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FROM CONTROVERSY TO RECOVERY: CRISIS MANAGEMENT AT VICTORIA'S SECRET

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SUMMARY: "From controversy to recovery: Crisis Management at Victoria's Secret" addresses crisis management in the renowned lingerie brand Victoria's Secret, based on the controversies it has faced in recent years. The study examines how the critics related to the brand's lack of inclusivity and controversial comments have impacted its reputation and market position of itself. Through the analysis of these crises and their handling, a crisis management plan is developed, which includes identifying lessons learned, creating a risk assessment framework, and formulating preventive and response strategies. The aim is to provide tools and recommendations for crisis management in the fashion industry, strengthening organizational resilience and enhancing strategic communication.

KEY WORDS: crisis management, brand reputation, strategic communication, inclusivity, management plan, fashion industry.

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION

This study serves as a comprehensive demonstration of the knowledge and skills acquired throughout four years of academic training in corporate communication and crisis management. In a world where brand reputation can be lost in an instant, understanding and managing public perception has become crucial for organizations. A single misstep can have long-lasting consequences, erasing years of effort and accomplishment. For companies, maintaining credibility in the face of crises is an essential component of organizational resilience and strategic capability.

Crises in corporate communication and brand management present challenges that test an organization's ability to sustain its reputation and respond effectively under pressure. In this context, the current project undertakes an in-depth analysis of a paradigmatic case in the world of fashion and beauty standards: the Victoria's Secret crisis. Victoria's Secret, a once-iconic brand in the fashion industry, especially in lingerie, has seen its public image eroded by controversies related to inclusivity, corporate practices, and outdated beauty ideals. Known for its lavish fashion shows and influential advertising campaigns, the brand helped define beauty standards for decades, making its recent struggles a compelling study in reputation management.

Founded in 1977 by Roy Raymond, Victoria's Secret rapidly rose to prominence, establishing itself as a leader in the lingerie market with a glamorous image and luxurious products. Its annual fashion shows became cultural events, showcasing top supermodels and elaborate designs, significantly contributing to the brand's global fame. However, in recent years, Victoria's Secret has faced substantial criticism, both for its representation of beauty standards and for corporate policies perceived as misaligned with societal shifts towards diversity and inclusivity.

The Victoria's Secret case presents a unique opportunity to explore crisis management within the high-stakes fashion industry, an arena where public perception directly influences brand success. As a brand that once epitomized exclusivity and narrow beauty ideals, Victoria's Secret's struggles to adapt to evolving consumer expectations offer a valuable case study on the dynamics of

crisis management. Examining the brand's crisis trajectory, this research sheds light on how organizational practices and communication strategies can either mitigate or intensify public backlash in today's interconnected media landscape.

By analyzing the crisis management strategies implemented by Victoria's Secret and the public's reactions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms at play in managing reputational crises within the fashion industry. Furthermore, the project seeks to explore lessons learned from the brand's experience, offering insights and best practices for managing crises that can be applied across various sectors. This study contributes to academic literature by filling a gap in crisis management research within the fashion industry, providing real-world applications and contemporary examples that enrich existing frameworks on crisis response.

This final degree project is structured as a case study of Victoria's Secret's crises, culminating in a crisis management plan that contributes significantly to both the academic and professional communities. By examining the specific challenges faced by Victoria's Secret, such as public relations missteps, declining consumer loyalty, and shifting attitudes towards inclusivity, this study addresses the following research questions:

-What crisis management strategies did Victoria's Secret employ in response to its reputational challenges?

-How effective were these strategies in addressing public concerns and rebuilding the brand's image?

-What best practices and lessons can be extracted from Victoria's Secret's experiences to inform future crisis management efforts in the fashion industry?

Ultimately, this study aspires to provide a detailed analysis that bridges academic theory and practical applications in crisis management, offering actionable strategies for brand recovery and resilience. By combining insights from marketing, public relations, business strategy, and consumer behavior, this interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the academic community's

understanding of crisis management in fashion but also serves as a resource for industry practitioners.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Crisis management

