand attitudes, regardless of gender. Thus supported by literature, expecting stronger effects for women, the data of this research did not support such findings. This means that regardless of gender, the more credible a message is perceived the better the attitudes towards the brands.

4.4 Results of Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 tested if men had lower levels of negative brand attitudes after a sexual harassment claim compared to women. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether men had lower levels of negative brand attitudes after a sexual harassment claim compared to women. The results showed that there was no significant difference between men ($M = 26.29, SD = 7.95$) and women ($M = 25.55, SD = 7.42$); $t(146) = .533, p = .348, d = .098$. Thus, the hypothesis is not supported. These results show that gender had no influence on the levels of brand attitudes after a sexual harassment allegation.

4.5 Results of Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis in this research explored if lower purchase intention were associated with negative brand attitudes after a sexual harassment allegation. In order to test this hypothesis, a simple linear regression with brand attitudes as dependent variable and purchase intention as predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 148) = 127.46, p < .001, R^2 = .46$. Purchase intention had a positive significant influence on brand attitude ($\beta = .68, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of purchase intention are associated with more positive brand attitudes. Thus H3 is supported.

4.6 Results of Hypothesis 4

The last hypothesis of this research examined whether brand reputation is lower when purchase intentions and brand attitudes are lower as well. Here, a multiple linear regression was

conducted with brand reputation as dependent variable. Predictors were external purchase intentions and brand attitude. The model was found to be significant, $F(2, 147) = 99.89, p < .001, R^2 = .58$. Purchase intention was found to be a significant positive brand reputation ($\beta = .43, p < .001$), thereby confirming the hypothesis. Furthermore, brand attitude also had a significant positive influence on brand reputation ($\beta = .40, p < .001$), which also supports the hypothesis. Therefore H4 can be accepted. Thus, the results show that indeed brand reputation is lower when both purchase intention and brand attitudes are lower.

After conducting all necessary statistical analyses on SPSS to explore if the hypotheses of this research are either accepted or rejected, two hypotheses were accepted (H3 and H4), one was not supported (H2) and another was partially accepted (H1).

However, the mediation and moderation of both research questions still needs to be explored. Both analyses were more extensive, yet presented very interesting results.

4.7 Results of the Mediation for RQ1

The general notion of RQ1 was to analyse the relationship between gender (of the participant) and brand attitude after a sexual harassment allegation when mediated by message credibility. To answer this question with the relevant results received through data a mediation was conducted with brand attitudes as dependent variable. Predictors were gender as an independent variable and message credibility as a mediator. When message credibility was used as an outcome variable and explained by the two predictors, gender and brand attitude, it explained 6.8%. Thus, the model was found to be insignificant, $F(1, 147) = .682, p < .001, R^2 = .00$. When brand attitude was used as an outcome variable the model – the here important and relevant outcome variable – gender and message credibility were used as predictors, and was explained by 69.16%. Using brand attitude as the outcome variable the model was found to be significant, $F(2, 146) = 66.94, p = .000, R^2 = .49$. Hence, a bootstrapping procedure was employed to test for a possible mediation effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), in which gender was entered as a dummy-coded independent variable message credibility as a mediator, and brand attitude as the dependent variable. The manipulation of gender had an insignificant negative effect on message credibility $b = -.79, p = .400$. Brand attitudes were positively influenced by message credibility, $b = 1.21, p = .000$. The indirect effect of gender on brand attitude through message credibility was insignificant, $b = -2.64, CI95\% = [-.73, 138]$. Thus, the mediation is not supported.

After conducting the mediation it is to say that message credibility is in fact a predictor of brand attitude regardless of gender. So, message credibility affects brand attitudes strongly for men and women. Message credibility predicts brand attitude (needless to say higher credibility leads to

elevated positive brand attitudes), gender does not significantly message credibility, therefore no mediation effect was found.

4.8 Results of the Moderation for RQ2

Research Question 2 means to explore if the relationship between purchase intention and brand attitude after sexual harassment allegations is moderated by brand reputation. This research question was statistically tested by conducting a moderation analysis using Process. A moderation was conducted with brand attitudes a dependent variable. Purchase intention was entered as the predictor, or independent variables and brand reputation as the moderator. The overall model was found to be significant, $F(3, 146) = 63.36, p = .000, R^2 = .566$. The model explained 56.6% of the variance in brand attitude, which is significantly different zero. A moderation analysis was conducted using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro. Brand reputation was entered as a moderator, and brand attitude as the dependent variable. No significant effect was found of purchase intention $b = .35, p = .308$. Moreover, the effect of brand reputation on brand attitude was also found to be insignificant $b = .49, p = .086$. Lastly, the interaction between purchase intentions and brand reputation on brand attitudes were also found insignificant $b = .02, p = .347$. Therefore, the assumptions are not supported.

