

An Analysis of Employer and Corporate Branding within Reputation Crises Events: Assessing Influencing Factors on Resilience and Rebuilding.

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ABSTRACT

The current corporate landscape - comprised of real-time digital and social media exposure, as well as increased stakeholder expectations - is often deemed as a highly volatile and hyper-connected environment. In this context, reputational resilience emerges as a cornerstone of long-term organisational success. Several studies have, indeed, demonstrated that the ability of businesses to restore their image is parallel to their ability to operate efficiently at both internal and external levels. However, these two corporate layers have historically been always treated as separate domains, with the former consisting of Human Resources efforts and the latter being purely led by the Marketing department.

With a more detailed analysis and overview, this dissertation project will aim at investigating the dynamic interplay between Employer Branding (EB) and Corporate Branding (CB) capabilities, with specific reference to events of corporate crisis, where the alignment between internal and external branding practices is fundamental to stakeholder trust and recovery. This thesis' objective will be showcasing these two spheres as interdependent elements of a successful organisation, especially in crisis contexts where coherence between them can enhance - or harm - a company's recovery trajectory. In achieving the above goals, this study has employed a mixed-methods approach, thus combining extensive literature review and theoretical models, with quantitative data collection via the use of surveys. This methodology has aimed at exploring how the perception towards branding coherence scenarios would impact on organisational recovery from reputational damage, with a specific focus on both internal stakeholders (i.e. employees) and external stakeholders (i.e. consumers, investors, regulators, politics). This project's second objective is, instead, examining how - and to what extent - different organisation types or structures (i.e. private, public, and non-profit) moderate the relationship between branding alignment -on one side- and reputational resilience -on the other. The investigation of the above hypothesis has indeed revealed that strong EB and CB alignment significantly enhances trust, reinforces brand equity, and accelerates post-crisis recovery, whilst - on the other hand - misalignment or inefficient practices may lead to greater scepticism, lower employee engagement and possibly prolonged reputational damage.

Overall, this dissertation proposes an integrated branding framework that bridges the gaps in the literature and offers practical managerial recommendations, thus contributing to both academic understanding of real corporate scenarios and connected recovery strategies. Ultimately, this paper's final considerations are addressed to all organisations to adopt a specific approach to better withstand crises, build internal cohesion, and also present a unified, authentic identity to the outer world. These practices ultimately strengthen a company's image and contribute to a quicker and more effective recovery.

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction and Contextual Foundation of the Study

1. Introduction to the Study

Within the contemporary corporate landscape, managing reputational images through Employer Branding (EB) and Corporate Branding (CB) has become vital for organisations aiming to thrive, evolve and emerge. In this extremely volatile and unpredictable environment, the advent of social media – combined with enhanced consumer awareness and expectations – has shifted managers and directors' attention towards reputation management strategies, as a core company objective rather than a mere reactive measure. Furthermore, technology, social media platforms and real-time, widespread, highly disseminated information directly contribute to rapid escalations of reputational crises, thus putting the brand and the business at risk. Therefore, modern organisations and enterprises are constantly pressurised to deliver on their promises, to adhere to their values and being compliant, whilst maintaining a coherent alignment between external and internal branding capabilities and strategies (Silva & Dias, 2022).¹

Employer Branding was first introduced in the Business Literature in 1996, defined as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”, and essentially revolves around companies' efforts in building a strong image of themselves with the intent of improving human capital's attraction and retention (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)². Despite its strong significance, it has often been viewed as a separate discipline from Corporate Branding, which – on the other hand – is associated with an organisation's self-presents externally to key stakeholders, such as customers, investors, regulators, and ultimately the public. As exposed by research, these two business components have usually operated separately and have often been reviewed as standalone elements: whilst Employer Branding had always been an integral part of Human Resource Management, Corporate Branding was commonly connected with the expertise of Marketing teams, primarily due to the different audiences their strategies were addressed to. Besides, it is commonly

¹ Silva, A. J., & Dias, H. (2022). The relationship between employer branding, corporate reputation and intention to apply to a job offer. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 31(8), 1-16. Doi 10.1108/IJOA-01-2022-3129.

² Ambler, T., & Barrow, S. (1996). The employer brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 4(3), 185–206. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.1996.42>

recognised that Employer Branding usually takes a back seat to Corporate Branding: the cause must be searched in the – often – immediate and measure positive effects that the latter yields, whilst the former is mainly regarded as a long-term, not prioritised, strategy to attract and retain staff. Limited budgets, siloed structures, and the misconception that corporate branding alone attracts top talent contribute to this imbalance, where management does not recognise that employer branding has equal relevance in keeping the boat afloat and solid. (Chin, 2024).³

Contrarily, in the modern interconnected and transparent world, studies seem to be suggesting that the gap between the two disciplines has become narrower, and that their interdependence is seen as more evident, with specific relevance within reputational crisis events (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010) ⁴. In addition, modern academics claim that the employer brand can be conceived as “an extension of the corporate brand” – within a context of strategic brand building methodologies, that aim to align these two spheres in order to build an overall reputation, identity and strength. More specifically, whatever the brand architecture is, the employer brand does not stand apart from the corporate brand, its purpose and identity. It acts, instead, as its ‘extension’, to engage within a specific target market (Wolfswinkel, Enslin & Terblanche-Smit, 2023).⁵

The importance of integrating Employer and Corporate branding is attributed an even superior role within scenarios of reputational and organisational crises. These might occur from various sources – financial misconduct, environmental negligence, product recalls, unethical business practices, or leadership failures – events that can ultimately tarnish a company’s overall image. Corporate crises pose significant challenges for businesses to manage both internal and external perceptions at the same pace, same time and, possibly, at the same extent. In this context, aligning employer branding and corporate branding

³ Chin, T. (2024, October 17). Why employer branding often takes a back seat to corporate branding. *Forbes Communications Council*. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescommunicationscouncil/2024/10/17/why-employer-branding-often-takes-a-back-seat-to-corporate-branding/>

⁴ Foster, C., Punjaisri, K., & Cheng, R. (2010). Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 19(6), 401–409. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610421011085712>

⁵ Wolfswinkel, M., Enslin, C., & Terblanche-Smit, M. (2023). The employer brand through a brand lens: A critical review of literature. *Human Resource Management - An Update*. In A. A. Vilas Boas (Ed.), *Human Resource Management - An Update*. Intech Open. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1002507>

becomes critical in maintaining brand integrity and guiding the organisation through the recovery process. More in detail, it could be argued that measuring an employer's brand image involves evaluating both external and internal perceptions, whose combination generates a company's 'Brand Equity' (Knox & Freeman, 2006).⁶ This concept underlies the idea that an organisation's reputation is shaped by how it is perceived externally by customers, investors, regulators, the Government and the media, but also – and with similar magnitude – by internal insights and feedback, and in other words by its work force's judgment. The authors' thought on this topic seems to acquire bigger relevance within the above-mentioned crisis contexts, as misalignment between internal culture and external messaging can only exacerbate the damage to a company's reputation, and consequently complicates its rebuilding strategies.

Organisational crises are complex and articulated: the aftermath of these undesirable events typically requires a concerted effort to restore trust, credibility – amongst consumers – and confidence among stakeholders and investors. As already encompassed, inconsistency between external and internal communication and perceptions is only going to prolong a company's recovery and usually hinder its resiliency capabilities – thus potentially leading to lasting – and sometimes unfixable – damage. Today it is important to highlight: “Corporate reputation is the cornerstone of a company's success and has a significant impact on various aspects of its operations and outcomes.” (Nuortimo, Harkonen & Breznik, 2024, p.2).⁷

For instance, considering a hypothetical scenario where a corporation emphasises sustainability, corporate social responsibility and ethical business practices, although looking at the internal reality, employees seem to be subjected to toxic work environments, unfair labour practices, or lack of transparency: in the event of corporate crisis, regardless of the cause – the misalignment between these two common grounds might result as explicitly obvious, hence resulting in heightened scrutiny and intensified

⁶ Knox, S., & Freeman, C. (2006). Measuring and Managing Employer Brand Image in the Service Industry. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 22(7–8), 695–716. <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725706778612103>

⁷ Nuortimo, K., Harkonen, J., & Breznik, K. (2024). Exploring corporate reputation and crisis communication. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, p.2. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-024-00353-8>

reputational damage. On the other hand, companies that strive to keep a consistent, unique approach with regards to corporate and employer branding (externally and internally) might be better positioned to recover quickly and re-emerge in the industry or market (Anisimova & Mavondo, 2008).⁸ Modern-day society, and more specifically modern-day corporate society demand more transparency and authenticity. In this context, it appears evident how both consumers and employees can be seen as a holistic basket, where aligning employer and corporate branding becomes essential not only in light of crises management, but also with the aim of fostering long-term corporate resilience. Organisations that are successful in maintaining a certain coherence between internal and external brand messages are more likely to build trust among stakeholders, investors, customers and regulators, but also and more importantly among its own employees, who act as real brand ambassadors. They play a central role in shaping and advertising a company's brand image, where their loyalty and advocacy are vital in assessing the organisation's external perception during a distressed period. Conversely, if society feels a company's employees are disconnected and disinterested, they tend to look carefully at the gap between the internal layer and the external world, which emerges in result of the crisis. As anticipated, this often creates a black label that is more difficult to vanish and complicates all management's recovery efforts.

As practical examples demonstrate, one of the biggest challenges in managing corporate reputation through integrated branding strategies is the complexity and variety of crises that companies usually face. As shown, crises manifest in different forms, and are usually listed as: environmental, ethical, financial, or linked to leadership failures, product or service malfunctions (Jeong, 2022).⁹ Each case requires, obviously, different strategic approaches, specifically in relation to communication, stakeholder management, brand recovery and financial stability. In light of the cited considerations, this research study aims at exploring the role of branding coherence during reputational – or more generally organisational – crises with a peculiar focus on how alignment or misalignment between

⁸ Anisimova, T., & Mavondo, F. (2008). Aligning corporate brand perceptions: Does it matter? In T. C. Melewar & E. Karaosmanoğlu, *Contemporary thoughts on corporate branding and corporate identity management*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230583221_4

⁹ Jeong, H. J. (2023). The effects of crisis types on corporate warmth and competence perceptions: Interplay with post-crisis promotion types for corporate attitude recovery. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 30(8), 1060–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2023.2208127>

employer and corporate branding affects resilience and ultimately recovery. Furthermore, by investigating the interaction between these two topics, this thesis will attempt at contributing to a deeper understanding of how corporations should leverage ‘integrated’ branding strategies, capabilities, and resources with the ultimate objective of mitigating immediate effects, and also restoring and improving their re-born image. Different company types also are characterised by unique challenges when attempting to align internal and external brand messages; moreover, understanding these specifics and nuances is critical for developing tailored strategies and approaches.

Private companies, for example, reputation is often linked to financial performance and shareholder value: in this view, a damaged reputation can incur customer loss, investors’ confidence diminishment, and market share decline. Public-sector organisations and institutions are, instead, tied to public trust: crises can, therefore, erode the legitimacy of the organization’s actions or policies.

Last but not least, non-profit players see their reputation as strongly associated with – and supported by – donor confidence and support: in this example, crises could jeopardise funding, partnerships and ultimately undermine its operations. It can be stated, indeed, that a company’s nature and business model are extremely impactful of its reputation-building approaches, its reputation re-construction, its branding strategies, and – when needed – recovery paths (Coombs, 2007).¹⁰

Nonetheless, whilst it is widely recognised that companies are increasingly aware of the importance of brand reputation, many still struggle to find a connection line between employer and corporate branding, in such a way to reflect their true organisational values and mission. In this context, this dissertation will aim to uncover the barriers to effective branding alignment and explore how organizations can overcome these challenges, particularly in the face of a reputational crisis. Additionally, there will be an emphasis on identifying best practices for aligning internal and external brand messages, drawing on case studies and examples from both successful and unsuccessful crisis management

¹⁰ Coombs, W. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049>

efforts. By focusing on the importance of aligning internal and external practices, this research will bring valuable knowledge to both the academic literature and practical management strategies. In a world where crises are increasingly frequent and complex, understanding how to manage reputation through integrated branding is not just a theoretical exercise—it is a critical skill for organizational leaders seeking to protect and enhance their company's reputation in the face of adversity.

1.1 Research Aim

This research study will aim at investigating the correlation between Employer Branding and Corporate Branding during impactful events of reputational crises. Moreover, the spotlight will be placed on the coherence between these two organisational subsectors, and their pivotal role in connecting their specific branding strategies and thus influencing the recovery of a company's reputation and image, and consequently building its resilience capabilities.

This thesis will, in addition, assess the impact of branding alignment on both external (consumers, investors, and the broader public) and internal stakeholders (employees) during a crisis. Besides, the paper will explore how organisational types and business natures – whether private, public or non-profit – moderate the relationship between branding coherence and recovery, also offering valuable insights on how organisations across different sectors and industries can leverage integrated branding strategies to mitigate the long-term consequences of reputational damage.

In expanding on these topics, the study will then contribute to further understanding the pivotal role of strategic external and internal brand alignment in maintaining an organisation's integrity, trust and resilience – especially through crises and adversities. A particular emphasis will, moreover, be placed on the significance of coherence between employer and corporate branding, two strategic weapons that – if properly integrated – reinforce and complement each other, and ultimately contribute to the overall success of the company. In simple terms, a coherent approach between the two mentioned branding spheres means that all the values, messages, and actions promoted internally (hence among the staff) is equally and similarly promoted externally (among customers,

shareholders, regulators). It is proven that, as the literature review will point out, companies that succeed in achieving such alignment project a strong and authentic brand image, often a long-lasting one. On the other hand, corporations that choose to operate through internal and external branding capabilities as standalone (or alternatively do not manage to do otherwise), might lead people to scepticism, and may intensify the magnitude of reputational crises, or negative events more in general. An example can be found in a company that may publicly advocate for ED&I efforts (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), while failing to practically sustain such principles among the work force. It appears evident, therefore, that ensuring and actively managing this consistency is fundamental in order to rebuild corporate reputation and enhancing organisational resilience in the long run.

1.2 Research Objectives

First of all, this research study will aim at defining differences, similarities, and connection arrows between Corporate and Employer Branding, two important spheres within an Organisation's Marketing capabilities that have direct influence on its success, recovery and sustainment over time and across volatile markets or industries.