An organizational crisis is an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive. It can threaten an organization's goals and have profound implications for its relationships with stakeholders. However, despite sustained interest across multiple disciplines, recent commentary on the field suggests that "we have only just begun to scratch the surface in our understanding" of crises and crisis management and encourages further consideration of the theoretical mechanisms at work (Coombs, 2010: 479; Pearson, Roux-Dufort, & Clair, 2007). Additionally, research in this area has been criticized for its lack of theoretical and empirical rigor, given that many of its conclusions and prescriptions are derived from case studies or anecdotal evidence (Coombs, 2007; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Finally, many scholars continue to lament a silo effect, noting that researchers from different perspectives often talk past one another without capitalizing on opportunities to build cross-disciplinary scholarship (James, Wooten, & Dushek, 2011; Jaques, 2009; Kahn Et Al., 2013). As such, there is little consensus and integration across fields of study, numerous and sometimes conflicting prescriptions abound, and debates continue regarding the relevant antecedents, processes, and outcomes associated with crises and crisis management.

Every crisis, due to its unexpected and complex nature, is difficult to encompass. However, there are indeed a series of common characteristics that can be observed across all crises. The phenomenon of crises tends to produce a series of situations that distort the normal functioning of any organisation. Jaume Fita (1999) identifies the following characteristics common to all "crises":

> *- The element of surprise: crises occur at the most unexpected times, and it is unclear why this happens. In fact, if one could predict when a crisis would occur, it would never happen.*

> *- Uniqueness: no two crises produce identical effects. For instance, an organization might experience two fires with*

similar connotations, yet each will create distinct problems and require different responses. The same causes will never yield the same effects.

- Urgency and emergency: every crisis will undoubtedly create an urgent and emergency situation. This urgency will alter behaviors as the organization must address difficulties inherent in such situations.

- Decline in communication quality: faced with an onslaught of problems, organizations are forced to react rather than take the initiative. This destabilizes all communication processes. Prior to the crisis, the organization maintains control over routine information. However, a crisis disrupts all stakeholders involved in the organization's defense.

According to conclusions drawn by the French group led by Bertrand Robert and Daniel Verpeaux, additional common characteristics of crises include:

- Loss of confidence within the organization and its surroundings (shareholders, suppliers, professional associations, etc.).

- Intensive media scrutiny.

- Uncertainty among the organization's clients, often leading to loss of contracts or disruption of normal business operations.

- Immediate prominence of victims, even in cases where the causes are dubious.

- Intervention by public authorities through inspections, controls, etc.

Furthermore, the corporate group highlights three phenomena that occur within organizations during crises:

- The organization becomes a media focus, and all its actions undergo significant amplification. Events accelerate rapidly due to media influence, posing risks to the company as the capital-image binary (financial solvency, labor issues, etc.) Is at stake. The inherent pressure of the crisis is compounded by pressure from media professionals and public authorities, sometimes driven by the media, to intervene in the crisis.

- The company appears in opposition to society, potentially even in conflict with it. Effective management of the company's image requires a firm commitment to priorities and quickly address harmful effects.

- Corporate leaders and their leadership capabilities are questioned both internally and in their external projection. Consequently, they must accept their share of responsibility stemming from the crisis, implement transparent communication strategies, and apply effective anti-crisis measures.

After knowing all of these, we are going to speak about 4 stages inside a crisis: precrisis or prevention (migration); preparation or crisis management program (CMP); post crisis (response and recovery) and revision or future research.

The pre-crisis stage focuses on identifying potential risks and preventing crises before they occur. According to Mitroff (2005), organizations must engage in continuous risk assessment and develop strategies to mitigate potential threats. Preparation involves developing detailed crisis management plans and conducting regular training and simulations. Pearson and Clair (1998) emphasize that effective preparation can significantly reduce the impact of a crisis. The post-crisis stage involves implementing the crisis management plan, communicating with stakeholders, and taking corrective actions to manage the crisis. Coombs (2012) notes that timely and transparent communication is crucial during the response phase. Recovery focuses on restoring normal operations, supporting affected individuals, and rebuilding the organization's reputation. The final stage involves reviewing the crisis management process, identifying lessons learned, and updating plans and procedures. According to Elliott and Smith (2006), continuous improvement is essential for enhancing organizational resilience.

Moreover, the role of transparent communication cannot be overstated. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003) emphasize that open communication builds trust and ensures stakeholders are informed and involved in the recovery process. This transparency helps to mitigate rumors and misinformation, which can exacerbate the crisis situation. Research by Augustine (1995) highlights the importance of speed in crisis response. Swift action demonstrates the organization's commitment to resolving the issue and reduces uncertainty among stakeholders. This approach aligns with the principles of SCCT, which advocate for timely and accurate communication to maintain credibility and trust.