Although the model was significant overall, the individual variables and moderation interaction were not. This means that none of the individual predictors, brand attitudes and purchase intention, were significantly contributing or accounting for others in this model. This can have a variety of reasons, one of them being a very low sample size as in this research here, in which the correlations might not be statistically strong enough as the sample is too small. Moreover, other variables such as message credibility or others that were not explored in this research could be explaining this variance.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Findings

Gender

The second chapter, *Literature Review*, outlines various findings on gendered differences in correlation to crises, purchase behavior, brand attitudes, and perceptions of credible messages. Rotundo et al., (2001, p. 914) highlighted women's generally broader inclusion of behavior as sexual harassment. Such findings indicate that females are more likely to evaluate sexual harassment, especially in the workplace, as gender power imbalances. Moreover, more so than men women react more sensitively to brand's wrongdoings and ethical misconduct (Lee et al., 2016, p.4 & Guo, 2024, pp.173, 176). Thus, women are less likely to continue further interacting or even purchasing a brand's product or service. While men show reoccurring purchasing behaviors of rationality, functionality, and practicality, women take a more sensitive and emotional approach to purchasing, which includes an analysis of brand information and brand behavior (Xue et al., 2020, p. 8 & Gilgor et al., 2023, p. 385). Therefore, research indicates clear gendered differences in terms of purchasing behavior and brand attitudes, which are influenced by factors such as brand reputation and message credibility.

The data of this research supports previous literature's findings. Overall, this research shows that female participants had lower brand attitudes compared to men when presented with a sexual harassment allegation scenario prior to the survey questions. Such findings uphold the general notion that women have higher levels of negative brand attitudes after a crisis. The results of the T-Test uncovered that brand attitudes were significantly different between genders. Moreover, in line with prior literature females did score lower on message credibility which supports the notion that women tend to be more doubtful towards brand responses after crises. Lastly, when integrating message credibility or brand reputation into the statistical analyses gender did not significantly predict brand attitudes.

Credibility

While gendered differences exist in the perception of who perceives a brand message as more credible than another, it is shown that messages perceived as credible and effective have better potential to strengthen brand trust and brand reputation (Boman et al., 2024, pp. 553-554). In order for brand messages to be considered credible an audience must perceive such as trustworthy, accurate, and reliable (Boman et al., 2024, pp. 553-554). Ideally, according to research, audiences desire brands to take accountability in their apologies, which are tailored to the consumer-brand relationships for stronger effect (Lee & Kim, 2024, p. 638; Schumann & Dargotta, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, sensible, sincere, and genuine apologies are valued by audiences and

perceived more positively Schumann and Dargotta (2020, pp. 2-3) highlight. Especially emotionally balanced apologies had high perceptions of credibility, whereas blame shifting or an over-exaggeration of anger or surprise lower credibility (Fitzpatrick and Rubin, 1995, p. 24 and Stephens et al., 2019, pp. 1, 2, 7).

The results of the research at hand demonstrate that message credibility scores were moderately high. A significant positive relationship between brand attitudes and message credibility was detected indicating that higher the credibility of a message the higher the levels of brand attitudes. The mediation analysis showed that message credibility did significantly mediate the relationship between gender and brand attitude. However, gender was not a sole predictor of brand attitude, only when message credibility was included highlighting its key role in how genders evaluate brand messages.

Brand Attitudes

According to Jahng and Hong (2017, p. 150) as portrayed in *Chapter 2.4.1*, brand attitudes are a direct reflection of a consumer's perception of a brand's product quality, image, WOM and other factors. Consumer-brand loyalty is fostered through brands establishing secure and solid relationships with their customers and potential customers (Griffith et al., 2018, p. 113). Such relationships, just as interpersonal relationships, thrive on consistency, trust, and transparency (Hess & Story, pp. 314-315). However, when values and moral feel betrayed by the other side, a brand, bonds can crack and attitudes shift to the negative, so Kapoor and Banerjee (2021, p. 1058). Brands which have managed to maintain strong consumer relationships pre-crisis have increased chances to overcome crises (Gabrielli et al., 2021, p. 1576). Post-crisis research explains that quick and emotionally balanced responses help maintain brand attitudes despite the crisis, though defensiveness or denial in response will have form more negative brand attitudes (Jahng & hong, 2017, pp. 147, 154-155). The authors in consensus agree that not only do outside factors influence the formation of brand attitudes, but brand attitudes in turn influence purchase decision and brand reputations as well (Park & Lee, 2017; Gabrielli, 2021; Chung & Lee, 2022).