Moreover, this thesis will examine other key objectives related to the coherence between employer branding and corporate branding during a reputational crisis. The second objective of this paper will be assessing the perceptions of branding coherence from both external and internal stakeholders; this evidently involves understanding how different stakeholder groups (such as employees and consumers, investors) perceive the alignment between employer and corporate branding during adverse events. The overall aim is to identify whether there are clear differences in such perceptions, and – if so – how they influence the broader process of reputation recovery, focusing primarily on the internal organisational climate versus the wider external feedback.

In addition, another pivotal point will be investigating how company types – again if public, private or non-profit – affect the perception of branding coherence. This objective will explore whether organisational contexts influence the way stakeholders interpret the alignment between corporate and employer branding. More specifically, this point will

revolve around how perceptions may vary depending on organisational types, and also how such differences may affect the overall reputation management strategy of the organization during a crisis.

Finally, the research will investigate how corporate types moderates the relationship between branding coherence and reputation recovery. This objective will examine whether the effectiveness of branding coherence effectively supports a company in recovering its reputation and restoring its image, and how this process differs across diverse business models. In detail, the goal is to determine whether certain corporate attributes, such as structure, public trust, and financial stability directly influence the impact of branding coherence on the recovery process during a reputational crisis.

Addressing these key objectives is vital, as it will be showed, to perfectly capture the interrelation between employer and corporate branding during reputational crises. It will also valuably offer insights onto how organisations across different sectors can leverage branding coherence to mitigate the long-term impact of adverse and distressed events. In doing so, the study will utilise relevant findings from the academic literature, as well as employ quantitative methods – including the analysis of a survey – to capture and collect data from a wide range of stakeholders, providing a comprehensive assessment of the key research questions.

1.3 Issues in Managerial Approaches

As widely recognised, managers often face numerous challenges during a company's reputational crisis: a key point is the ability and capacity to balance the immediacy of responses with the consistency of branding messages. Whilst it is important to respond to and address problems in a timely manner, it is also equally fundamental to ensure that sent messages are aligned with the company's specific values and identity – to avoid compromising long-term brand equity. The point that top management must address here is, from one side trying to restore the public image during and after the crisis – which requires the adoption of authentic communication strategies consistent with the company's core values, and on the other hand supporting the former by implementing

concrete action plans aimed at practically restoring (or improving) the situation (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012).¹¹

As already mentioned, aligning employer and corporate branding here is crucial during a crisis: it is indeed essential that both external and internal communication practices are coherent. As analysed, employer branding is often not attributed the importance it deserves, although engaging employees – who are key stakeholders – is vital to maintain their support, prevent confusion and avoid any damage to morale or an increase in staff turnover.

The second key point this research encompassed in the objectives section is the assessment of organisation types: public, private and non-profit. This significantly influences the managerial challenges related to keeping consistency between employer and corporate branding during reputational crises. As noted by the literature, there is a key difference between private companies – who are not subjected to open their finance records or operational processes (unless publicly listed on a Stock Exchange) – and public-sector organisations, who are always in the eye of political scrutiny, as well as operations and funding accountable (Drennan, McConnell & Stark, 2014).¹² This distinction is crucial when discussing the topic of managerial challenges in private companies, where the primary focus is often on the financial performance and in driving shareholders' value. Top managers in these organisations must find the balance between responding promptly to the crisis and ensuring that both internal and external communication practices align with the company's core values. This challenge is particularly acute in private corporations, as their reputation is directly impactful on customer loyalty and investor confidence, which are vital for maintaining their market position.

In public organisations, the challenge lies in managing public trust and transparency. These organizations are typically accountable to government bodies and the general

¹¹ Claeys, A.-S., & Cauberghe, V. (2012). Crisis response and crisis timing strategies, two sides of the same coin. *Public Relations Review*, 38(1), 83–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.09.001>

¹² Drennan, L. T., McConnell, A., & Stark, A. (2014). *Risk and crisis management in the public sector* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315816456>

public, and this practically means that their responses to reputational crises must be in line with the public service ideals they represent and incorporate. Besides, managers in public companies have the burden to face the added pressure of meeting high standards of ethical behaviour and transparency whilst ensuring alignment between employer and corporate branding; in this context, communication should address the crisis, but at the same time reinforce the organisation's commitment to its mission, as well as – and maybe more importantly – to public accountability. Ultimately, in non-profit agencies and organisations managerial challenges are commonly associated with maintaining credibility, which in turn helps sustaining donor trust and navigating financial constraints. Leaders must ensure that crisis responses reinforce the organisation's mission, uphold transparency, and also reassure stakeholders of responsible stewardship. Unlike private firms and the scenarios discussed above, non-profits heavily rely on goodwill, thus making ethical communication and proactive reputation management pivotal in guaranteeing long-term sustainability.

1.4 Practical Relevance

Nowadays, more than ever, organisations must be prepared to respond effectively to any threat to their public image. This may involve scandals, operational errors, or controversies related to sensitive topics, such as ethics or the environment. With regards to the context of private companies, for instance, reputation management is crucial, as poor practices can lead to the loss of customers, investments, and also talent, all resulting in turn into financial damage. Collapse in sales volume or decline in stock prices might be driven by ethical or environmental scandals, leading to often irreparable crises. In the case of public and non-profits, instead, reputational integrity is given an even more important role, as it is directly tied to their legitimacy and public trust. In these scenarios, a loss of reputation can compromise an organization's ability to operate effectively and maintain support from institutions and citizens.

Specifically: “In an economy where 70% to 80% of market value comes from hard-to-assess intangible assets such as brand equity, intellectual capital, and goodwill, organizations are especially vulnerable to anything that damages their reputations”

(Eccles, Newquist & Schatz, 2007).¹³ It is therefore noted that reputational crises harm the external image of a company, in addition to affecting its ability to attract talent and resources, making long-term recovery even more challenging.

As research has claimed, despite difficulties, employees remain motivated and feel engaged under a strong employer branding strategy, which emphasises consistency between corporate promises and internal experience, and can help sustain motivation and loyalty even in times of uncertainty or reputational crisis. Following recent studies, it has emerged how important it is to align internal branding efforts with organisational culture, employee engagement, and job satisfaction to enhance talent retention. It is proven that, by fostering a positive internal brand image, organisations can improve employee commitment and reduce turnover numbers (Ahmed et al., 2022).¹⁴

Another important influencing factor that amplifies the impact of reputational crises is the rise of social media platforms. In a world where information travels in real-time, crises' magnitude is worsened and spread at an incredible exponential pace (Capozzi & Rucci, 2013).¹⁵ Companies can no longer afford to be late or inaccurate in responding to these events, and every kind of communication strategy adopted must be timely, clear and above all authentic, whilst still maintaining a certain alignment with the organisation's core values.

1.5 Layout of the Study

Having set the main research objectives and provided an overview of the key topics relevant to the investigation, the study will then proceed with an in-depth theoretical analysis and will be aimed at identifying the existing research gap. This step will heavily rely on the review of the existing literature, critically assessing previous studies to determine the areas where further exploration is needed. Identifying this gap will be

¹³ Eccles, R. G., Newquist, S. C., & Schatz, R. (2007, February). Reputation and its risks. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2007/02/reputation-and-its-risks>

¹⁴ Ahmed, R. R., Azam, M., Qureshi, J. A., Hashem E, A. R., Parmar, V., & Md Salleh, N. Z. (2022). The relationship between internal employer branding and talent retention: A theoretical investigation for the development of a conceptual framework. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.859614>

¹⁵ Capozzi, L., & Rucci, S. R. (2013). *Crisis management in the age of social media* (1st ed.). Business Expert Press.

crucial as it will serve as a foundation for formulating the research questions, which will then guide subsequent phases of the study. Once the research question is established, the thesis will expand on the two main hypotheses, grounded in existing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. These hypotheses will be structured to address the core relationships between employer branding, corporate branding, and reputation recovery in different organisational contexts. Moreover, the work will carefully be examining the relevant theories, considering various perspectives to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the topic.

Building upon the analysed theoretical foundation, the research will transition into its methodological section, in other terms where the study design and data collection strategy will be outlined in detail. More specifically, the research will employ a quantitative research approach, also utilising an online survey method distributed to a diverse sample of respondents. This will include structured questions designed to measure key variables such as branding coherence, organisational type, and reputation recovery. The collected set of data will then be processed and analysed using statistical methods, allowing for empirical validation of the proposed hypotheses.

Following the analysis of data and numbers, the findings will be critically discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and previous research. Such discussion will highlight key insights, potential implications, and any unexpected results that emerge from the analysis. The work will then conclude by outlining specific managerial implications, offering practical recommendations for organisations seeking to align employer and corporate branding strategies during reputational crises. In addition, the research will contribute to the existing academic literature by providing new perspectives on the role of different companies in moderating the effects of branding coherence on reputation recovery.

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations for Branding and Crisis Management

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

As this project has already encompassed, branding – in all its forms and species – plays a crucial role in shaping the reputation, the image and the market perception of a business. The brand is – perhaps – a firm’s most valuable asset and is often seen as a key activity in the sphere of strategic development. Over the years, this discipline has expanded and aligned with Human Resource Management’s efforts, going beyond products and services and comprising a broader spectrum of aspects, for instance employee attractiveness and corporate identity. The two fundamental facets of this evolution are Corporate Branding and Employer Branding: whilst the former is related to how an organisation is perceived by external stakeholders – such as customers, investors, regulators – the latter is associated with internal perceptions and feedback, hence how it is viewed by former and current employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).¹⁶

The concept of Employer Branding has seen a considerable increase in its popularity since the 1990s, and in principle it was purely conceived as a company’s efforts aiming at being considered as the best place to work for. Moreover, in today’s technology driven era and rapidly changing business environments, this has become a focal point in the organisations’ top management with regards to the challenges in meeting the increasing demand for executive talent and its retention. As exposed in the academic literature, Employer Branding capabilities – broadly speaking – incorporate three main components: *Employee Engagement, Employee Retention and Employee Satisfaction* (Singh, 2021).¹⁷

Employee Engagement is a popular and recurring term in HR academic papers. According to many, an engaged workforce is essential to achieving competitive advantage. Nonetheless, the debate has risen in connection to what ‘engagement’ truly refers to, as often defined in terms of emotional intellectual commitment employees towards their

¹⁶ Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, 9(5), 501-517. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430410550754>

¹⁷ Singh, R. P. (2021). *Employer branding literature review. Feedforward: Journal of Human Resource*, 1(2), 105. Faculty of Economics and Business, Pelita Harapan University. <https://doi.org/10.19166/ff.v1i2.4472>

firm (Bailey et al., 2017).¹⁸ While previous studies seem to be suggesting that employee engagement is the mere result of various monetary and non-monetary rewards, recent research shows that these rewards include pay, bonuses, health benefits, paid leave and others, but not necessarily solely limited to them. On the other side, as expressed earlier, employee engagement is firmly addressed to talent attraction and engagement strategies for current as well as potential employees. As talent becomes scarce and turnover volumes increase, it is vital that corporations design strategies that actively engage their staff, both current and potential, in addition to merely attracting top employees.

It can be asserted, therefore, that employee engagement is simply the extent to which a company manages to retain its work force, and the extent to which this latter is willing to stay and devote extra effort for the success and growth of the company itself. It appears obvious that, in order for this to happen, employees usually need to feel actively involved and engaged in their company's operations and feel valued within the same. Employee Retention must not be confused with employee engagement, as this latter is effectively one of the practices an organisation must adopt to incentivise the former. As known, experienced employees are an important resource and represent indeed a key competitive advantage for their firm. Due to a shortage of skilled talent, employer branding has helped companies retain employees, in addition to solely attracting them. In today's continuously evolving labour market, it appears evident how the brand of a firm becomes of vital importance in attracting, recruiting, engaging and ultimately retaining its staff; as exposed, a strong employer image often translates in lower hiring costs, as the company will need to make fewer efforts in advertising its name and workplace among the industry professionals (John & Raj, 2020).¹⁹ Lastly, employee retention efforts should specifically be addressed towards the reasons why people work, chose and leave an (other) organisation, over their existing ones; therefore, such strategies should be targeting the employer's efforts in encouraging the workforce to stay in the company for long periods of time – or at least rotating departments within the same place. In an ideal world,

¹⁸ Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., & Fletcher, L. (2017). The meaning, antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement: A narrative synthesis. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19(1), 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12077>

¹⁹ John, A., & Raj, J. R. V. P. (2020). Employer branding: A decisive means of employee relationship management. *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Organizations*, 10(3), 18. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJKBO.2020070103>

effective employer branding influencing employee retention must focus on reward strategy, people orientedness – as well as leadership and development as significant predictors of talent retention (Matongolo, Kasekende, & Mafabi, 2018).²⁰ Employee Satisfaction is, perhaps, one of the most important constructs of Human Resource Management. Whilst job satisfaction is one of the pillars of this point, it is equally important to consider employer satisfaction – and both terms actually incorporate employee satisfaction at a more holistic level. This latter is fundamental and a prerequisite for productivity, growth, interpersonal relationships, and the reduction of absenteeism rates (Slavkovic, Pavlovic, & Simic, 2018).²¹ According to research, employer branding strongly impacts employee satisfaction and ‘organisational citizenship behaviour’; this latter is defined as the pro-social attitude observed in an employee’s behaviour and x that ultimately translate into enhanced performance and higher contribution towards the firm’s success (Kaur, Malhotra, & Sharma, 2020).²² Ultimately, such behavioural capabilities are particularly shaped by a company and the way it manages its (internal and external) branding scopes in order to influence satisfaction within the workplace, the department and the role itself, thus potentially minimising turnover rates. Employers must also strive to create an environment of trust, inclusiveness, and support which makes employees feel valued and appreciated, and consequently boosts their performance.