Another critical aspect is the psychological support for both employees and affected individuals. According to Shoss, Jiang, and Probst (2018), providing mental health support and resources helps in managing the stress and trauma associated with the crisis, thereby aiding in quicker recovery and return to normalcy. In addition to these strategies, organizations should engage in continuous improvement post-crisis. Boin and 't Hart (2003) argue that learning from each crisis event through after-action reviews and integrating these lessons into future is essential. This approach ensures that the organization is better prepared for future crises and can enhance its resilience.

Furthermore, the ethical dimension of crisis management should not be overlooked. Kaptein (2011) asserts that maintaining ethical standards during a crisis reinforces the organization's values and strengthens stakeholder trust. Ethical crisis management involves honesty, accountability, and fairness, which are crucial for long-term reputational recovery.

In recent years, crisis management theories have evolved to include a stronger focus on organizational resilience and crisis leadership. These advancements address not only the strategies for managing crises but also the underlying organizational characteristics that enable a company to withstand and recover from such events effectively.

- Organizational Resilience

Organizational resilience is defined as the capability of a company to prepare for, respond to, and adapt to unexpected disruptions while maintaining core functions and recovering quickly. Boin and Van Eeten (2013) highlight that resilience requires a proactive approach, where organizations continuously assess risks and develop flexibility to respond to unpredictable events. In the context of crisis management, resilience involves building structures and processes that enable an organization to withstand shocks, learning from each incident to strengthen future responses (Boin et al., 2010).

- Crisis Leadership

Effective crisis leadership has become an essential component of modern crisis management models. According to DuBrin (2013), crisis leaders must demonstrate agility, empathy, and decisiveness to navigate organizations through turbulent times. Heifetz et al. (2009) emphasize adaptive leadership, where leaders encourage innovation and foster collaboration, which are crucial for guiding organizations through crises. This approach aligns with the need for leaders to make quick, strategic decisions under pressure while also addressing the emotional and psychological needs of stakeholders.

- Organizational Psychology in Crisis Situations

Understanding the psychological dimensions of crisis management has become increasingly important. Shoss, Jiang, and Probst (2018) argue that psychological support for employees during crises can mitigate stress and enhance recovery. This psychological perspective is critical in maintaining workforce morale and engagement, which contribute to a company's resilience and sustained performance during crises.

- Integrative Crisis Management Models

The Integrative Crisis Management Framework (ICMF), proposed by Pearson and Clair (1998), merges various elements, such as strategic planning, leadership, and organizational culture, into a cohesive approach to crisis management. The ICMF emphasizes preparation, immediate crisis response, and post-crisis recovery, with a focus on continuous improvement. This model advocates for adaptive capabilities and learning from each crisis to foster an organizational culture that prioritizes resilience.

2. 1. 1. First Step: Precrisis or prevention (Migration)

A crisis can be prevented if appropriate action is taken on the warning signs. Prevention is the ideal form of crisis management because the best-managed crisis is the crisis that is prevented. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect that all crises can be prevented (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992). Certain indicators may prove elusive to perceive. It is within the realm of possibility for crisis managers to overlook certain warning signs and misconstrue others. However, this does not

imply that the process of signal detection should be disregarded. On the contrary, crisis management necessitates the establishment of a structured framework intended to actively scan and monitor for indicators of impending crises, herein referred to as the crisis-sensing mechanism.

Failure to adequately address either domain may lead to the inadvertent oversight of crucial indicators signaling an impending crisis. The task confronting crisis managers revolves around the seamless integration of the three organizational facets into a proficient crisis-sensing apparatus. Effectively navigating this task requires crisis managers to possess a keen awareness of the sources warranting scrutiny, adeptness in information gathering techniques, and proficiency in evaluating information vis-à-vis its potential to precipitate a crisis.

Understanding the stages of a crisis is essential for effective management and resolution. According to Coombs (2007), crises typically follow a predictable lifecycle comprising three main stages: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis. Each stage involves specific actions and strategies that are crucial for navigating through a crisis successfully.

In the pre-crisis stage, organizations focus on prevention and preparation. This stage involves identifying potential threats and vulnerabilities that could lead to a crisis. Activities include risk assessment, developing crisis management plans, and training employees on their roles and responsibilities during a crisis. Coombs (2007) emphasizes the importance of proactive measures to mitigate potential risks before they escalate into full-blown crises. Effective communication strategies are also established during this stage to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and prepared.