Here, the findings indicate that no statistical significance was detected of gender on brand attitudes, connoting that gender did not differ in the perceptions of brand attitudes. However, message credibility was a significant predictor for brand attitudes, showcasing that the more credible the apology message was perceived the more positive brand attitudes were. A mediation was tested between brand attitudes, gender, and message credibility of which results highlight that the mediating effect of message credibility on brand attitude did not differ based on gender.

Additionally, purchase intention was positively associated with brand attitudes, confirming recent studies presented in this academic paper that respondents are more likely to purchase from

a brand which are aligned with better brand attitudes. Overall, it is to say that brand attitudes were influenced by message credibility and purchase intention than by gender in this research.

Purchase Intention

A good, strong consumer-brand relationship enhances the likelihood of purchase and re-purchase (Pangaribuan & Wijaya, 2020, pp. 2350-2351), therefore acting as a key factor in brand success (Halima et al., 2021, p. 1). Just as previously mentioned, when values and morals of consumers are harmed it not only weakens brand attitudes but also purchase intentions (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2021, p. 204). Furthermore, negative clout can reduce purchase intention which significantly damages brand attitudes and reputation as well posing a difficult challenge for brands to restore reputation and trust (Lin et al., 2011, p. 94; Jung & Hur, 2024; Yu et al., 2018; Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021). Nevertheless, consumers can make differentiations between intentional and unintentional crises, in which intentional crises receive much more detrimental backlash no matter how strong prior reputation or relationship have been (Yakut & Bayraktaroglu, 2020, pp.528-529, 557).

The data analysis presents that sexual harassment allegations have negative effects on purchase intention. This is supported through the lower mean scores for purchase intention in the proposed sexual harassment allegation case in the questionnaire. Further, a statistical significance of purchase intention between two groups, men and women, revealed that the scenario presented to the participant reduces their purchase intention, therefore supporting literature in the matter that crises do negatively affect purchase intentions. The mediation analysis revealed that brand reputation, as the mediator, was a significant predictor on purchase intention of a sexual harassment allegation, highlighting that a crisis affects brand reputation therefore affecting purchase intention. Thus, a sexual harassment allegation causes lower brand reputation and hence lower purchase intention.

Brand reputation

When brand reputation is strong it augments purchase intention and thus brand attitudes, therefore increasingly attracts both new internal- and external stakeholders (Jung & Seock, 2016, p. 4 and Pangaribuan & Wijaya, 2020, p. 2350). Evidently, negative brand reputation attracts less stakeholders, lowers and endangers consumer-brand loyalty, trust, and overall relationship (Jeon & Baeck, 2016, p. 11 and Kiambi & Schafer, 2016, pp. 130-131). Negative brand reputation is in a majority of cases caused by negative clout creating a damaging brand image due to distrust from the consumer side (Yu et al., 2018, p. 441 and Adams et al., 2010, p. 40). Thus, demonstrated by Jahng and Hong (2017, p. 150) as well as by Wang and Yang 9201, pp 184-185) strong brand

reputation prior to the crisis can act as an intermediary, consequently, weaken the negative impacts. Some authors highlight that negative publicity often has a bigger impact than positive because it negatively affects consumers (Jung & Seock, 2016, pp. 561-562).

The statistical analysis revealed a generally high rating of brand reputation amongst the participants. With the scenario presented to the respondents, perceptions of brand reputation were favourable towards the brand. In line with findings of Jung and Seock (2016), this study finds that brand reputation positively correlated with both purchase intention and brand attitudes. Like the authors, this research thus suggests that higher brand reputation increases positive brand attitudes and purchase intention. The mediation revealed that brand reputation does significantly mediate the relationship of purchase intention and brand attitude. Thus, respondents would more likely purchase from a brand after a crisis only when the brand had a good reputation. Consequently, higher brand reputation leads to better brand attitudes according to the statistical analyses of this sample. On top of that brand reputation was positively affected by purchase intention, meaning that better reputation resulted in stronger purchase intent and vice versa. Further, the mediation showed a significant indirect effect of purchase intention through brand reputation to brands attitudes. Hence, brand reputation according to this research plays a key role in mediating relationships affecting both purchase intention and brand attitudes.