Further studies have also emphasised the role of internal communication satisfaction (ICS) in shaping employees' perceptions of employer attractiveness (EA). Specifically, researchers have demonstrated how – in addition to creating and fostering a positive environment – it is pivotal that external employer branding efforts and internal employee experiences are aligned: in this view, it is one of the key challenges for management to ensure what an employee actually experiences does not differ from what the company advertises externally. In simple terms, what helps to achieve these goals (or helps bridging

²⁰ Matongolo, A., Kasekende, F., & Mafabi, S. (2018). Employer branding and talent retention: Perceptions of employees in higher education institutions in Uganda. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 50(5), 217–233. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-03-2018-0031>

²¹ Slavkovic, M., Pavlovic, G., & Simic, M. (2018). Employee recruitment and its relationship with employee satisfaction: Verifying the mediating role of the employer brand. *Economic Horizons*, 20(2), 125–137. <https://doi.org/10.5937/ekonhor1802127S>

²² Kaur, P., Malhotra, K., & Sharma, S. K. (2020). Employer Branding and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Management Research and Innovation*, 16(2), 122-131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2319510X20931716>

the gap between the two spheres) are values such as effective leadership communication, clear career growth pathways, and recognition of employee contributions – and these ultimately contribute to the creation of a solid internal employer brand. Furthermore, a company must invest its resources in strategic internal communication practices, ensuring all employees become brand ambassadors of the firm, and the brand, and as a result designing the path to better retention, higher engagement, and a more resilient organisational culture. (Vokić, Verčić & Čorić, 2023).²³

The concept of employer branding has also been assessed and discussed from the perspective of the elements that shape the overall perception of a certain organisation as an attractive workplace. Research has shown how key characteristics like organisational culture, brand reputation, compensation packages, career development opportunities, and work-life balance are carefully examined by professionals when choosing a prospective employer. Through the analysis of a conceptual model, the authors have found that employer branding starts with an initial examination of a company's values, mission, ideologies and policies, which are all then converted into the value proposition that eventually is communicated and advertised to the workforce. This model, in detail, serves as a diagram of the whole employer branding “process” and articulates via four main components:

1. *Organisational Attributes*: this is the initial screening phase, and is particularly comprised of elements such as compensation, culture, career prospects and development, employee empowerment, brand name and job profile.
2. *Promotion / Communication Channels*: this category refers to how well and effectively an employer shares and advertises its brand online and via more traditional platforms, such as newspapers, career fairs, company presentations, professional social media and more importantly the corporate website.
3. *Formation of Employer Image*: this area is the intermediate stage where a company's value proposition (point 1) and its marketing strategies (point 2) structure the employer image – which will be at the heart of potential applicants' perception. Moreover, this phase is critical as there is the need to ensure that the actual

²³ Vokić, N. P., Tkalac Vučić, A., & Sinčić Čorić, D. (2023). Strategic internal communication for effective internal employer branding. *Baltic Journal of Management*, 18(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BJM-02-2022-0070>

employment experience and the communicated employer brand are fully aligned (as incoherence will drastically result into undesired effects in attraction and retention volumes).

4. *Employer Attractiveness: successful* efforts in the previous points will then have positive influence onto employer attractiveness, as a strong employer brand will attract a better pool of employees; this all translates into a considerable reduction in cost per hire, hiring costs over time due to replacement needs, and lower costs in advertising due to low attractiveness and lack of consideration (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).²⁴

Besides, the literature also observes the shift in the employer-employee relationship in the modern volatile and evolving market. In particular, traditional standardised Employee Value Proposition (EVP) efforts are no longer sufficient to engage talent, with very peculiar and highly personalised wishes of meaningful work experiences. In recent years, employer branding strategies have evolved in parallel with the rise of social media and third-party employer branding platforms (such as Indeed, LinkedIn, Glassdoor, or simply Google); if from one perspective this phenomenon is positive and has brought enormous and disruptive changes to the discipline, from another point of view, it means companies must now also ensure communication practices are aligned across all channels, in order to ensure consistency among its shared messages (Saini, 2023).²⁵

Having analysed the concept of Employer Branding, it is now equally important to encompass Corporate Branding; as discussed in the introduction to this research paper, this discipline consists in the promotion of a corporate brand on customers, investors, and other various external parties, in order to shape a positive and strong impression on its products, services, compliance or financial stability (depending on the perspective of the addressee). Many authors have highlighted how this does not merely relate to the efforts in promoting its product on the targeted customer base, but also encompasses the ability

²⁴ Chhabra, N. L., & Sharma, S. (2014). Employer branding: Strategy for improving employer attractiveness. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 22(1), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-09-2011-0513>

²⁵ Saini, G. K. (2023). Employer Branding: A Critical Review and Future Research. *NHRD Network Journal*, 16(3), 220-232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26314541231170424>

to create and foster emotional connection with the consumers, in order to enhance brand loyalty and trust. In light of these definitions, Corporate Branding is often confused with product branding, although it must be noted that the former is addressed to a wider group of external stakeholders (not only customers or clients), and it also poses the strategic focus on the whole organisation itself rather than a specific product segment. Therefore, it can be argued that this branch holistically takes a comprehensive perspective on marketing, necessitating cross-functional coordination within organizations to achieve cohesive branding efforts. In addition to that, whilst product branding tends to focus on consumer preferences and product-specific marketing efforts, corporate branding encompasses a much wider narrative that includes corporate culture, values, and ethical responsibilities, aiming to shape the broader corporate image. In a constantly evolving and saturated market, several important factors contribute to the success of corporate branding structures, including the necessity of consistent communication and the need for a clear brand vision that resonates with target audiences. Besides, the shift to digital platforms as essential venues for engaging consumers effectively has emphasised the need for the use of modern communication channels, and specifically that businesses must remain agile and responsive to market trends, leveraging technology and social media to build meaningful relationships with consumers and maintain brand relevance overall (Alyafei, 2022).²⁶

Other studies define corporate branding as a vital and strategic asset for organisations and can serve as a significant source of sustainable competitive advantage. In order to substantiate this claim, authors have drawn upon the principles of the Resource-based View (RBV) of a firm, indicated as a prominent strategic management framework (Balmer & Gray, 2003).²⁷ According to this theory, firms achieve competitive edges when they possess valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable resources. It refers to resources that cannot be easily transferred or purchased, or that require an extended learning curve or major change in the organisation climate and culture – hence that are

²⁶ Alyafei, O. (2022). Concept of corporate branding: Challenges and comparison with product branding. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*, 10(4), <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijstrm/v10i4.em2>

²⁷ Balmer, J. M. T., & Gray, E. R. (2003). Corporate brands: What are they? What of them? *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 972–997. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477627>

likely to be unique to the company. Nonetheless, if resources with these characteristics constitute an inarguable source of competitive advantage for the brand, not all resource are to be considered as such: competitive advantage only occurs, indeed, when there is a situation of resource heterogeneity (hence, different resources across firms) and resource immobility (in other words the inability of competing firms to obtain resources from other firms). (Madhani, 2010).²⁸ By applying such lenses onto the concept of corporate branding, in order for a corporate brand to truly confer a lasting advantage, it must embody the features listed above, otherwise the firm may risk to create a strong position that is only durable for a certain period of time, due to – for instance – to the lack of updates, the inability to regenerate or also the spread of its unique resources to a wider group of competitors within the industry.

Balmer and Gray also critically examine the inadequacy of existing brand typologies, arguing that traditional frameworks do not fully capture the nuanced realities of contemporary corporate branding practices (Balmer and Gray 2003).²⁹ To bridge this gap, they propose a more comprehensive and expanded theory of corporate branding types:

- **Familial:** this type of corporate brand leverages the established reputation, values, and heritage associated with a family name across a diverse range of business ventures or product lines. An example can be hospitality business Hilton, a prominent family-owned conglomerate where the family name itself carries significant brand equity and resonates with the public.
- **Shared:** this classification is quite similar to the above one but with the difference that companies often operate within distinct and sometimes related markets. For instance, Rolls Royce – which has operations in automobile engineering and aero engines, or Volvo – which produces both cars (subsidiary of Ford US) and commercial vehicles.
- **Surrogate:** in this scenario, a less established entity aligns itself with a more reputable and recognised corporate brand; by association, the ‘surrogate’ brand will aim at gaining credibility, trust, and market acceptance, essentially borrowing the positive

²⁸ Madhani, P. M. (2010). The resource-based view (RBV): Issues and perspectives. *PACE: A Journal of Research of Prestige Institute of Management*, 1(1), 43–55.

²⁹ Balmer, J. M. T., & Gray, E. R. (2003).

attributes of the more well-known one. An example is British Regional Airways and the more notorious British Airways tag.

- **Supra:** a 'supra' brand acts as an overarching corporate identity that sits above and encompasses a portfolio of various sub-brands, product lines or business units. Whilst the sub-brands may have their own distinct identities, they ultimately operate under the umbrella and benefit from the reputation of the core corporate brand. An example could be the airlines operating within the Airline Alliance umbrella.
- **Multiplex:** this corporate branding type is a characteristic of complex and diversified brand portfolios operating under a single corporate entity. These might include brands across various industries or market segments, thus requiring sophisticated management strategies to maintain overall coherence and avoid brand confusion. For instance, the Virgin brand comprises operations across airlines, gyms, trains, telecoms and the financial services.
- **Federal:** this model describes a corporate branding structure where relatively autonomous business units or divisions operate with a degree of independence whilst still being linked by a central corporate identity. This allows for local market adaptation and responsiveness with the objective of maintaining a degree of overall brand unity and shared values across the organisation. An example is the Airbus Consortium, which was a European aircraft-manufacturing partnership formed in 1970 by companies and governments from countries like France, Germany, and the UK – with the intent of competing with dominant American aircraft manufacturers.

Besides, a successful corporate brand is not solely built through external communication but is deeply rooted in the organisation's internal dynamics; a truly effective corporate brand is not solely an aspect that is externally projected, but an authentic manifestation of a company's values, purpose, and culture, deeply embedded within its internal fabric. Within the theory of corporate branding, three main propositions have been formulated: first of all, corporate identity is foundational for corporate brand orientation, as it must be dynamically aligned with the corporate brand in order to provide a distinct and cohesive organisational identity. Secondly, the internal corporate image and internal perceptions regarding the brand significantly shape their behaviours and cognitions, hence influencing the overall brand effectiveness; third, fostering a strong organisational-wide

identification with the corporate brand is crucial for embedding a unified brand culture throughout the entire business. Perfectly understanding these interconnected facets of corporate branding is pivotal and imperative for cultivating a meaningful and effective strategy. In addition, by recognising and regularly assessing these elements, managers can better position their organisations for operational success and stakeholder engagement in a highly competitive landscape (Balmer & Podnar, 2021).³⁰

Other studies have assessed the corporate branding dimension by identifying three main approaches: internal, transactional and external. The internal approach focuses on the essence of the company itself, emphasising how corporate branding shapes and reflects the corporate and visual identities. Specifically, it relates to how organizations cultivate their image both internally among employees and externally towards stakeholders, highlighting the significance of employment image and its influence on the application intentions of potential hires. The transactional approach, on the other hand, revolves around the role of corporate branding concerning the company's offerings, evaluating how branding affects consumer perceptions of products and services, as well as sponsorship efforts. This approach includes studies that examine consumer behaviour and assessments of brands, directly connecting branding initiatives to market performance and customer loyalty. Lastly, the external approach of the theory addresses the impact of corporate actions on public perceptions, diving into themes that ultimately influence a company's image, financial performance and trust – such as corporate misbehaviour and its repercussions on corporate reputation (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012).³¹

As carefully noted, these two big conceptual models – Employer and Corporate Branding – are fundamental disciplines within the Human Resource and Strategic Management landscapes and their interdependence (especially during a crisis) reveals their power and vital role. This connection, as the project has pointed out, is successful if externally and

³⁰ Balmer, J. M. T., & Podnar, K. (2021). Corporate brand orientation: Identity, internal images, and corporate identification matters. *Journal of Business Research*, 134, 729-737. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.06.016>

³¹ Fetscherin, M., & Usunier, J.-C. (2012). Corporate branding: An interdisciplinary literature review. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(5), 733–753. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211212494>

internally delivered messages are aligned and will then result in the construction of a robust image.

Some authors have talked about the need for effective brand efforts that balances both internal and external focus; in particular, internal branding initiatives are crucial to ensure employees understand and embrace the brand's identity and culture – enabling them to deliver on the brand's promise to the customer base. External branding, instead, encompasses all activities aimed at shaping the perceptions of customers, investors, and the wider public. This includes strategic marketing campaigns, public relations efforts, consistent brand messaging across all customer touchpoints, and the delivery of products and services that align with the communicated brand values, all working in concert to build brand awareness, positive associations, and ultimately, to attract and retain customers and enhance the organisation's reputation in the competitive landscape. Scholarly discourse increasingly emphasises the necessity for effective brand-building efforts that consciously balance both internal and external focuses. The synergy between externally projected brand messaging and the internally cultivated understanding and embodiment of that brand is a cornerstone of effective brand management. When an organisation's external communications – encompassing its marketing campaigns, public relations efforts, and overall brand narrative – consistently reflect the values, culture, and promises that its employees genuinely understand and believe in, a powerful sense of authenticity is conveyed, fostering greater trust and a stronger overall brand reputation amongst all stakeholders (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010).³²

2.1 Development of Research Gap and Addressing Research Questions

As written, the literature and the field of branding have both seen significant growth in research focused on employer branding and corporate branding, and many previous studies have often assessed these concepts in isolation. However, limited research has examined the intersection between these two forms of branding and how they interact, particularly during reputational crises. Whilst numerous studies highlight the importance of both branches in shaping organisational image and reputation, very few of them explore how these branding dimensions work in synergy in facing adverse times of crisis,

³² Foster, C., Punjaisri, K., & Cheng, R. (2010).

creating a substantial gap in the literature. On this point, some authors argue that: “Future studies could investigate how variations in employer brand messaging and value propositions shape decision-making processes, internal communication strategies, and overall resilience during challenging times” (Rys, Schollaert, & Van Hoyer, 2024, p.22).³³ Such assertion calls for a deeper understanding of how organisations navigate the delicate balance between employer and corporate branding, especially when their reputation is at risk. However, despite the big relevance of these studies within the relevant literature, there still appears to be a lack of research that combines these concepts in the context of a crisis, and specifically how employer branding and corporate reputation are influenced and adapted during reputational crises. As noted by some scholars, “It would also be interesting to analyse other variables relevant to the intention to apply for a job offer, such as the use of social networks and their influence on corporate reputation” (Silva & Dias 2022, p.12).³⁴ This statement emphasises the evolving nature of branding in the digital era, where social media platforms play a significant role in shaping perceptions of both employer and corporate branding. This perspective is, however, usually overlooked in studies that focus on reputation management in a crisis’ aftermath; in this view, the intersection between employer and corporate branding, with particular attention to a company’ recovery phase, remains an unexplored area that this thesis project aims to address.

In particular, this research study seeks to fill the gap by examining how organisations across the globe are adjusting their employer and corporate branding strategies during periods of reputational distress. In detail, it will aim at investigating the changes in these strategies and how such adaptations create value for both consumers and the organisation itself. The spotlight will be placed upon whether organisational reputation, built through strong corporate and employer branding efforts, is a key determinant in attracting both consumers and prospective employees during such crises.