The crisis response stage is activated once a crisis occurs. This stage involves the immediate actions taken to manage and contain the crisis. According to Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2017), "timely and transparent communication is crucial during this stage to maintain trust and credibility with stakeholders." The organization must provide accurate information quickly, address the concerns of those affected, and take visible actions to resolve the crisis. Effective crisis

communication can help minimize damage and prevent the situation from worsening.

Finally, the post-crisis stage focuses on recovery and learning. After the immediate crisis has been managed, organizations must analyze the event to understand its causes and impacts. Smith and Elliott (2007) highlight the importance of "organizational learning during this stage." By conducting a thorough post-crisis evaluation, organizations can identify what went wrong, what was handled well, and what improvements can be made. This stage also involves rebuilding and repairing any damage caused by the crisis, both in terms of physical damage and reputational harm. Developing strategies to prevent future crises is a key component of the post-crisis stage.

These stages (pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis) are critical for effective crisis management. Each stage requires specific actions and strategies to ensure that organizations can navigate through crises successfully and emerge stronger. By understanding and applying the principles outlined by experts like Coombs (2007), Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2017), and Smith and Elliott (2007), organizations can enhance their resilience and preparedness for future challenges.

In the initial phase of crisis management, the process of scanning plays a pivotal role. This entails a thorough examination of the available scanning resources, which include issues management, risk assessment, and reputation management. Collectively, these three functions serve as a comprehensive radar system, facilitating the detection of early warning signs indicative of potential crises. By scrutinizing these areas, a solid groundwork is laid for the establishment of a robust crisis-sensing mechanism.

Issues management is geared towards mitigating the adverse effects of emerging concerns within an organization. It adopts a systematic approach aimed at shaping the trajectory of these issues and their eventual resolution. Emphasizing proactive engagement, issues management seeks to influence outcomes in favor of the organization, particularly concerning societal and political matters in its external milieu. Given the propensity of certain issues to escalate into full-blown

crises, the practice of issues management significantly contributes to the scanning process.

Concurrently, risk assessment endeavors to identify vulnerabilities within an organization and evaluate the likelihood of these vulnerabilities being exploited or evolving into crises. Various risk factors, ranging from personnel and products to production processes and regulatory compliance, are subject to assessment. Although not daily occurrences, the existence of these internal vulnerabilities underscores the potential for significant crises to arise, emphasizing the indispensable role of risk assessment in crisis scanning.

Additionally, reputation management focuses on safeguarding and enhancing the organization's standing in the eyes of its stakeholders. A favorable reputation is contingent upon the organization's ability to meet stakeholder expectations effectively. This is influenced by direct interactions, both positive and negative, as well as indirect perceptions disseminated through various channels. Recognized as an asset during crisis management, favorable relationships between the organization and its stakeholders' foster interdependence, thereby bolstering resilience in times of crisis.

After identifying potential sources of environmental information, managers encounter the task of acquiring this information, presenting its own set of challenges. Among the commonly employed methods for information collection are content analysis, interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Familiarity with these tools constitutes an asset in the realm of crisis management.

Content analysis entails the methodical examination and categorization of written materials. To conduct effective content analysis, it is essential to establish coding categories and possess proficiency in their application. Coding categories serve as compartments wherein discrete pieces of information are organized. Each category necessitates a comprehensive written definition outlining its appropriate contents, ensuring mutual exclusivity to prevent overlap between categories.

Individuals tasked with employing these categories, known as coders, must undergo training to ensure proficiency in their utilization. Coders must

demonstrate the ability to consistently allocate similar messages to corresponding categories, a trait referred to as reliability. Reliability ensures uniformity in coding across different individuals, enabling the comparison of coded data.

Content analysis facilitates the transformation of written information into quantifiable data, where words are translated into numerical values suitable for statistical analysis.

2. 1. 2. Second Step: Preparation or crisis management program (CMP)

In today's dynamic and interconnected business landscape, organizations are constantly exposed to a myriad of potential crises that can threaten their stability, reputation, and even existence. From natural disasters to cyber-attacks, from product recalls to financial scandals, the spectrum of crises is vast and unpredictable. In response to this reality, the field of crisis management has emerged as a critical area of study and practice, offering methodologies and frameworks to help organizations effectively navigate and mitigate the impact of crises.