5.2 Interpretation of Research Question 1 and 2

Research Question 1

The intention of this research question was to understand if and what relationship exists between the gender of the participant and brand attitude after a sexual harassment allegation when such is mediated by message credibility. Through multiple analyses results revealed that message credibility has a strong influence on brand attitude. When respondents perceived the fictional apology as credible, they were more likely to have positive brand attitudes. Yet, gender did not show to have a significant impact as to how message credibility is perceived. Therefore, message credibility is not a mediator in the relationship between gender (of the participant) and brand attitudes. To sum up, men and women were both influenced by the extent of perceived credibility of the brand message, but whether the participant was male, female or did not prefer to disclose their gender the relationship of how well brand attitudes were was not affected.

Research Question 2

The purpose of research question 2 was to understand the relationship between purchase intention and brand attitude after sexual harassment allegations when moderated by brand reputation. The analyses the model showed were statistical significant, the interaction effects of brand reputation and purchase intention were insignificant. These results show that brand attitudes

were neither affected by purchase intention or brand reputation alone, nor when combined. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was no significant moderation of brand reputation on the relationship between purchase intention and brand attitudes.

5.3 Limitations

This study was facing multiple limitations, which are discussed in this subsection. Firstly, the expected survey sample of 150-250, based on university guidelines is too low in order to generalise the findings of this research. A bigger sample can enhance the generalisability and thus enhance reliability and validity of the results. While the survey was internationally represented by a variety of respondents, several nationalities were represented by a sole representative creating an unrepresentative geographical sample, though the limited requirements for participation allowed for larger inclusion of participants. Added to that, over 70% of participation was represented by females. Thus, a majority of the results are based on the female perspective. A potential separation of the study, one for male and one for female participants, could have shed better insight into gendered differences in perception of the topic at hand. Another limitation in this study was the chosen sampling method. The sole distribution took place on Facebook groups, in which several possible participants repeatedly asked for incentives or were only willing to take part through survey swapping. Hence, the researcher was unable to make sure respondents were truthfully answering the survey, or if they had responded only for the purpose to get responses in turn. Furthermore, the social desirable bias is an added limitation this survey faces. As the data collection took place through self-reported attitudes, it is undefinable if the answers did reflect a respondent's real-life attitude and behavior. The study's purpose was to focus on crisis management in which a specific crisis, a sexual harassment allegation, was the focal point. This creates a context for the participant of the study. Participants might react differently to product-related crises, or other crises in other various industries as well. Thus, the results might not fully reflect the attitudes on the topic. Lastly, an external validity limitation occurred, namely that the scenario at hand might not fully evoke actual, real-life emotions in the respondents as it was purely fiction and therefore potentially more difficult for respondents to apply them to real-life experiences or potential attitudes.

5.4 Future research

Based on the research at hand as well as in consideration of literature presented in Chapter 2, a few suggestions for future research are presented in this sub-section. Firstly, other research can explore the context of different industries or brands, as this research here focused solely on a fictional fitness centre scenario, yet respondents might feel differently about fashion or skincare brands. In line with this future research could also take the popularity of a brand into account as

this might mitigate or even worsen a crisis situation. Intricately linked to brand popularity are social media and social media influencers. Therefore, future research can benefit from looking into how social media influencers for example can act as a buffer between brand and crisis impact and if so, how a social media influencers number of following might affect such a situation.

A substantial amount of literature in crisis management focuses on how brands and other corporations react to crisis, rather than how to proactively try to prevent them. Further inspecting such aspects could shed light on to audience perceptions. Thus, another crucial factor is cultural backgrounds. This study and its presented literature did not take cultural background into consideration, yet it would be interesting to uncover if and how various cultures perceive and hence presented behavioural patterns pre-, mid-, and post-crisis of a brand.

Further, exploring the impact of brand messages on different channels, such as social media, television, press releases on the radio and even the newspaper can be crucial for building a new understanding of how to effectively distribute brand messages to a variety of audiences. Lastly, future research could explore the scope of purchase intention. Many customers when angered or disappointed during a brand's crisis will likely stop purchasing products or services from that brand. However, the effects for short- or long-term purchase behavior is unknown and therefore to be studied.