The central research question of the study will be:

³³ Rys, M., Schollaert, E., & Van Hoyer, G. (2024). Living the employer brand during a crisis? A qualitative study on internal employer branding in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLoS ONE*, 19 (5), e0303361, p.22. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0303361>

³⁴ Silva, A. J., & Dias, H. (2022). P.12.

RQ: How is the intersection between employer branding and corporate branding perceived during reputational crises, and what impact does this perception have on the recovery or stability of the company's reputation?

This question has its foundations into the phenomenon of reputational crises, further exploring how these affect the public perception of a company as well as its internal workforce. Besides, the study's objective will be to understand how organisations balance their external brand communications (corporate branding) and internal brand messages (employer branding) during such crises. In particular, it will examine how the alignment or misalignment of these two forms of branding influences the speed and effectiveness of reputation recovery.

By addressing this research question, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of branding strategies during a reputational crisis, shedding light on the role that branding coherence plays in restoring an organization's reputation and maintaining its position in the market. Furthermore, the research will explore how different types of organizations—public, private, and non-profit—may respond differently in terms of branding alignment during a crisis, and how these responses impact stakeholder trust and organisational resilience.

2.2 Hypotheses and Theory Development

This research aims to investigate and explore the relationship between employer branding, corporate branding and the recovery of the organisational reputation during – and after – a crisis. The development of the hypotheses is a critical step in this process, as it will help identify and test the underlying mechanisms that govern how branding coherence influence stakeholder perceptions and the speed of reputation recovery. This section, ultimately, outlines the theoretical foundations that inform the research and presents the hypotheses that stem from such theories.

This dissertation is comprised, as it will be discussed, of several key theories that highlight the importance of brand alignment and reputation management. First of all, the theory of corporate branding emphasises a company's identity strategic management and – above all – its role in shaping external perceptions, hence amongst its outer

stakeholders. During periods of crisis, as this text has argued, the coherence between corporate branding and employer branding becomes of vital importance, because crucial in signalling and reinforce to these stakeholders that the organisation is unified, cohesive, and totally able to manage the crisis; in addition, it is proved that a consistent message across both employer and corporate branding helps to reinforce the organisation's identity and ultimately its ability to recover from potential reputational damage.

As previously explained, the theory of employer branding heavily focuses on how the organisation presents itself to potential employees, as well as to its existing workforce. Therefore, a strong employer brand, aligned with solid corporate branding capabilities, communicates a unified organisational identity image – which is often vital in times of crisis. When employer branding and corporate branding are perceived as coherent, indeed, they contribute to strengthening the image of the business and convey a message of reliability and stability, which will then play an important role in mitigating the negative downturns and the impacts of that crisis on its reputation. On top of what already analysed, reputational management theory within the literature contexts suggests that a company's reputation is among its most valuable assets, and it must therefore be actively protected, especially during a crisis. Such events, as known, may significantly damage a company's reputation, and the recovery process is only determined by the business' ability to communicate consistently and transparently with both internal and external stakeholders. The alignment between employer and corporate branding is a key factor in ensuring that a unified message reaches the targeted audience. Lastly, aligning corporate and employer branding messages and efforts is a key factor in avoiding scattered and unrelated responses, which then allows for a seamless rebuilding process and accelerates reputation recovery.

As a result, the following hypotheses are derived from the theories and concepts:

H1: The coherence between employer branding and corporate branding during a reputational crisis is perceived positively by various stakeholders, accelerating the recovery of the company's reputation.

This first hypothesis suggests that when stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors and regulators, perceive a high level of alignment between the two branding spheres, they will be more likely to have trust in the organisation and believe in its ability to recover and overcome adversities. This attitude can lead to a faster restoration of the company's reputation, as aligning branding messages will be a clear signal of stability and robustness.

H2: The type of organization (private, public, non-profit) moderates the relationship between the perception of alignment between employer and corporate branding and reputation recovery.

The second hypothesis claims that the impact of branding alignment on reputation recovery will occur at a different extent, depending on the type of organisation at stake. As an example, in public and non-profits – where stakeholders' trust and value alignment are fundamental – branding coherence may play a bigger role and a more impactful influence on the recovery process compared to private firms. In fact, the focus in these latter group usually tends to be on addressing immediate financial performance issues and operational recovery.

The development of these hypotheses is based purely on the assumption that aligned employer and corporate branding plays a key role in how a corporation is perceived by its own stakeholders during a crisis. Multiple theories of branding and reputation management suggest that coherence between these two forms of branding can enormously affect a company's recovery pace; nonetheless, the moderating effect of company types adds further complexity to this relationship, considering different organisational types prioritise different concerns and stakeholder expectations during a crisis. The proposed hypotheses will be tested through an analysis and empirical research, which will involve measuring stakeholder perceptions of branding alignment and reputation recovery in organisations across various industries and sectors. Through the testing phase of these hypotheses, the study aims at contributing towards the relevant literature to the understanding of how the examined branding alignment practices can accelerate an organisation's reputation recovery during a crisis and how this interdependence varies across different organisational structures.

2.3 The Role of Employer Branding in Crisis Management

During a crisis, as this project has expressed, organisations face numerous complex and unforeseen challenges, which not only do threaten their reputation, but also undermine and destabilise workforce dynamics – as well as hinder the possibilities of attracting new members. During these difficult times, a solid and well-managed employer brand becomes a vital and strategical asset. In fact, by fostering resilience, providing unwavering support to employees, and cultivating a positive organisational culture, employer branding can significantly help in the recovery process, both internally and externally. Specifically, this chapter will aim at exploring the critical role that employer branding plays in crises management, with a focus on its contribution to restoring the organisation's reputation and maintaining and ensuring employee retention.

The impact of a crisis on an organisation's reputation can be very profound, eroding public trust, damaging stakeholder relationships, and creating uncertainty amongst employees. Nonetheless, companies with a strong employer brand are better positioned to overcome such challenges. It is obvious that a strong brand reinforces the perception of the company as a positive and supportive workplace, which helps maintain employee morale and trust, even during such adverse and volatile times.

In addition, a well-established employer brand fosters long-term employee loyalty, a value that must not be taken for granted these days. As proof, employees who identify and align with their company's core values – and trust its leadership – are much more likely to remain engaged and continue to contribute to the organisation's success, regardless of whether it is undergoing a period of crisis. This sensibly reduces turnover rates, sustains productivity and stabilises the workforce. From another point of view, instead, companies that wish to neglect their employer brand during crisis risk disengagement, higher turnover, and difficulties in attracting and keeping top talent – even after a crisis has passed (De Villartay et al., 2023) ³⁵

³⁵ De Villartay, S., Abid-Dupont, M. A., & Berger-Remy, F. (2023). The dynamic of employees' trust in their organisation in a corporate brand crisis: the bounce-back effect of organisational identification. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 40(3–4), 260–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2023.2276867>

Besides, in times of a crisis, organisations must prioritise transparency, strong leadership, and employee well-being. Moreover, by focusing on these values and keeping open lines of communications with both employees and the public, organisations can reinforce their employer brand and demonstrate commitment to ‘doing the right thing’, even when under pressure. Strong leadership plays a critical role in sustaining trust and fostering an environment of support, which is essential for resilience and recovery (Yue, Men & Ferguson, 2019).³⁶ In terms of leadership, leaders who communicate freely and openly (and empathetically) are more likely to influence their workforce and maintain employees’ trust, even under challenging circumstances. A leader who presents a clear, reassuring vision for the future of the organisation, makes informed decisions and supports their team, massively strengthens the employer brand, but also – and more importantly – preserves the integrity of the organisation in the eyes of external stakeholders. As a result, the way leaders behave during a crisis can significantly influence the corporation’s long-term reputation recovery, as well as the short-term efforts in minimising a crisis’ effects on the overall structure. As an example, research has analysed post-Covid communication patterns by corporate leaders in Singapore, specifically pointing out actionable items - with the case study of the local Government and multinational enterprise Johnson & Johnson: the central point here is guiding new leaders in managing these situations by prioritizing open and timely communication, demonstrating empathy, ensuring consistency across messages, acknowledging uncertainty, and engaging proactively. Overall, these approaches build trust, prevent misinformation, and strengthen stakeholder relationships during crises (Tan, 2024).³⁷ During a crisis, uncertainty is high, and this situation is strongly affected by the company’s leadership abilities to instil confidence; employees rely on their leaders for guidance and direction, and – therefore – leaders who show emotional intelligence, acknowledge the challenges, and work collaboratively on solutions can transform a potential disaster into a growth and learning opportunity. These leaders, when successful,

³⁶ Yue, C. A., Men, L. R., & Ferguson, M. A. (2019). Bridging transformational leadership, transparent communication, and employee openness to change: The mediating role of trust. *Public Relations Review*, 45(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.04.012>

³⁷ Tan, V. (2024, October 21). Leading in uncertain times: How transparent leadership shapes crisis communications post-COVID-19. *Forbes Communications Council*. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescommunicationscouncil/2024/10/21/leading-in-uncertain-times-how-transparent-leadership-shapes-crisis-communications-post-covid-19/?utm>

will manage to create an environment where employees feel valued, heard, and motivated to remain dedicated to the organisation's goals, despite external pressures.

A consistent and empathetic leadership presence, in fact, also serves to stabilise the workforce: by taking a proactive approach, offering clarity and addressing concerns, leaders can reinforce the resilience of their teams and enhance motivation to fight. This approach, in turn, fortifies the employer brand by demonstrating the company's dedication to its employees' well-being, even in adverse situations. Furthermore, effective leadership ensures alignment between internal and external communications, as a totally transparent approach helps safeguard the organisation's reputation with both employees and external stakeholders. Besides, leaders who prioritise openness and integrity craft a consistent message that resonates across the organisation and beyond. This coherence is crucial for reputation recovery, as stakeholders tend to support organisations that prove a consistent and principled behaviour during such crises. Research on this topic argues: "The leadership should be able to provide transparent communication by clearly explaining the reasons for the reduction to all employees, whether they are staying or leaving. Transparency can help maintain trust and morale. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to produce innovative ideas and evaluate their efforts in order to enhance their creativity in problem-solving. They achieve this by challenging assumptions, restating difficulties, and interpreting familiar circumstances in novel ways" (Chiwisa, 2024, p.49).³⁸ Ultimately, it can be argued that employer branding plays an essential role in crisis resilience by shaping and influencing public perception, stabilising the workforce, and accelerating reputation recovery. Organisations that invest in clear communication, employee engagement and values-driven leadership are more likely to mitigate the negative effects of a crisis and emerge stronger. A strong employer brand, hence, helps maintain integrity during challenging times, but also helps foster long-term trust, loyalty and empathy amongst key internal and external stakeholders.

³⁸ Chiwisa, C. (2024). The Role of Leadership in Crisis Management: A Literature Review. *Journal of Human Resource and Leadership*, 9(3), p.49. <https://doi.org/10.47604/jhrl.2844>

2.4 The Role of Corporate Branding in Crisis Management

As analysed, corporate branding plays a pivotal role in shaping the way a company is perceived, and especially during a crisis, this becomes of extreme importance. In detail, the actions an organisation decides to take to communicate, demonstrate accountability and align its brand values during times of difficulty can have a long-lasting impact on its reputation. Crisis situation, when caused – for instance – by product failures, legal issues, environmental disasters, public or financial scandals, present companies with the unique challenge of preserving trust, sustaining positive relationships with stakeholders, and ultimately maintaining the brand's core identity when facing the adversities. In particular, this chapter will aim at exploring the specifics of corporate branding and its capabilities during crises, examining the key communication strategies that companies employ to safeguard their reputation, rebuild trust and stabilise their position in the market (Greyser, 2009).³⁹

The corporate brand is attributed the top job in these scenarios, and often the spotlight, as the way a company responds will inevitably make or break its future; public perception is highly susceptible during such times, and the company's actions (or lack thereof) will determine whether it emerges stronger or will face prolonged consequences of reputational damage. Effective corporate branding, in this context, is not just about protecting the company's name but also about reinforcing its commitment to values such as responsibility, transparency, and accountability.

It is proven that a strong corporate brand brings a stabilising influence during a crisis, and also that one of the primary elements of this process is the ability to communicate openly and quickly with external stakeholders. These practices encompass liaising with the public, hence customers, as well as investors, the media, regulators and the general public. Failure to communicate appropriately or to address the crisis promptly might result in a loss of control over the narrative, thus exacerbating the crisis and potentially also leading to long-term damage to the brand's equity.

³⁹ Greyser, S. A. (2009). Corporate brand reputation and brand crisis management. *Management Decision*, 47(4), 590–602. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740910959431>

An essential first step in exploiting the corporate branding's potential is to acknowledge, first of all, the issue publicly and take active responsibility; companies must act swiftly and transparently, addressing the problem at its origin and without any delays. The immediate acknowledgment of the issue is, in fact, a powerful weapon that allows to prevent speculation and misinformation, but also signals to stakeholders that the company is awake, and aware of the issue and perfectly committed to resolving it. On the other side, if handled poorly, a company risks appearing evasive or unprepared, undermining trust and credibility as a result (Kiambi & Shafer, 2015).⁴⁰ Of equal importance is, in addition, the consistency and clarity of the messaging practices adopted by the organisation with the intent of effectively communicating externally. It is fundamental that these strategies should comprise consistent messages, regardless of them being shared via social media, press releases, interviews, or public statements; moreover, the corporate brand should emphasise the company's commitment to resolving the crisis whilst expressing empathy for those affected. For instance, a company opting to recall an items or product brand from the market should not only explain and detail how the process is going, but also and more importantly acknowledge the inconvenience it caused to consumers, thus apologising and providing assurances that steps will be taken in the future to prevent any further issue or incident.