At the heart of crisis management lie various theoretical models that provide structured approaches for understanding, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crises. These models not only offer guidance during times of adversity but also serve as invaluable tools for enhancing organizational resilience and adaptive capacity.

Steven Fink, a member of the Pennsylvania crisis management team during the Three Mile Island (TMI) accident, published Crisis Management in 1986. This book, the first in the USA on crisis management, outlines the steps in crisis management: in the premonition stage, "crisis forecasting," "crisis intervention," and "crisis management plans" are carried out. During the first acute stage, when a major accident or disaster occurs, "crisis survey and crisis identification" are conducted. In the second acute stage, "crisis isolation and crisis management" are executed, with "crisis communication" being vital throughout the acute stages.

Crisis communication involves "controlling the message" and "handling hostile press" (Fink, 1986).

Fink introduced a unique assessment method for crisis forecasting in the premonition stage, evaluating a crisis using a damage indicator called the "crisis impact value (CIV)." CIV scores a crisis from 0 to 10 based on its effects, results, monetary loss, and human damage. The score is the average of answers to five questions: the potential intensification and speed of the crisis, its observability by outsiders, its interference with operations, whether the company is the victim or culprit, and its damage to the bottom line.

Fink explained risk forecasting with a coordinate plane divided into four quadrants: the horizontal axis represents the probability of occurrence (0% to 100%), and the vertical axis represents CIV (0–10). The intersection of 50% probability and CIV 5 is the origin, with quadrants named the red zone (high probability, high CIV), yellow zone (low probability, high CIV), gray zone (high probability, low CIV), and green zone (low probability, low CIV). This method, visual and easy to understand, has evolved into the widely used "risk map."

The integrative literature review revealed several key themes related to organizational resilience concerning crisis response and employee engagement within Fink's Crisis Management Model. Pre-crisis planning significantly influences employee engagement. Organizations that proactively engage in risk assessment and crisis preparedness positively impact employee engagement levels. Clear communication about pre-crisis plans fosters a sense of safety and meaning among employees, enhancing engagement during crises (Krause, 2022; Settembre-Blundo et al., 2021). Leadership commitment to pre-crisis planning is crucial, instilling confidence and trust among employees, further enhancing their engagement (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

Effective communication strategies throughout a crisis are vital for employee engagement. Transparent, timely, and consistent communication from leadership reduces uncertainty and anxiety, contributing to psychological safety and higher engagement levels (Kilag et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021). Open communication channels are essential for maintaining trust and engagement during crises (Kang

& Sung, 2017). Leadership significantly impacts employee engagement during crises. Effective leaders who demonstrate empathy, decisiveness, and support positively influence employee engagement (Dubey, 2023; Ojo et al., 2021). Conversely, a lack of visible and decisive leadership can decrease engagement and increase stress (Kilag et al., 2023).

Post-crisis reflection and learning are critical for organizational resilience. Organizations that engage in systematic post-crisis evaluations and adapt their practices demonstrate higher resilience and increased employee engagement (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015; Lee et al., 2017). Valuing employees' experiences and integrating lessons learned into organizational practices enhance engagement and preparedness for future crises. These themes collectively highlight the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between crisis response strategies and organizational resilience. Engaged employees are more adaptable, committed, and willing to contribute discretionary effort during and after crises. Effective crisis management, transparent communication, strong leadership, and post-crisis learning are crucial for fostering higher levels of employee engagement and enhancing organizational resilience. The findings provide valuable insights for leaders, practitioners, and researchers, offering a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to building and sustaining resilience in the face of crises.

The key point of Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is that it emphasizes protecting the public from damage, rather than protecting the company's reputation. This is the priority to warrant safety and survival when facing a crisis situation (Veil, Liu, Erickson, & Sellnow, 2005). In turn, it can develop a positive attribution of the public to the company's reputation. Coombs (2007) stated that it would be irresponsible to begin crisis communication by focusing on the organization's reputation. To be ethical, crisis managers must begin their efforts by using communication to address the physical and psychological concerns of the community. It is only after this foundation is established that crisis managers should turn their attention to reputational assets (Coombs, 2007, p. 165).