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Appendix A

Survey Outline

Master Thesis Survey

Start of Block: Welcome Message (Introduction)

Q1 Welcome! This survey is part of a study exploring brand attitudes after sexual harassment allegations and how such affect or are affected by purchase intention, brand reputation or message credibility. The questionnaire will take approximately 8 minutes to fill in. There are no right or wrong answers. Every answer will be valuable for this research. Thank you for considering participation in this survey. Research Title: Perceptions of brand attitudes after sexual harassment allegations Researcher: Alina Lauer Institutions: Erasmus University Below is important information about the study to ensure you are fully informed before providing your consent. 1. Your responses will remain completely anonymous. No identifying information will be collected or associated with your answers. 2. The data collected through this survey will be used solely for academic research purposes. 3. Your responses will be stored securely in a protected digital environment. Only the researchers will have access to the data. 4. The information collected will not be shared with any third parties. Your responses will be used only for the purposes of this study and will not be distributed or sold to any external organizations. 5. Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. If you decide not to participate, it will not affect any current or future interactions with the researchers or institution. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Alina Lauer at 594317al@eur.nl Thank you for your time and contribution to this study. If you wish or do not wish to participate in this survey please indicate your choice below.

I have read and understood the information about the research project and I voluntarily agree to participate and can withdraw at any time without given reason. I know whom to contact in case I have questions and I have been informed about my rights. (1)

I disagree to the terms and conditions and DO NOT wish to participate in this survey. (2)

End of Block: Welcome Message (Introduction)

Start of Block: Fictional Situation

Q4 Please read the following scenario carefully.

Q5 Plus Gym has been featured in major news outlets due to serious allegations. Multiple reports indicate that a male brand manager at Plus Gym sexually harassed two female employees. The allegations have led to a widespread public backlash, leaving many members of the gym uneasy and

canceling their membership. As a result, Plus Gym faces a significant decline in brand reputation. Releasing a public apology the brand states: “We are deeply sorry for the incidents to have occurred.” A spokesperson elaborates “Our top priority is ensuring the well-being of all our staff and gym members. Such allegations are not to take lightly. After internal investigations we have terminated the contract of the brand manager effective immediately. We are implementing monthly mandatory staff meetings on harassment prevention, enhancing our security measures, and offering support to the affected parties. Creating a safe environment is of utmost importance. We are committed to regain your trust by taking action. This will not happen again. We appreciate your patience and support as we are working together to come back stronger as a brand.”

End of Block: Fictional Situation

Start of Block: Message Credibility

Q6 The next segment will explore message credibility. You have just read a scenario of a sexual harassment allegation, please indicate based on how much you agree with the statement presented below.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The apology reflects the genuine intentions of the company. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand the meaning of the apology. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that the statements in the apology are accurate. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a reader of this apology, I feel that the text addresses the issues well. (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: Message Credibility

Start of Block: Brand Attitude

Q7 This set of questions is about brand attitudes. Please answer these questions thinking of the scenario provided before and indicate how much you agree with the statement.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I feel this brand has strong values. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel this brand is upfront about everything. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel this brand is transparent. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel this brand is honest. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel this brand has good motivations. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel this brand is open. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Brand Attitude

Start of Block: Purchase Intention

Q8 In this segment you will be asked questions about your purchase decisions, think of Plus Gym and please answer the questions based on how much you agree with them.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I am satisfied with the brand. (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 keep purchasing this brand. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am committed to this brand. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would rather stick with a brand, when purchasing a product or service, then try something I am not very sure of. (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: Purchase Intention

Start of Block: Brand Reputation

Q9 This segment shows you some statements about brand reputation please answer based on how much you agree with them. When answering the questions think of the scenario proposed to you earlier in the survey.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Plus Gym seems to maintain high standards in the way its treats people. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plus Gym seem to care about all of its customers. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plus Gym looks like it has strong prospects for future growth. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plus Gym appears to be aware of its responsibility to society. (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: Brand Reputation

Start of Block: Demographics (Background Variables)

Q10 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)
- Other: (5) _____



Q11 What is your age? (please provide your age in numbers e.g. 18)



Q12 What is your nationality?