Along with timely communication efforts, companies should also focus on demonstrating action. This simply means that, a well-managed corporate brand is expected to also take active steps to address the problem: this may involve compensating affected parties, altering internal processes, collaborating with independent experts, but in any case, striving to find a practical solution is pivotal in shaping how the name will be perceived (Bloch, 2014).⁴¹ Corporate branding during a crisis is also heavily affected by leadership; this relates to how leaders communicate, behave, act both publicly and internally, and plays a central role in shaping the external narrative, above all. Top people, just as CEOs or founders, should therefore take an active role in addressing the crisis, reinforcing that

⁴⁰ Kiambi, D. M., & Shafer, A. (2015). Corporate Crisis Communication: Examining the Interplay of Reputation and Crisis Response Strategies. *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(2), 127–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1066013>

⁴¹ Bloch, O. (2014). *Corporate identity and crisis response strategies: Challenges and opportunities of communication in times of crisis* (1st ed.). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-06222-4>

all senior managers are fully engaged and are working and taking charge. In addition to that, the leadership's tone and clarity of communication should resonate with the values and the integrity of the corporate brand, overall, and failing to present a clear vision or showing indecisiveness could potentially erode trust and damage the public image (Men et al., 2024).⁴²

Media platforms and channels also, obviously, play a critical role in determining how the crisis is viewed externally. It is strongly recommended, hence, that corporate brands should actively engage with the media, as a well-planned outreach strategy can help control the message, ensuring it is in line with the company's desired narrative. More importantly, the company's leaders should be able and prepared to handle the media's questions with transparency and sincerity, acknowledging the severity of the crisis while aligning the specific steps that have been undertaken to bring the event to a resolution. With the rise of social media, and information that is available in instants, crises amplify both positive and negative consequences, depending on the approach adopted. During a crisis, companies should rapidly respond to social media posts, address any concerns, provide any updates, and also clarify any misunderstanding. It is essential to maintain a tone of empathy and responsibility when engaging with diverse audiences online. Besides, social media provides an opportunity for direct engagement, allowing companies to interact with their customers and stakeholders in real-time – helping in this way to mitigate any concerns and show responsiveness.

Nonetheless, external channels should all display a consistent set of messages, as mixed or contradictory approaches will undermine the company's credibility and might confuse the public. The corporate brand should in theory protect unity and strive for clarity, ensuring the narrative remains consistent, especially as the company addresses various aspects of the crisis itself.

As seen, whilst immediate action is important, the long-term corporate branding strategical plan must also focus on recovery and rebuilding. In fact, one way or another, at some point the crisis will be over, and what matters will be the company's efforts in

⁴² Men, L. R., Qin, Y. S., Fitzsimmons, A. B., Di Staso, M. W., & Heffron, E. (2024). An integrated framework for exploring the impact of leadership communication on employee trust during disruptive crisis times. *International Journal of Business Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884241226567>

trying to restore or improve its image and perception – as well as showcasing the precautions taken to prevent any similar future cases. This may include reporting on changes in policies, outlining new safety or quality measures, or investing in community programs. Rebuilding the brand's image is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts and communication, ensuring that the company's commitment to improvement is both visible and authentic (Dutta & Pulling, 2011).⁴³

Lastly, corporate branding in crisis management is not just about damage control but it also comprises all steps taken in demonstrating the organisation's commitment to adhering to its values and predefined principles. Transparent communication, as an example, together with responsible actions and integrity, is a great method to mitigate the effects of a crisis and preserve the strength of the brand. As this subchapter has explained, indeed, strong and empathetic leadership, effective media management, and consistent external communication are essential in protecting and reinforcing the corporate brand during times of adversity. In the end, a well-managed corporate brand can recover from a crisis and may even emerge stronger, with enhanced trust and loyalty from stakeholders (Dawar & Lei, 2009).⁴⁴

2.5 The Importance of Company Type in Employer-Corporate Branding Alignment

The introductory passages of this project have clearly highlighted how the type of organisation – whether private, public, or non-profit – plays a crucial role in shaping the alignment between employer and corporate branding. This simply occurs as each company type operates under distinct structural, financial, and stakeholder-driven dynamics that ultimately will influence the formulation of appropriate branding strategies – as well as the manner in which these are conveyed. Understanding such differences is, consequently, essential in evaluating the way organisation manage to maintain brand consistency and ensure a strong identity in the market.

⁴³ Dutta, S., & Pullig, C. (2011). Effectiveness of corporate responses to brand crises: The role of crisis type and response strategies. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(12), 1281–1287. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.01.013>

⁴⁴ Dawar, N., & Lei, J. (2009). Brand crises: The roles of brand familiarity and crisis relevance in determining the impact on brand evaluations. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(4), 509–516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.02.001>

Private sector organisations are primarily driven – as expected – by profitability and shareholder expectations, making corporate branding a key focus for building consumer trust and investor confidence. From the perspective of employer branding, it is often designed to attract and retain top talent, ensuring business growth and competitive advantage. A strong alignment between corporate and employer branding in private companies reinforces a consistent brand image, fostering loyalty among both employees and customers. Misalignment, however, may lead to employee disengagement and inconsistencies in external brand perception, potentially affecting financial performance and market positioning (Potgieter & Doubell, 2020).⁴⁵

In the case of public sector organisations, instead, the focus is on prioritising public service, regulatory compliance, and transparency overall. In this instance, their corporate branding is closely tied to trust, reliability, and accountability, while employer branding highlights job security, purpose-driven work, and commitment to the public good. Aligning these two spheres is therefore essential in maintaining credibility and an engaged workforce. Moreover, considering the high level of scrutiny that these firms undergo, being consistent in delivering the appropriate messages strengthens institutional reputation and employee commitment – whilst misalignment can lead to diminished trust from both employees and the wider public, impacting operational effectiveness (Savolainen, 2024).⁴⁶

Thirdly, non-profit organisations as known heavily rely on their mission-driven identity, where employer branding plays a crucial role in emphasising values such as passion, dedication, and social impact, while corporate branding focuses on credibility and stakeholder trust. In turn, the alignment of these two dimensions is fundamental in sustaining volunteer and donor engagement, as well as ensuring employees' motivation and commitment to the cause. In contrast, any inconsistency between employer and corporate branding can lead to scepticism among key stakeholders, affecting funding

⁴⁵ Potgieter, A., & Doubell, M. (2020). The influence of employer branding and employees' personal branding on corporate branding and corporate reputation. *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, 15(2), 109–135. <https://doi.org/10.31920/1750-4562/2020/v15n2a6>

⁴⁶ Savolainen, K. (2024). *Employer brand image in public organizations: A single case study of Uusimaa TE Office* (Master's thesis). Aalto University.

opportunities and long-term sustainability (Sarrica et al., 2014).⁴⁷ Different company types, therefore, require tailored approaches and strategies that ultimately reflect an organisation's unique goals and expectations. While, on one hand, private firms must balance profitability with employee satisfaction, public entities must reinforce transparency and public service commitment, whereas non-profits work to ensure their internal and external messaging authentically reflect their mission. As a conclusion, by examining how employer and corporate branding coherence varies across different company types, organisations can develop more effective branding strategies that strengthen their market presence and corporate identity.

Going back to the reputational crises' topic, the degree of alignment between employer and corporate branding is even more critical, as companies facing crises must navigate heightened scrutiny from stakeholders, and any inconsistencies between internal and external branding can exacerbate reputational damage. More in detail, private companies may struggle to regain consumer and investor trust if their response appears inconsistent with their employer branding values, whereas public sector organizations, subject to governmental oversight and public accountability, risk credibility erosion if employees perceive a disconnect between internal policies and external messaging. In a similar way, non-profits rely on their ethical and value-driven identity, and any reputational crisis stemming from misalignment may lead to donor attrition and weakened stakeholder support. As a matter of fact, fully and clearly capturing how company types influence branding alignment during a crisis can provide valuable insights on reputation recovery and long-term resilience strategies – and usually help minimise the risk of adopting the wrong approach.

2.6 Examination of Business Resilience and Rebuilding Strategies

Resilience, in business terms, must be intended as an organisation's ability to withstand, adapt and recover from a crisis whilst still maintaining operational ability and stakeholder-customer confidence. In the business landscape, it is deeply interconnected

⁴⁷ Sarrica, M., Michelon, G., Bobbio, A., & Ligorio, S. (2014). Employer branding in nonprofit organizations. An exploration of factors that are related to attractiveness, identification with the organization, and promotion: The case of emergency. *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 21(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.4473/TPM21.1.1>

with both corporate and employer branding, because – as seen – companies that successfully align the two will be a step ahead in the battle for navigating challenges and rebuilding their reputation. Moreover, the ability to re-emerge and rebuild is specific to each company structure and type, as this often encapsulates tailored approaches that align with their structural, financial, and stakeholder dynamics. One of the core pillars of business resilience is strategic crisis management, which involves proactive planning, transparent communication, and adaptive leadership. In this view, organisations that manage to anticipate potential threats and implement clear response frameworks, can mitigate damage and maintain brand integrity. For instance, private companies usually rely upon financial reserves, public relations campaigns, and internal culture reinforcement to rebuild after a crisis. Moreover, a well-integrated employer and corporate branding strategy will help ensuring employees remain engaged and committed during recovery efforts, thus potentially preventing talent attrition and fostering a shared spirit of responsibility for renewal (Koronis & Ponis, 2018).⁴⁸

In the case of organisations operating within the public sector, resilience capabilities are closely linked to regulatory compliance, public accountability and institutional reputation. In reality, due to their inherent dependence on government policies and taxpayer trust, these entities must emphasize transparency and service continuity during crisis recovery. Aligning employer and corporate branding here means – in times of instability – reinforcing confidence among employees and the public, ensuring the continuation of essential services and long-term credibility. Furthermore, incorporating resilience-focused training and employee engagement initiatives can only strengthen internal culture, making public entities more adaptable to future disruptions (Horák & Špaček, 2024).⁴⁹ On the other hand, in the example of non-profit organisations, instead, given their reliance on donor funding and public goodwill, they must adopt resilience strategies that prioritize ethical accountability, mission reaffirmation, and stakeholder engagement. Besides, effecting branding strategies alignment in this case translates with

⁴⁸ Koronis, E., & Ponis, S. (2018). Better than before: The resilient organization in crisis mode. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 39(1), 32–42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-10-2016-0124>

⁴⁹ Horák, P., & Špaček, D. (2024). Organizational Resilience of Public Sector Organizations Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Czechia and Key Influencing Factors: Use of the Nograšek and Vintar Model. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2024.2371421>

the capacity of rebuilding trust after reputational damage, ensuring that both employees and external supporters remain committed to the organisation's cause. In order to re-establish credibility and attract renewed funding and volunteer participation it is needed that these entities adopt clear and consistent messaging, coupled with authentic storytelling about recovery efforts. On top of this, non-profits that successfully integrate corporate branding approaches with positive employer branding plans throughout their resilience-building initiatives can foster long-term sustainability and deeper stakeholder loyalty (Witmer & Mellinger, 2016).⁵⁰

As encompassed earlier, leadership is yet another fundamental element of resilience and recovery strategies within a firm; more specifically, it is important to analyse the role of leadership, and the type of organisational culture embedded in the company that strives to foster an environment that is adaptable to change. Such leader styles include people who promote and advocate for agility, continuous learning, and crisis preparedness. Moreover, strong leadership guides a company through challenging periods, reassuring stakeholders and reinforcing brand values that align with both employer and corporate identities. What makes organisations more capable of responding effectively to unforeseen challenges is embedding a resiliency-based culture, which in turns is made up of and enriched by training programs, crisis simulation exercises, and employee engagement initiatives (Ibrahim, 2024).⁵¹

In the digital era, technology plays a pivotal role in shaping resilience strategies; organisations can nowadays leverage the power of data analytics, AI, and digital communication tools that can improve their ability to detect potential risks much earlier, as well as streamline crisis responses, and maintain transparent engagement with stakeholders. Being resilient or attempting to be so in the digital world means also having businesses that can maintain operational continuity, protect brand reputation, and ensure that both employees and customers remain connected to the organisation even in times of

⁵⁰ Witmer, H., & Mellinger, M. S. (2016). Organizational resilience: Nonprofit organizations' response to change. *Work*, 54(2), 255–265. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-162303>

⁵¹ Ibrahim, A. Z. (2024). Crisis management and resilience planning in organizations. *Journal of Arts and Management*, 3(3), 29–34. <https://rojournals.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ROJAM-P6.pdf>

disruption (Tang, Dong, & Zhou, 2025).⁵² Something that unifies all resiliency strategies across multiple company types is the reinforcement of corporate values and culture. Organisations that embed resilience into their core branding – intended both at corporate and employer levels – are better positioned to withstand future crises and maintain long-term stability. This entails fostering an adaptive and learning-oriented workforce, investing in leadership development, and leveraging technology to improve operational efficiency. In addition, by aligning branding strategies with resilience principles, businesses can not only recover from crises but also emerge stronger and more competitive in their respective markets.

Ultimately, understanding the interplay between resilience, branding, and organisational recovery is essential for businesses aiming to navigate uncertainties and build a reputation that endures challenges. Whether in the private, public, or non-profit sector, companies that integrate resilience into their branding frameworks can enhance employee commitment, maintain stakeholder trust, and position themselves for sustainable growth. It appears evident that organisations can enhance their ability to rebuild, restore trust, and secure long-term success by reinforcing internal and external coherence, investing in leadership and innovation, and fostering a proactive crisis management culture.

⁵² Tang, C., Dong, S., & Zhou, R. (2025). The impact of digitalization on corporate resilience. *International Review of Economics and Finance*, 97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iref.2024.103834>.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology, Data Collection, and Analysis Procedures

3. Research Methodology and Data Analysis

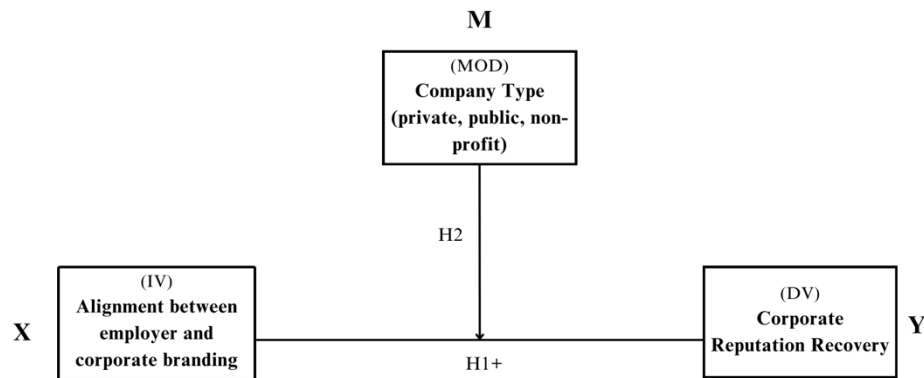
This chapter aims at providing an overview of the methodological framework and data analysis procedures employed in the study. This research, specifically, will examine how the perceived alignment between employer and corporate branding affects the recovery and re-establishment of a company's reputation during a crisis, and additionally whether – and to what extent – this relationship is moderated by the organisational type at stake (i.e., private, public, or non-profit). In so doing, the methodology has been designed accordingly in order to ensure rigor, transparency and replicability, and employed a structured online survey, that was developed and administered with the intent of collecting primary data from a diverse sample of participants.