The assumption about not solely focusing on the organization's reputation appears to be linked to the Contingency Theory of Accommodation in Public Relations. The Contingency Theory of Accommodation assumes that although public relations practitioners are advocates for or defenders of their organizations, they also function as accommodators of trust with their public (Cameron, Cancel, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Mitrook, Parish, & Seltzer, 2008; Reber & Cameron, 2003). The concept of "reputation" means that the company has "legitimacy." Metzler (Veil, et al., 2005, p. 19) and Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, and Terrell (1993, p. 18) stated that legitimacy is "an organization's right to exist." Legitimacy is approved by the community (Culbertson, et al., 1993) and developed by two aspects: an organization's competence and character (Veil, et al., 2005). If the company operates its business effectively, it is considered competent. Character can be gained if the public perceives that the company has programs concerned with the social community (CSR) (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009; Turker, 2009; Veil, et al., 2005).

Therefore, the public's interpretation is important to support an organization's competence (Veil, et al., 2005), and competence is an aspect of the model of reputational crisis that determines the degree of the company's reputation (Zyglidopoulos, 1999). To gain a positive interpretation, the company must satisfy the expectations of its public.

In terms of the company's reputation, the SCCT describes three factors in a crisis that potentially threaten the company's reputation. These three factors are initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation. Initial crisis responsibility is the level of the public's attribution toward the company's responsibility for the crisis: whether the company is perceived to have caused the crisis or not (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Coombs, 2007). Public attribution can be categorized into three clusters of crises, called crisis types: a victim cluster, an accidental cluster, and an intentional cluster (Coombs, 2007). The company is categorized as a victim cluster when the public considers that the company is not the cause of the event. The accidental cluster emerges if the public considers that the event is accidentally caused by the company. An

intentional cluster occurs when the public attributes that the event happened because of the company's mistakes.

Furthermore, crisis history occurs when the public perceives that the company has experienced the same situation previously. Prior relational reputation is the public's perception of how the company has cared for the public in previous situations (Coombs, 2007).

The SCCT has often been overlooked. However, most research has focused on an organization-centered approach rather than a public approach (Choi & Lin, 2009). Additionally, most of the research applied a quantitative method. There appears to be little qualitative research centered on the public approach (Moffitt, 1992). Therefore, this theory was applied in a qualitative methodology to obtain more detailed information. For instance, Sisco, Collins, and Zoch (2010) undertook content analysis to examine the response strategy of the American Red Cross in dealing with the crisis and compared it with this theory. Hence, this research focuses on the public's perspective of the mudflow crisis.

Ian Mitroff, a crisis management scholar, defined a five-stage model for crisis management in 1988. Its five stages are Signal Detection, Probing and Prevention, Damage Containment, Recovery, and Learning.

Signal detection is the initial stage in crisis management, where organizations identify potential crises through early warning signs (Mitroff et al., 1987). These signs, often ambiguous, require organizations to interpret and respond appropriately. Failure in this stage can result from systemic management issues that hinder the recognition and reporting of these signals (Jaques, 2010). Effective detection involves recognizing early warnings and addressing them proactively to prevent crises from escalating (Mitroff et al., 1987).

In the probing and prevention stage, organizations actively search for and assess risk factors that might lead to a crisis (Mitroff et al., 1987). This involves differentiating between internal and external risks and tailoring responses accordingly. Probing and prevention are proactive measures, emphasizing continuous vigilance and preparedness rather than waiting for a crisis to occur

before acting (Mitroff, Pearson, & Harrington, 1996). Jaques (2010) elaborates that effective crisis prevention is part of broader pre-crisis management, utilizing issue management tools and techniques during the pre-event stage.

Once a crisis is underway, damage containment focuses on preventing the damage from spreading (Mitroff et al., 1996). This stage requires pre-established mechanisms and plans to be effective, as attempting to devise solutions during the crisis is often too late. Effective containment is proactive, involving preparation and training well before any crisis materializes.

Drawing upon these theoretical foundations and leveraging insights from contemporary literature and real-world case studies, this final degree project seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of crisis management models and their application in enhancing organizational resilience. By examining the theoretical underpinnings, practical implications, and emerging trends in crisis management, this study aims to equip organizations with actionable insights and best practices to effectively navigate crises and emerge stronger and more resilient than before.

2. 1. 3. Third Step: Post crisis (Response and Recovery)

Crisis response strategies are essential for managing an organization's reputation during a crisis, and they can be categorized based on the postures adopted by crisis managers, as supported by academic research. According to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs and Holladay (2002), these strategies are critical for effective crisis management.