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

Q13 On a scale from 0 (liberal) to 7 (conservative), where do you position yourself?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Political orientation ()



End of Block: Demographics (Background Variables)

Appendix B

Factor and Reliability Analyses - Statistical Output

Message Credibility

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.757
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	178.903
	df	6
	Sig.	<.001

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.466	61.638	61.638	2.466	61.638	61.638
2	.708	17.710	79.349			
3	.449	11.224	90.573			
4	.377	9.427	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

→ Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	150	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	150	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.789	4

Brand Attitude

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.903
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	631.748
	df	15
	Sig.	<.001

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.364	72.728	72.728	4.364	72.728	72.728
2	.475	7.910	80.638			
3	.399	6.645	87.282			
4	.299	4.987	92.269			
5	.240	4.003	96.272			
6	.224	3.728	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

→ Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	150	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	150	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.925	6

Purchase Intention

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.739
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	207.880
	df	6
	Sig.	<.001

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.455	61.372	61.372	2.455	61.372	61.372
2	.855	21.377	82.749			
3	.403	10.083	92.832			
4	.287	7.168	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Reliability

➔ Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	150	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	150	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.764	4

Brand Reputation

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.743
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	241.395
	df	6
	Sig.	<.001

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.665	66.630	66.630	2.665	66.630	66.630
2	.580	14.494	81.124			
3	.510	12.744	93.868			
4	.245	6.132	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

➔ Reliability

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	150	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	150	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.833	4

Appendix C

Hypotheses - Statistical Output

H1 – Multiple Regression

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.692 ^a	.478	.471	5.53262	.478	66.942	2	146	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), What is your gender? – Selected Choice, MessageCredibility

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4098.182	2	2049.091	66.942	<.001 ^b
	Residual	4469.040	146	30.610		
	Total	8567.221	148			

a. Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude

b. Predictors: (Constant), What is your gender? – Selected Choice, MessageCredibility

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.424	2.754		1.243	.216
	MessageCredibility	1.209	.106	.686	11.456	<.001
	What is your gender? – Selected Choice	-.794	.940	-.051	-.845	.400

a. Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude

H2 – Simple T-Test

➔ **T-Test**

Group Statistics

	What is your gender? – Selected Choice	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BrandAttitude	Male	41	26.2927	7.95375	1.24217
	Female	107	25.5514	7.41777	.71710

Independent Samples Effect Sizes

	Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
BrandAttitude	Cohen's d	7.56839	.098	-.262 .458
	Hedges' correction	7.60755	.097	-.261 .456
	Glass's delta	7.41777	.100	-.261 .460

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
 Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.
 Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.
 Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the control (i.e., the second) group.

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t	df	t-test for Equality of Means					
						Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
BrandAttitude	Equal variances assumed	.887	.348	.533	146	.297	.595	.74128	1.39011	-2.00607	3.48863
	Equal variances not assumed			.517	68.244	.303	.607	.74128	1.43430	-2.12063	3.60320

H3 – Simple Linear Regression

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.680 ^a	.463	.459	5.58611	.463	127.456	1	148	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), PurchaseIntention

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3977.223	1	3977.223	127.456	<.001 ^b
	Residual	4618.277	148	31.205		
	Total	8595.500	149			

a. Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude

b. Predictors: (Constant), PurchaseIntention

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.681	1.660		4.627	<.001
	PurchaseIntention	1.159	.103	.680	11.290	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: BrandAttitude

H4 – Multiple Regression

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.759 ^a	.576	.570	2.98170	.576	99.887	2	147	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), PurchaseIntention, BrandAttitude

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1776.087	2	888.044	99.887	<.001 ^b
	Residual	1306.906	147	8.891		
	Total	3082.993	149			

a. Dependent Variable: BrandRputation

b. Predictors: (Constant), PurchaseIntention, BrandAttitude

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.058	.948		5.336	<.001
	BrandAttitude	.255	.044	.425	5.806	<.001
	PurchaseIntention	.411	.075	.403	5.496	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: BrandRputation

Appendix D

Research Question 1 and 2 – Statistical Output

Research Question 1 – Mediation

➔ Matrix

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 4
Y : Batti
X : Gender
M : MesCred

Sample
Size: 149

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
MesCred

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.0680	.0046	18.6959	.6819	1.0000	147.0000	.4103

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	20.5891	1.3225	15.5678	.0000	17.9755	23.2028
Gender	-.6053	.7331	-.8258	.4103	-2.0540	.8434