This specific approach indeed enabled for the empirical testing of the conceptual model through quantitative analysis; more in detail, the chapter will be subdivided in this way:

- Section 3.1 will carefully outline the research design.
- Section 3.2 will encompass the data collection process and the questionnaire structure.
- Section 3.3 will present the results of the pre-test, conducted to ensure the clarity, reliability, and validity of the measurement instruments and manipulations.
- Section 3.4 will instead report the main analyses conducted on the experimental data.
- Finally, section 3.5 will aim at providing a discussion of the final results, and relevant commentary.

In this context, in order to ensure the robustness and reliability of the findings, the collected data were processed and analysed utilising the software “IBM SPSS Statistics” [version 29.0.2]. The empirical study comprised a combination of descriptive statistics, reliability testing (e.g., Cronbach's alpha), and inferential statistics such as two-way ANOVA to test the formulated hypotheses. Furthermore, the statistical techniques were selected to validate the constructs and assess both the direct and interaction effects outlined in the theoretical framework.

The figure below illustrates the conceptual model that guided the empirical investigation:



Source: The Author

3.1 Research Design

As previously mentioned, section 3.1 will employ the use of an experimental between-subjects design, with the intent of assessing the impact of employer–corporate brand alignment on organisational reputation recovery following a reputational crisis. In this view, the survey made sure participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, each corresponding to different corporate set-ups – namely public, private or non-profit. Moreover, respondents were presented with a scenario describing a reputational crisis involving that specifically attributed organisation, with the ‘organisational identity’ serving as the manipulated factor. For clarity, the scenarios displayed in the questionnaire were identical, with the only exception being the nature of the company at stake, which was explicitly stated at the beginning of the questions set – in each vignette.

The goal of such design was simply to test whether the perceived alignment between employer branding and corporate branding has any influence on how favourably people evaluate that entity’s ability and resilience to recover and rebuild its reputation, and ultimately whether this relationship is moderated – indeed – by the relevant organisational type. This approach was carefully constructed in such a way to allow for the simultaneous examination of both the main effect of alignment and the potential moderating effect of

corporate type. Lastly, in order to verify the clarity of the items, the reliability of the scales, and the effectiveness of the manipulation, the study has incorporated a pre-test, which was conducted prior to the main study.

3.2 Data Collection and Questionnaire Composition

The data were collected using an online questionnaire created and distributed through Qualtrics. The survey was shared via social media platforms, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. To manipulate the independent variable related to organizational type, participants were randomly assigned to one of three scenario conditions (public, private, or non-profit). Each scenario described a fictional but realistic reputational crisis affecting an organization and emphasized the organization's branding-based response strategy. While the structure and tone of the vignettes remained consistent across all three conditions, the organizational nature (public, private, or non-profit) was systematically varied. Below are the three scenarios used in the experimental manipulation:

Non-Profit Scenario

"Imagine a non-profit organization focused on social, environmental, or humanitarian causes that has recently faced a reputational crisis. The incident has attracted media attention and public criticism, raising concerns among donors, volunteers, and the broader community. In response, the organization is actively working to restore its credibility by aligning its corporate and employer branding efforts to reinforce its mission, ethical values, and commitment to both beneficiaries and employees."

Public Organization Scenario

"Imagine a public organization, such as a government agency or a state-owned institution, that has recently been involved in a reputational crisis. The event has been widely covered by the media, generating public concern and scrutiny. The organization is responding by enhancing its communication strategies toward both internal personnel and the general public, aiming to restore trust. A key part of this response involves aligning employer and corporate branding to reinforce institutional transparency, social responsibility, and employee reassurance."

Private Company Scenario

"Imagine a private company operating in a competitive market that has recently been affected by a reputational crisis. The situation has drawn significant media attention and stakeholder concern. In reaction, the company is actively engaging in internal and external communication to manage the crisis. The organization is leveraging alignment between corporate and employer branding to rebuild public trust, reassure its workforce, and restore its market image."

After reading one of these randomly assigned scenarios, participants were instructed to respond to a series of questions based on their impressions and assumptions regarding the organization described. To measure the perceived alignment between employer branding and corporate branding, an adapted version of the Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt) developed by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005)⁵³ was used. Although the original scale comprises 25 items assessing various dimensions of organizational attractiveness, 7 items were selected and reworded to reflect the perceived consistency between internal (employer) and external (corporate) brand communication. The adaptation was made to align the measurement with the specific context of reputational crisis and branding coherence addressed in the present study. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). The seven adapted items used to measure perceived alignment were:

1. *The company communicates a unified message through both employer and corporate branding.*
2. *The values presented in the employer brand are consistent with those in the corporate brand (externally).*
3. *The company's internal and external brand messages appear aligned.*
4. *There is no contradiction between how the company presents itself to employees and to the public.*
5. *The employer brand strengthens the credibility of the corporate brand.*

⁵³ Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising*, 24(2), 151–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2005.11072912>

6. *Both employer and corporate branding reflect a shared organizational vision.*
7. *The alignment of branding strategies enhances the company's image as a whole.*

To assess the perceived ability of a company to recover its reputation following a crisis, a 7-item scale was adapted from the framework developed by Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, and Beatty (2009)⁵⁴, originally introduced in the article “*Examining the Antecedents and Consequences of Corporate Reputation: A Customer Perspective*”. The original scale was designed to capture consumer perceptions of corporate reputation, including trust and credibility. For the purposes of this study, the items were modified to reflect the specific context of a post-crisis scenario and the construct of reputation recovery. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The seven adapted items used to measure perceived reputation recovery were:

1. *I believe this company is capable of regaining public trust.*
2. *The company appears to be handling the crisis in a credible and trustworthy way.*
3. *The company's communication during the crisis helps restore its reputation.*
4. *The actions taken by the company reflect positively on its reputation.*
5. *The company shows a strong commitment to correcting its mistakes.*
6. *I would be willing to trust this company again in the future.*
7. *The brand's reputation can fully recover after this crisis.*

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were also asked to report basic demographic information, including age, gender, and current employment status.

3.3 Pre-Test Development and Outcomes

A pre-test phase was carried out in order to evaluate the psychometric quality of the questionnaire, assess the clarity of the items, verify the internal reliability of the scales, and test the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation before the implementation of the main study. The questionnaire was structured in multiple blocks, starting with a randomized experimental scenario that described a reputational crisis involving a public,

⁵⁴ Walsh, G., Mitchell, V.-W., Jackson, P. R., & Beatty, S. E. (2009). Examining the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation: A customer perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 20(2), 187–203. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2007.00557.x>

private, or non-profit organization. This manipulation was implemented through the Qualtrics randomizer function, which ensured that each participant was exposed to only one of the three scenarios. Immediately following the scenario, participants responded to a series of items measuring their perception of employer–corporate brand alignment, reputation recovery, and a set of sociodemographic questions including gender and age. The sample for the pre-test included 37 participants. The descriptive statistics for the alignment scale showed generally high levels of agreement, with item means ranging from $M = 4.97$ ($SD = 0.87$) to $M = 5.59$ ($SD = 0.93$).

Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Independent Variable

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Alignment - The company communicates a unified message through both employer and corporate branding.	37	3	6	4.97	.866
Alignment - The values presented in the employer brand are consistent with those in the corporate brand (externally).	37	4	7	5.24	.955
Alignment - The company's internal and external brand messages appear aligned.	37	4	7	5.43	.929
Alignment - There is no contradiction between how the company presents itself to employees and to the public.	37	4	7	5.43	.835
Alignment - The employer brand strengthens the credibility of the corporate brand.	37	4	7	5.38	.924
Alignment - Both employer and corporate branding reflect a shared organizational vision.	37	4	7	5.59	.927
Alignment - The alignment of branding strategies enhances the company's image as a whole.	37	3	7	5.49	1.070
Valid N (listwise)	37				

Source: SPSS

Similarly, the reputation recovery scale presented moderate to high average values, with item means between $M = 3.41$ ($SD = 1.07$) and $M = 3.97$ ($SD = 1.14$), suggesting that the items were clear and well understood.

Figure 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variable

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ReputationRecovery - I believe this company is capable of regaining public trust.	37	1	5	3.41	1.066
ReputationRecovery - The company appears to be handling the crisis in a credible and trustworthy way.	37	2	5	3.49	1.044
ReputationRecovery - The company's communication during the crisis helps restore its reputation.	37	1	5	3.68	1.056
ReputationRecovery - The company shows a strong commitment to correcting its mistakes.	37	2	5	3.89	1.125
ReputationRecovery - The actions taken by the company reflect positively on its reputation.	37	2	5	3.95	1.153
ReputationRecovery - I would be willing to trust this company again in the future.	37	1	5	3.65	1.060
ReputationRecovery - The brand's reputation can fully recover after this crisis.	37	2	5	3.97	1.142
Valid N (listwise)	37				

Source: SPSS

No participants reported confusion or ambiguities, confirming the comprehensibility of both the scenario and the questionnaire items. An attention check question was included in the questionnaire to ensure participant engagement (Please select the word ‘strongly agree’). All participants answered the item correctly, and therefore no cases were excluded based on this criterion.

To evaluate the internal consistency of the scales, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated. The alignment scale exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.936$), and item-total correlations ranged from 0.645 to 0.911.

Figure 3: Reliability Statistic -Cronbach's Alpha - IV

		N	%
Cases	Valid	37	100.0
	Excluded^a	0	.0
	Total	37	100.0

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

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.936	7

Source: SPSS

The “Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted” analysis showed that the removal of any item would not have improved the scale’s reliability (e.g., $\alpha = 0.938$ if the item “There is no contradiction between how the company presents itself to employees and to the public” was removed), confirming that all items contributed positively to the construct.

For the reputation recovery scale, Cronbach’s alpha was even higher ($\alpha = 0.962$), and since the internal consistency was already optimal, the “if item deleted” analysis was not performed, as further breakdown was unnecessary.

Figure 4: Reliability Statistic -Cronbach's Alpha - DV

		N	%
Cases	Valid	37	100.0
	Excluded^a	0	.0
	Total	37	100.0

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

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.962	7

Source: SPSS

To rule out potential effects of demographic variables, several additional checks were conducted. An independent-samples t-test was performed to compare gender differences in the perception of alignment and reputation recovery. No significant differences emerged for alignment ($t(34) = 0.71, p = .484$), while a significant difference was found for recovery ($t(31.88) = 2.16, p = .038$), suggesting that male respondents ($M = 4.12$) rated recovery higher than female respondents ($M = 3.47$); however, this result, although statistically significant, should be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample size.

Figure 5: Independent Samples Test - IV

Independent Samples Test				
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of
		F	Sig.	t
Alignment_mean	Equal variances assumed	3.682	.063	.707
	Equal variances not assumed			.758

Independent Samples Test				
		t-test for Equality of Means		
		df	Significance One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Alignment_mean	Equal variances assumed	34	.242	.484
	Equal variances not assumed	30.388	.227	.454

Source: SPSS

Figure 6: Independent Samples Test - DV

Independent Samples Test				
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of
		F	Sig.	t
Recovery_mean	Equal variances assumed	15.190	<.001	1.974
	Equal variances not assumed			2.164

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Recovery_mean	Equal variances assumed	34	.028	.057
	Equal variances not assumed	31.878	.019	.038

Source: SPSS

Figure 7: Gender Statistics (DV)

Group Statistics					
What is your gender?		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Recovery_mean	Male	13	4.1209	.75333	.20894
	Female	23	3.4658	1.05086	.21912

Source: SPSS

Furthermore, age was examined using a one-way ANOVA based on the five categorical age groups provided in the survey. The results showed no significant differences between age groups either for alignment ($F(7,29) = 0.73, p = 0.645, \eta^2 = .151$) or for recovery ($F(7,29) = 1.12, p = 0.377, \eta^2 = .213$), indicating that age did not significantly affect participant responses.

Figure 8: One-way ANOVA

ANOVA					
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Alignment_mean	Between Groups	3.395	7	.485	.734
	Within Groups	19.160	29	.661	
	Total	22.555	36		
Recovery_mean	Between Groups	7.454	7	1.065	1.121
	Within Groups	27.545	29	.950	
	Total	34.999	36		

			Sig.
Alignment_mean	Between Groups		.645
	Within Groups		
	Total		
Recovery_mean	Between Groups		.377
	Within Groups		
	Total		

Source: SPSS

To evaluate the success of the experimental manipulation, an ANOVA was conducted using the scenario condition (public, private, or non-profit) as a between-subject factor. The results revealed a significant effect of the scenario on both alignment ($F(2,34) = 183.56, p < .001$) and reputation recovery ($F(2,34) = 339.27, p < .001$).

Figure 9: One-way ANOVA

ANOVA					
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Alignment_mean	Between Groups	20.643	2	10.322	183.561
	Within Groups	1.912	34	.056	
	Total	22.555	36		
Recovery_mean	Between Groups	33.329	2	16.665	339.272
	Within Groups	1.670	34	.049	
	Total	34.999	36		

ANOVA		
		Sig.
Alignment_mean	Between Groups	<.001
	Within Groups	
	Total	
Recovery_mean	Between Groups	<.001
	Within Groups	
	Total	

Source: SPSS

Post-hoc Bonferroni comparisons indicated that all scenario conditions differed significantly from each other (e.g., mean difference in alignment between public and non-profit = $-1.85, p < .001$; in recovery = $-2.32, p < .001$), confirming that the manipulation successfully activated different organizational contexts in the minds of participants. The test of homogeneity of variances (Levene's test) was not significant for either variable (alignment: $p = 0.198$; recovery: $p = 0.557$), confirming that the assumptions for ANOVA were met.

Figure 10: Test of Homogeneity of Variances – Levene

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Alignment_mean	Based on Mean	1.697	2	34	.198
	Based on Median	1.523	2	34	.232
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.523	2	27.045	.236
	Based on trimmed mean	1.610	2	34	.215
Recovery_mean	Based on Mean	.595	2	34	.557
	Based on Median	.641	2	34	.533
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.641	2	27.540	.534
	Based on trimmed mean	.621	2	34	.543

Source: SPSS

In summary, the pre-test confirmed the validity and internal consistency of the instruments, the clarity of the items, and the effectiveness of the scenario-based manipulation. No major issues were identified with the structure or functioning of the questionnaire, and the results support the transition to the main study with confidence in the robustness of the experimental design.

3.4 Main Study and Analyses

The main study was conducted following the successful completion of the pre-test phase, which confirmed the clarity and reliability of the measurement instruments. The same questionnaire structure and item formulations were retained in the main study to ensure consistency and replicability. Data were collected through Qualtrics, employing a randomized between-subject design in which each respondent was exposed to one of three organizational crisis scenarios (private, public, or non-profit). A total of 107 valid responses were collected and processed using SPSS Statistics version 29.0.2.

Preliminary descriptive analyses showed that the mean perception of employer–corporate brand alignment across participants was $M = 5.35$, based on a 7-point Likert scale. The sample was almost evenly distributed across the three scenario types: private (36.1%), public (31.5%), and non-profit (32.4%).

Figure 11: Three scenario types distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	private	39	36.1	36.1	36.1
	public	34	31.5	31.5	67.6
	nonprofit	35	32.4	32.4	100.0
	Total	108	100.0	100.0	

Source: SPSS

Reliability analysis confirmed the high internal consistency of both measurement scales: the alignment scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.965$, while the recovery scale scored $\alpha = 0.971$, indicating excellent reliability.

Figure 12: Reliability Statistics IV

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	108	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	108	100.0

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

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.965	7

Source: SPSS

Figure 13: Reliability Statistics DV

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	108	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	108	100.0

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

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.971	7

Source: SPSS

The composite means for alignment_mean and recovery_mean were computed by averaging responses to their respective 7 items. A binary variable alignment_group was created to distinguish participants with perceived low (below 5.35) versus high alignment (5.35 or above).

Descriptive statistics revealed that participants with high alignment perception reported a significantly higher recovery score ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.46$) compared to those with low alignment perception ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.90$).

Figure 14: Descriptive Statistics for Reputation Recovery by Perceived Alignment Level

highvslow	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
.00	3.0597	55	.90338	1.86	4.86
1.00	4.2237	53	.46588	2.14	4.86
Total	3.6310	108	.92688	1.86	4.86

Source: SPSS

Additionally, recovery scores varied across scenario conditions, with the non-profit scenario reporting the highest mean ($M = 4.33$), followed by the public ($M = 4.06$) and private ($M = 2.63$) conditions.

Figure 15: Mean Reputation Recovery Scores by Perceived Alignment Level and Organization Type

Dependent Variable: RECOVERY_MEAN				
highvslow	scenario_tipo	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
.00	private	2.5865	.59209	38
	public	4.1176	.47174	17
	Total	3.0597	.90338	55
1.00	private	4.4286	.	1
	public	4.0000	.59333	17
	nonprofit	4.3265	.35936	35
	Total	4.2237	.46588	53
Total	private	2.6337	.65449	39
	public	4.0588	.53118	34
	nonprofit	4.3265	.35936	35
	Total	3.6310	.92688	108

Source: SPSS

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with recovery_mean as the dependent variable and both alignment_group (low vs high) and scenario_“tipo” (1 = public, 2 = private, 3 = nonprofit) as between-subject factors. Levene’s test for homogeneity of variance was non-significant ($p = .409$), indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met.

Figure 16: Levene’s test

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances ^{a,b}					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
RECOVERY_MEAN	Based on Mean	.972	3	103	.409
	Based on Median	.636	3	103	.594
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.636	3	83.295	.594
	Based on trimmed mean	.844	3	103	.473

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

Source: SPSS

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of alignment group on recovery, $F(1, 103) = 10.08$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .089$, as well as a significant main effect of scenario type, $F(2, 103) = 4.33$, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .078$. Most importantly, the interaction between alignment group and scenario type was also significant, $F(1, 103) = 13.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .112$, suggesting that the effect of perceived alignment on reputation recovery differed across organizational types.

Figure 17: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for DV: Two-Way ANOVA with alignment_group and scenario_tipo

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: RECOVERY_MEAN					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	65.369 ^a	4	16.342	63.387	<.001
Intercept	530.120	1	530.120	2056.202	<.001
alignment_group	2.600	1	2.600	10.083	.002
scenario_tipo	2.231	2	1.116	4.328	.016
alignment_group * scenario_tipo	3.357	1	3.357	13.022	<.001
Error	26.555	103	.258		
Total	1515.776	108			
Corrected Total	91.923	107			

Source: SPSS

Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted to explore pairwise differences between scenario conditions. The results showed that the private condition was significantly different from both the public ($p < .001$) and non-profit conditions ($p < .001$), while the difference between public and non-profit scenarios was not significant ($p = .120$). These findings indicate that participants were more critical of recovery in the private sector scenario compared to the public or non-profit conditions.

Figure 18: Multiple Comparisons (Bonferroni) for RECOVERY_MEAN across scenario_type:

Multiple Comparisons					
Dependent Variable: RECOVERY_MEAN					
Bonferroni					
(I) scenario_tipo	(J) scenario_tipo	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% ... Lower Bound
private	public	-1.4251 [*]	.12537	<.001	-1.7301
	nonprofit	-1.6928 [*]	.12441	<.001	-1.9955
public	private	1.4251 [*]	.12537	<.001	1.1201
	nonprofit	-.2677	.12867	.120	-.5807
nonprofit	private	1.6928 [*]	.12441	<.001	1.3901
	public	.2677	.12867	.120	-.0453

Source: SPSS

Finally, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed between alignment mean and recovery mean. The result showed a strong, positive, and significant correlation, $r(108) = .748$, $p < .001$, suggesting that higher perceived alignment is associated with stronger reputation recovery, consistent with the proposed conceptual model.

Figure 19: Pearson Corellation for DV and IV mean

Correlations			
		alignment_mean	RECOVERY_MEAN
alignment_mean	Pearson Correlation	1	.748 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	108	108
RECOVERY_MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.748 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	108	108

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

Source: SPSS

3.5 Discussion of Final Results

The findings of the main study offer strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual model and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how perceived brand alignment and organizational context influence stakeholder responses during a reputational crisis. The results confirmed H1, which stated: *"The perceived alignment between employer branding and corporate branding has a positive effect on the perceived recovery of a company's reputation following a crisis."*

Specifically, participants who perceived a high degree of alignment between employer and corporate branding evaluated the organization as significantly more capable of recovering its reputation than those in the low-alignment condition. This was supported by a statistically significant main effect of alignment group in the two-way ANOVA ($F(1, 103) = 10.08, p = .002, \eta^2 = .089$), and further reinforced by a strong, positive Pearson correlation between alignment and recovery ($r = .748, p < .001$). These findings confirm that brand coherence—defined as the perceived consistency between internal (employer) and external (corporate) brand communication—positively influences stakeholder confidence in an organization's ability to recover following a crisis. In addition to confirming H1, the study also supported H2, which proposed: *"The type of organization (public, private, or non-profit) moderates the relationship between perceived alignment and perceived reputation recovery."* The two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect between alignment and scenario type ($F(2, 103) = 13.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .112$), indicating that the effect of alignment on recovery perceptions was not uniform across organizational contexts.

Looking at the results by scenario, the non-profit condition strongly confirmed both H1 and H2: participants who perceived high alignment reported the highest recovery scores across all groups, while those with low alignment rated recovery substantially lower. This confirms that branding coherence significantly improves perceived recovery in non-profit settings, and that the effect of alignment is amplified in this organizational context. The public sector scenario also supported both hypotheses: recovery ratings were notably higher for participants in the high-alignment group compared to the low-

alignment group, although the overall effect size was smaller than in the non-profit condition.

In contrast, the private sector scenario provided support for H2 but not for H1. In this group, recovery ratings were low regardless of alignment level, suggesting that even when branding coherence is perceived, stakeholders may remain sceptical due to negative expectations commonly associated with profit-oriented organizations. These findings indicate a possible reputational penalty inherent to the private sector during crises, where alignment efforts alone may not be sufficient to shift public perception. The post-hoc Bonferroni analysis further supported these insights by revealing that the private condition was evaluated significantly less favourably than both the public and non-profit scenarios ($p < .001$), while no significant difference was found between the public and non-profit groups ($p = .120$). This reinforces the idea that organizational type not only moderates the impact of alignment, but also carries distinct reputational baselines that shape stakeholder evaluations.

Overall, the main study results provide strong confirmation of H1, demonstrating that perceived alignment between employer and corporate branding has a positive effect on the perceived recovery of a company's reputation. At the same time, the findings validate H2, confirming that the type of organization moderates this relationship, with alignment having a greater positive impact in non-profit and public contexts than in private ones. These findings are consistent with previous literature, which suggests that stakeholders evaluate public and non-profit organizations through a lens of social responsibility and mission alignment, while private companies may be subject to more critical or cynical scrutiny. The results emphasize that branding strategies during crises should not be one-size-fits-all, but rather adapted to the institutional identity of the organization. While brand coherence is a critical component of effective crisis communication, its impact on stakeholder perceptions.

CHAPTER 4 - Evaluating Findings and Advancing Branding in Crisis Contexts

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This research's primary objective was to investigate and examine how perceived alignment between Employer and Corporate Branding influences stakeholders' perception of an organisation's ability to recover and rebuild its reputation after a crisis. A second objective was to assess whether the specific organisational type (e.g. non-profit, private or public) had any particular leverage or moderation upon this relationship. The study, specifically, has employed a scenario-based experimental design to examine these hypotheses and drew on established scales to measure both brand alignment – on one side – and reputational recover – on the other.

In attempting to give an answer to the questions proposed, the results of the pre-test validated the psychometric quality of the scales and confirmed the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation. The subsequent main study, instead, has contributed to the overall work by producing findings that strongly support both the pre-formulated hypotheses. In detail, participants who perceived a high level of alignment between the two Branding spheres consistently rated the organisation as more capable of recovering its reputation after a crisis (H1). In addition to that, this relationship has been seen to be more significantly moderated by the relevant organisational context, with alignment being more effective in enhancing recovery perceptions in public and non-profit organisations than in private ones (H2).

Such findings are fundamental as an important contribution towards an enriched understanding of the dynamics between internal and external branding practices, and their role in stakeholder perception, especially during critical periods of reputational threat. The outcomes, indeed, seem to confirm that stakeholders value consistency and coherence in organisational communication and that the institutional context in which a crisis occurs can significantly shape the way branding strategies are interpreted.

Moreover, in light of the increasing importance of brand management in crisis contexts, this research offers both empirical and practical contributions: the results provide effective evidence that internal branding (Employer Brand) and external branding

(Corporate Brand) should not be treated as separate ‘silos’, but rather as interrelated components of a unified identity strategy. Besides, the alignment between the two forms of branding appears to act as a credibility enhancer in the stakeholders’ eyes, particularly when organisational trust is at risk.

In other words, by incorporating the moderating role of organisational type, this research study has addressed a relevant gap in the literature. In fact, while previous studies have highlighted the importance of branding alignment at a more general extent, only few academics have explored how its effects might differ based on whether an entity is profit-driven, publicly administered, or instead mission-oriented. Lastly, in doing so, the paper has provided a more nuanced understanding of how branding functions under varying institutional expectations.

4.1 Managerial Contributions

Unarguably, this study offers significant implications for branding and communication practitioners. Moreover, a major managerial insight is the critical importance of ensuring coherence between employer and corporate branding during reputational crises. In addition, organisations that closely align both their internal and external messages are deemed to be more likely to rebuild trust and demonstrate credibility to stakeholders. As a result, corporate managers should prioritise coordination between Human Resources, corporate communications, and ultimately public relations functions to better deliver a unified brand narrative, during a crisis – above all.

This research study also provides specific guidance in correlation with organisational types. To give an example, non-profits and public organisations should actively leverage branding alignment as a core component of their crisis recovery strategies. Given stakeholders’ expectations of transparency and mission-driven conduct from these institutions, any dissonance between internal and external communication practices can lead to amplified scepticism and reputational damage. Moreover, a strong emphasis on message consistency across all organisational levels can reinforce the organisation’s legitimacy and facilitate faster recovery.

Conversely, managers at the top of private corporates must recognise that – whilst alignment enhances perceived credibility, it may not be sufficient by itself to restore reputation following a crisis. Additional strategies, such as third-party validation, public commitments to change, and visible CRS initiatives, may be necessary to complement branding efforts. This underscores the need for a multi-faceted crisis management approach that goes beyond communication alignment to actively rebuild stakeholder trust.

On the other hand, this study highlights the need for organisations to adopt a more stakeholder-centred perspective in crisis communication planning. In this view, understanding how different audiences interpret brand coherence based on organisational type allows managers to craft more targeted and more effective responses. In addition, tailoring communication strategies to stakeholder expectations can significantly enhance the credibility and perceived authenticity of recovery efforts.

Last but not least, this thesis underscores the value of proactive brand management: organisations should not wait for crises to occur before aligning their employer and corporate branding capabilities, but rather exploit ongoing efforts to integrate internal and external messaging that can serve as a resilience mechanism, thus enabling quicker and more effective responses when reputational threats arise. The proposed managerial implications, taken together, can offer practical roadmaps for those organisations that seek to navigate crises more effectively, and also build resilient brands, as well as maintain stakeholder trust – especially under conditions of uncertainty.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation makes a substantial theoretical contribution to the fields of branding, crisis communication and stakeholder perception management. Firstly, the empirical evidence that has been gathered clearly highlights the need to conceptualise employer branding and corporate branding as deeply interrelated dimensions of an organisation's identity architecture – rather than isolated constructs. Whilst employer branding has traditionally been studied in the context of recruitment and employer retention, and corporate branding has been linked to external market positioning, this paper has aimed

at demonstrating that their intersection becomes especially critical in crisis situations. During reputational crises, in fact, stakeholders do not distinguish sharply between the two different branding messages, but – instead – they assess the coherence between the two as a fundamental indicator of organisational authenticity. This specific finding expands the theoretical scope of brand management by integrating internal branding considerations into external reputation strategies, responding to calls in the literature for more holistic approaches (Berthon et al., 2005).⁵⁵

Besides, this research study extends institutional theory by providing empirical support for the proposition that organisational types influence how branding strategies are interpreted by external audiences. In reality, stakeholders do not react to a brand alignment in a vacuum, but rather they frame their evaluations through institutional logistics that carry implicit expectations. In this scenario, non-profit organisations are expected to act in the public interest and to communicate transparently, whilst private firms are often met with greater scepticism, with specific regards to motives during crises. In addition to that, by showing that branding alignment has a stronger positive effect on reputation recovery for non-profit and public entities (in respect to private ones), this study advances theoretical models that posit the institutional embeddedness of brand perception - or legitimacy - processes (Suchman, 1995).⁵⁶

Another valuable theoretical contribution lies in refining the common understanding of stakeholder judgement formation during a crisis. As previous models often emphasised either message content (for instance corrective actions or apologies) or message channels (for instance media choice) as determinants of crisis outcomes, the intent of this specific study has been shifting towards the internal consistency of messaging as a central credibility cue. This argument resonates with and further extends frameworks of organisational authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015)⁵⁷ and trust repair (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009),⁵⁸ hence suggesting that consistency across organizational dimensions enhances

⁵⁵ Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L. L. (2005).