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
Batti

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.6916	.4784	30.6099	66.9422	2.0000	146.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.4244	2.7541	1.2434	.2157	-2.0187	8.8675
Gender	-.7940	.9401	-.8446	.3997	-2.6521	1.0641
MesCred	1.2090	.1055	11.4559	.0000	1.0004	1.4176

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-.7940	.9401	-.8446	.3997	-2.6521	1.0641

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
MesCred	-.7318	1.0087	-2.6375	1.3810

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
5000

----- END MATRIX -----

Research Question 2 – Moderation

➔ Matrix

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****

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Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model : 1
Y : BAtti
X : Purchase
W : BRep

Sample
Size: 150

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
BAtti

Model Summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
	.7521	.5656	25.5748	63.3640	3.0000	146.0000	.0000

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	6.7741	4.8069	1.4092	.1609	-2.7260	16.2741
Purchase	.3461	.3384	1.0228	.3081	-.3227	1.0149
BRep	.4915	.2845	1.7277	.0862	-.0707	1.0537
Int_1	.0160	.0169	.9444	.3465	-.0175	.0495

Product terms key:
Int_1 : Purchase x BRep

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

X*W	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
	.0027	.8919	1.0000	146.0000	.3465

Focal predict: Purchase (X)
Mod var: BRep (W)

Data for visualizing the conditional effect of the focal predictor:
Paste text below into a SPSS syntax window and execute to produce plot.

```
DATA LIST FREE/
Purchase BRep BAtti .
BEGIN DATA.
11.0939 13.4446 19.6073
15.5533 13.4446 22.1096
20.0128 13.4446 24.6120
11.0939 17.9933 22.6501
15.5533 17.9933 25.4770
20.0128 17.9933 28.3038
11.0939 22.5421 25.6930
15.5533 22.5421 28.8443
20.0128 22.5421 31.9956
END DATA.
GRAPH/SCATTERPLOT=
Purchase WITH BAtti BY BRep .
```

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

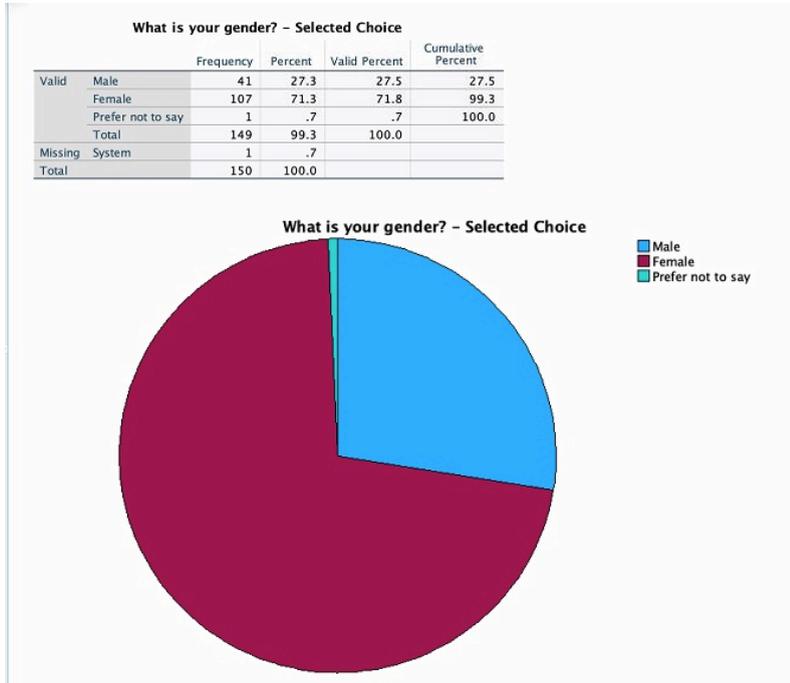
Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
95.0000

----- END MATRIX -----

Appendix E

Background Variables – Statistical Output

Gender



Age

→ Descriptives

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
What is your age? (please provide your age in numbers e.g. 18)	149	18.00	79.00	27.6510	10.05184
Valid N (listwise)	149				