⁵⁶ Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258788>

⁵⁷ Morhart, F., Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand authenticity: An integrative framework and measurement scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25(2), 200–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.11.006>

⁵⁸ Gillespie, N., & Dietz, G. (2009). Trust repair after an organization-level failure. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(1), 127–145. DOI:[10.5465/AMR.2009.35713319](https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2009.35713319)

stakeholder perceptions of sincerity, competence, and reliability, which are in fact key drivers of trust recovery.

Furthermore, this research has attempted to bridge the gap between branding literature and crisis management theory by operationalising alignment as a measurable construct and demonstrating its predictive power for post-crisis reputational outcomes. As a matter of fact, previous studies had theorised about the potential benefits of coherence without empirically testing its effects in crisis contexts. In so doing, this work has provided a foundation for future investigation into the mechanisms through which branding strategies affect reputational resilience and recovery trajectories.

Ultimately, a core pillar of this study in providing relevant contributions is the integration of experimental methodology in examining branding constructs; scenario-based experiments, in addition, have been less frequently applied to branding research, although being usually very common in crisis communication studies. In specific terms, this study shows that experimental designs can effectively capture nuanced stakeholder perceptions of both brand coherence and – at the same time – offer casual insights, this way complementing correlational and qualitative approaches prevalent in branding research. In short, this research study advances theoretical knowledge in five key areas:

1. The integration of employer and corporate branding in crisis contexts.
2. The moderating role of organisational types.
3. The importance of message consistency in stakeholder trust repair.
4. The operationalization of branding alignment as a measurable predictor of recovery.
5. The utilisation of experimental designs in branding research.

In essence, not only do such contributions expand on the academic discourse on the subject, but they also open new pathways for interdisciplinary research across marketing, communication, and organizational studies.

4.3 Practical Insights: Case Studies of Brand Alignment in Reputational Crises

In order to better capture and visualise both the managerial and theoretical implications of the presented study, it might be better to illustrate a few real-life case studies, as examples of how organisations across the three sectors proposed have managed branding alignment during reputational crises. Such scenarios highlight how the perceived consistency between employer branding and corporate branding can affect organisational resilience as well as reputational recovery, aligning closely with this research paper's conceptual framework.

Starting off with the *non-profit* sector, perhaps one of the most emblematic cases to mention is the reputational crisis that saw international humanitarian organisation 'Save the Children' at stake in 2018, after an investigation was launched by the Charity Commission for England and Wales, following allegations of inappropriate workplace behaviour between 2012 and 2015 – against many senior and executive staff members. In this instance, the crisis was amplified by the public common expectation that non-profit entities should embody the highest ethical standards, both externally (in their missions and objectives) and internally (hence in their workplace practices) (Quinn, 2018).⁵⁹ If this episode is analysed from a pure employer-corporate branding perspective, Save the Children initially struggled with perceived misalignment, simply because, whilst the external corporate brand emphasised care, protection, and ethical responsibility towards children and vulnerable individuals, the internal sphere revealed failures to uphold similar values for its employees. In addition, it appears clear that the lack of consistency between the external appearance and the internal environment's culture strongly undermined stakeholder trust and complicated any recovery efforts. Nonetheless, the organisation's follow-up involved specific actions aimed at realigning employer and corporate branding efforts. Specifically, their plan comprised the implementation of extensive internal reforms, strengthened safeguarding policies, and ultimately communicated these changes very transparently to both its employees and the public. Henceforth, by public addressing internal failures and demonstrating a renewed commitment to ethical values internally

⁵⁹ Quinn, B. (2018, April 26). *Save the Children suspends UK funding bids over abuse scandal*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/26/scandal-hit-save-the-children-cut-off-from-uk-government-funding>The Guardian.

and externally, Save the Children was then able to make a step forward in the attempt to rebuild its credibility and resilience; moreover, this case most importantly underlines the criticality of maintaining brand coherence – especially in non-profit contexts, where more than anywhere else, mission authenticity is vital for reputational recovery.

Moving onto a well-known *public* company scenario, it might be worth examining the case that involved “Transport for London”, a statutory corporation responsible for most of the transport network in the Greater London area, in the UK. This organisation faced a major reputational challenge in September 2017, when it opted for the non-renewal of Uber’s private hire license – expiring the 30th day of the same month, on the basis of concerns over public safety and corporate responsibility (Butler & Topham, 2017).⁶⁰ Furthermore, in an official press release, TfL noted that since London’s taxi and private hire trades’ regulation is designed to ensure public safety, it means private operators must meet rigorous standards, and also demonstrate to TfL they adhere to those. This latter declined the request to extend the current license, as it deemed the applicant not fit in terms of its approach to reporting serious criminal offences, to how medical certificates are obtained, to how Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are obtained, and ultimately to explaining the use of Greyball in London - software that could be used to block regulatory bodies from gaining full access to the app and prevent officials from undertaking regulatory or law enforcement duties. This episode, however, put Transport for London in the spotlight, as it began to be portrayed as some as obstructing innovation and by others as protecting citizen welfare. With respect to its employer-corporate branding alignment, it can be argued that TfL maintained a strong consistency between its internal culture – prioritizing public safety, responsibility, and regulatory standards – and its external communications. In addition to that, its staff members were extensively briefed to ensure their understanding and also the alignment with the public messaging strategy. In detail, what the organisation strived to emphasise was its statutory responsibility to prioritise passenger safety above commercial interests, both internally to employees and externally to the public and media. Such perfect alignment between employer and corporate branding capabilities massively helped TfL to demonstrate

⁶⁰ Butler, S., & Topham, G. (2017, September 22). *Uber stripped of London licence due to lack of corporate responsibility*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/sep/22/uber-licence-transport-for-london-tfl>

institutional resilience. It appears obvious, nonetheless, that this practice was initially perceived as controversial, but the decision reinforced stakeholder perceptions of TfL's commitment to public interest, aiding long-term reputation recovery. Hence, this specific example showcases how public organisations can leverage branding coherence to withstand external pressures and reinforce legitimacy to emerge even stronger through crises.

Thirdly, a prominent example to be assessed in relation to a *private* company event, is the notorious 'Diesel gate', which saw German multinational automobile manufacturer Volkswagen at the centre of a major environmental scandal. In particular, in September 2015 the corporation was found by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to have installed a specific software in many of its vehicles sold in the United States of America, or to better explain in the diesel engines of those cars, that could detect when they were being tested, changing the performance accordingly to improve results. As a result of the investigation, the car giant has since admitted cheating emissions tests in the US (Hotten, 2015).⁶¹ This revelation, consequently, led to severe legal, financial, and reputational outcomes, and this is primarily the cause of a clear inadequate of employer–corporate branding alignment, as Volkswagen's crisis revealed a profound inconsistency. By analysing the case in detail, it is found that the brand had positioned itself as environmentally conscious and technologically innovative, whilst internally, corporate behaviours and incentives fostered a culture that prioritized performance metrics over ethical compliance. Later, employees testified about internal pressures that contributed to the misconduct, indicating a significant gap between the values promoted to the public and the realities experienced within the organisation. Such a level of branding misalignment severely hindered the company's initial recovery efforts, as stakeholders perceived the brand as – ultimately – fundamentally inauthentic. It only began to regain credibility after major internal restructuring, leadership changes, as well as a concerted shift towards promoting a culture of ethical responsibility – equally internally and externally. This case study underscores the importance of authentic employer–corporate

⁶¹ Hotten, R. (2015, December 10). *Volkswagen: The scandal explained*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-34324772>

branding alignment in enabling resilience and restoring trust, especially for private companies facing heightened stakeholder scepticism.

All these three examples illustrate, as seen, how perceived alignment between the two branding efforts critically shapes organisational resilience and reputation recovery in the wake of crises. Respectively:

- Save the Children has demonstrated the centrality of ethical coherence for non-profits.
- Transport for London has highlighted how internal and external alignment reinforces public sector credibility.
- Volkswagen's trajectory gives an idea on the damaging effects of misalignment and the difficulty of rebuilding trust without substantive cultural change.

Broadly speaking, the fundamental teaching here is that, regardless of the organisational type at stake, branding coherence acts as a catalyst for stakeholder trust restoration and organisational resilience during reputational crises. However, that being said, it is widely acknowledged that the baseline expectations and recovery dynamics vary substantially according to the institutional identity of the organisation, thus reinforcing the need for context-sensitive branding strategies in crisis management.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research

This research study offers valid and importance theoretical and practical contributions on the subject, however some key limitations and ground for future research can be identified to fully capture the topic in subsequent works.

First of all, the study relied on a scenario-based experimental design with simplified textual vignettes that simulate reputational crises involving different types of organisations. In fact, although this methodology allowed for control over experimental variables and internal validity, it inevitably lacked the richness and emotional realism of real-world crises. Usually, in genuine reputational crises examples, stakeholder perceptions are shaped over time through multi-channel exposure to organisational responses, media coverage, as well as peer opinions. In this view, future research should

explore more valid methods, as an idea, multimedia simulations, longitudinal tracking of real crises, or experimental designs embedded within real-time digital platforms, to better capture the complex dynamics of reputation management.

Secondly, the sample in this study was obtained via convenience sampling through the method of online survey distribution. Indeed, even though efforts have been made in order to reach a diverse group of participants, the sample may not fully represent broader stakeholder populations in terms of culture, socioeconomic background, or industry experience. This profoundly limits the possibility to generalise the findings beyond the specific demographic group surveyed. Moreover, future studies could aim at replicating the design across more representative samples, including cross-national or cross-sectoral comparisons, in order to assess the way cultural norms and economic contexts influence the perception of branding alignment and reputation recovery.

Besides, while the study introduced the organisational types – previously encompassed – as a moderating variable, it treated these categories as broad, homogeneous groups. However, in reality, significant heterogeneity exists within each sector. For instance, private companies may range from small family-owned businesses to global corporations, each carrying very different levels of stakeholder expectations and reputational risk profiles. In parallel, public organizations vary significantly in their degree of public scrutiny. In this context, future research could disaggregate organisational types and explore more nuanced sectoral distinctions to refine understanding of how institutional context interacts with branding alignment strategies.

Although demographic data were collected (in respect to gender, age, employment status), such variables were not explored as potential moderators within the analysis. In support of this argumentation, it can be seen that – given the growing recognition in crisis communication research that factors such as gender and generational cohorts affect perceptions of risk, trust and authenticity – future studies could investigate whether the effects of branding alignment vary across demographic groups. In particular, such analyses would help businesses better tailor their crisis communication strategies to different stakeholder segments. Furthermore, it can be extrapolated that the study focused

on branding alignment as the primary organisational strategy without integrating other known variables that influence crisis outcomes, such as emotional tone, apology strategies, or responsibility attribution. In light of this consideration, future research could employ more complex experimental designs that manipulate multiple factors simultaneously to understand the interplay between branding coherence and other communication tactics.

To conclude, whilst the study has evidently offered robust initial evidence on the critical role of employer–corporate branding alignment in reputation recovery, addressing these limitations through methodological innovation, other angles – such as broader sampling, dynamic measurement, and expanded outcome variables – would be vital to advancing theoretical and practical knowledge in this emerging field.

4.5 Final Considerations

Modern-day society is characterised by hyper-transparency, instant communication, and rapidly shifting stakeholder expectations, hence why the managerial practices of navigating organisational reputation has evolved into a critical strategic imperative. Not surprisingly, crises – once seen as rare disruptions – are now a frequent reality for organisations across a variety of sectors. In such a volatile market and corporate landscape, the findings of this study offer a compelling reminder: resilience is not an accident of fate, but the outcome of deliberate, sustained, and coherent organisational behaviour.

At the heart of this resilience lies the strategic alignment between employer branding and corporate branding – as widely mentioned. Broadly speaking, organisations that speak with a single, authentic voice – by analysing from both an external and external standpoint – are better equipped to withstand reputational threats and to rebuild stakeholder trust when crises strike. It is recognised that alignment functions as a form of organisational credibility, signalling that the brand narrative presented to the external world is grounded in the lived realities of internal culture. Practically, when stakeholders detect this coherence, they are more willing to extend trust, even in the face of reputational challenges.

This paper reinforces the notion that branding is not merely about communication or image management, but about the deep integration of values, practices, and narratives. In fact, employer and corporate branding must not be treated as isolated functions operating in parallel, but rather as entities that are tied together into a cohesive, authentic organisational identity. When internal culture supports external promises, credibility is earned naturally, whilst when discrepancies emerge, trust is undermined, often with long-lasting consequences.

In addition, this research study highlights the importance of context sensitivity in branding strategies – as public, private and non-profit organisations operate under different legitimacy pressures and stakeholder expectations. In turn, recognising these institutional differences is essential for crafting branding and crisis recovery strategies that resonate authentically with intended audiences. Conversely, a one-size-fits-all approach to brand alignment and crisis response is likely to fail in the complex, heterogeneous environment organisations now face.

Unarguably, future crises scenarios will demand even more agility, authenticity, and strategic foresight from organisations seeking to manage their reputations effectively. In this context, as stakeholders grow increasingly discerning, and as information asymmetries continue to erode, companies must move beyond reactive crisis management toward building proactive resilience. Key elements for maintaining credibility and trust over time, in this complex evolutive scenario, will surely be investing in coherent branding, fostering a culture of internal-external consistency, and understanding the stakeholder landscape not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic, evolving ecosystem.

Lastly, this study seems to be pointing out a simple but profound truth, as reputations are not built on promises alone, but on the alignment between what organisations say, what they do, and who they are perceived to be. In these critical moments, it is authentic, visible and credible alignment that truly forms the bedrock of survival and future success. The findings of this thesis, moreover, invite business managers to reflect more deeply on their branding architectures, their internal cultures, and their commitment to authenticity –

although at first glance being solely rooted in (or restricted to) experimental data sets. As reputational risk becomes an increasingly central challenge of corporate lives, a correct understanding of the power of alignment will put companies in a better position to thrive – in the years ahead – in addition to pure survival.

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