Political Orientation

→ Frequencies

Statistics

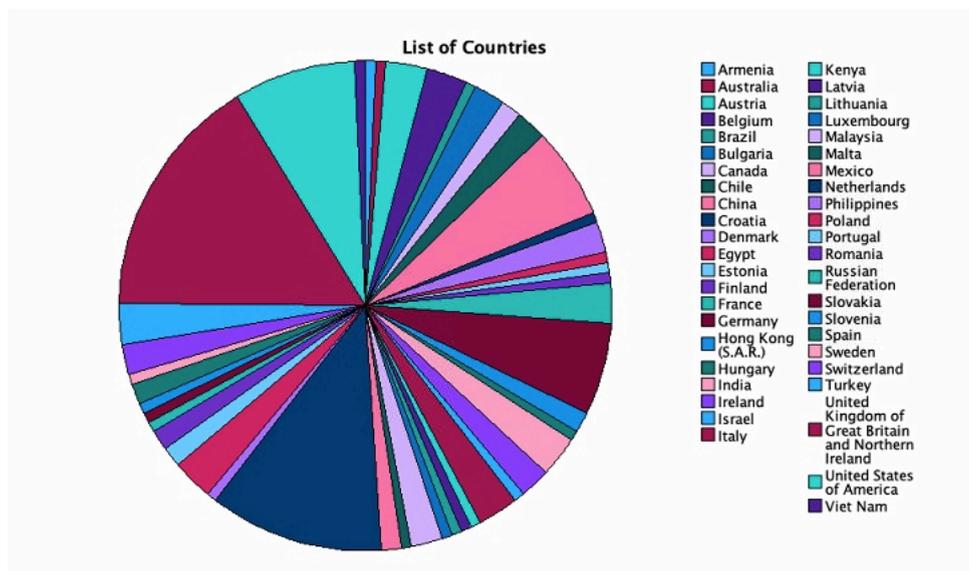
On a scale from 0 (liberal) to 7 (conservative), where do you position yourself? – Political orientation

N	Valid	149
	Missing	1

On a scale from 0 (liberal) to 7 (conservative), where do you position yourself? – Political orientation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	11	7.3	7.4	7.4
	1.00	14	9.3	9.4	16.8
	2.00	35	23.3	23.5	40.3
	3.00	36	24.0	24.2	64.4
	4.00	26	17.3	17.4	81.9
	5.00	15	10.0	10.1	91.9
	6.00	8	5.3	5.4	97.3
	7.00	4	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total		149	99.3	100.0
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		150	100.0		

Nationality



➔ **Frequencies**

Statistics

List of Countries

N	Valid	149
	Missing	1

List of Countries

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Armenia	1	.7	.7	.7
	Australia	1	.7	.7	1.3
	Austria	4	2.7	2.7	4.0
	Belgium	4	2.7	2.7	6.7
	Brazil	1	.7	.7	7.4
	Bulgaria	3	2.0	2.0	9.4
	Canada	2	1.3	1.3	10.7
	Chile	3	2.0	2.0	12.8
	China	9	6.0	6.0	18.8
	Croatia	1	.7	.7	19.5
	Denmark	3	2.0	2.0	21.5
	Egypt	1	.7	.7	22.1
	Estonia	1	.7	.7	22.8
	Finland	1	.7	.7	23.5
	France	4	2.7	2.7	26.2
	Germany	9	6.0	6.0	32.2
	Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	2	1.3	1.3	33.6
	Hungary	1	.7	.7	34.2
	India	4	2.7	2.7	36.9
	Ireland	3	2.0	2.0	38.9
	Israel	1	.7	.7	39.6
	Italy	4	2.7	2.7	42.3
	Kenya	1	.7	.7	43.0
	Latvia	1	.7	.7	43.6
	Lithuania	1	.7	.7	44.3
	Luxembourg	1	.7	.7	45.0
	Malaysia	3	2.0	2.0	47.0
	Malta	1	.7	.7	47.7
	Mexico	2	1.3	1.3	49.0
	Netherlands	17	11.3	11.4	60.4
	Philippines	1	.7	.7	61.1
	Poland	4	2.7	2.7	63.8
	Portugal	2	1.3	1.3	65.1
	Romania	2	1.3	1.3	66.4
	Russian Federation	1	.7	.7	67.1
	Slovakia	1	.7	.7	67.8
	Slovenia	1	.7	.7	68.5
	Spain	2	1.3	1.3	69.8
	Sweden	1	.7	.7	70.5
	Switzerland	3	2.0	2.0	72.5
	Turkey	4	2.7	2.7	75.2
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	24	16.0	16.1	91.3
	United States of America	12	8.0	8.1	99.3
	Viet Nam	1	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	149	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
	Total	150	100.0		