The denial posture involves countering claims of a crisis's existence through methods such as attacking the accuser, outright denial, or scapegoating. For example, an organization might threaten legal action against accusers to divert blame. This approach is particularly useful in rumor crises and unwarranted challenges where the organization's primary goal is to refute any claims of wrongdoing. Coombs (2015) notes that this strategy is effective in maintaining a strong defensive position when the crisis is deemed baseless.

In contrast, the diminishment posture focuses on reducing the perceived severity of the crisis and the organization's responsibility. Excusing involves downplaying the organization's culpability by asserting a lack of control over the events leading to the crisis. Justification aims to mitigate the perceived harm by suggesting that the damages were minimal or that the victims might have warranted their plight. This approach is beneficial in accident crises without a history of prior crises or a negative reputation. According to Coombs (2015), diminishment strategies help to alleviate stakeholder concerns by providing context that lessens the impact of the crisis.

The rebuilding posture emphasizes efforts to address and rectify the aftermath of the crisis. This includes compensation, where the organization provides monetary or other forms of restitution to affected parties, and public apologies, acknowledging full organizational responsibility and seeking forgiveness. Kim, Avery, and Lariscy (2009) highlight that rebuilding strategies are crucial for crises that have caused significant reputational damage, as they demonstrate the organization's commitment to making amends and restoring trust.

The bolstering posture seeks to reinforce the organization's image and reputation during a crisis. This includes reminding stakeholders of past positive actions, ingratiating them with praise, and portraying the organization as a victim alongside others affected. Coombs and Holladay (2002) suggest that bolstering strategies are effective in reinforcing a positive image and maintaining stakeholder support during and after a crisis.

Recommendations for selecting appropriate crisis response strategies emphasize the need to provide instructive and adjusting information to all victims or potential victims. This includes warnings and directives to safeguard against harm, as well as expressions of concern and offers of corrective measures. For victim crises lacking a history of crises or an unfavorable prior reputation, the provision of instructing and adjusting information suffices. In cases of accident crises without a crisis history or adverse prior reputation, diminishment strategies are recommended. Conversely, victim crises with a crisis history or an

unfavorable reputation warrant the implementation of diminishment strategies, while accident crises with such a background necessitate rebuilding strategies.

Denial strategies are advised in rumor crises and unwarranted challenges. However, in challenges where external stakeholders are likely to support the challenge, corrective action through adjusting information is recommended. Reinforcing strategies can serve as supplements to other response strategies, enhancing their efficacy. The victimize response strategy should be used exclusively within the victim cluster to maintain consistency, and denial strategies should not be combined with either diminishment or rebuilding strategies. However, diminishment and rebuilding strategies can be employed together for certain crises, as they provide a balanced approach to mitigating the crisis's impact and restoring the organization's reputation.

Furthermore, effective crisis management involves a comprehensive understanding of the crisis life cycle. According to W. Timothy Coombs (2019), "a crisis management plan should be a living document that is updated regularly based on lessons learned from exercises and actual crises." This continuous improvement approach ensures that the organization remains prepared for future crises and can respond swiftly and effectively.

The responsibility of the crisis team extends until all obligations arising from the crisis are satisfactorily met, including memorials, which play a significant role in commemorating events and honoring affected individuals. Memorials facilitate mourning and coping with grief, providing a means to acknowledge those affected. However, differing perspectives on the crisis and its remembrance can lead to conflicts regarding the nature or appropriateness of memorials. Organizational managers often seek to move past the crisis, while those impacted may wish to remember and commemorate the event.

Renewal, a crucial aspect following a crisis, emphasizes aiding victims and fostering a positive outlook for the future, with a strong emphasis on learning. It focuses on prospective opportunities rather than dwelling on past events. According to Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2010), renewal involves the organization adhering to pre-crisis ethical standards, maintaining strong pre-crisis

relationships with stakeholders, adopting a forward-looking approach to addressing the crisis, and committing to effective crisis communication.

Key considerations for leadership during a crisis include prioritizing public safety and welfare above all else. This recognition safeguards stakeholders and preserves valuable relationships, aligning with Coombs' (2015) argument that safeguarding stakeholders also protects the organization's interests. The evaluation of crisis management processes, plans, and the crisis management team is essential, despite being time-consuming and challenging. Effective crisis leadership should exhibit a learning orientation, viewing crises as opportunities for organizational improvement rather than solely as threats. According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), a learning orientation encourages adaptation and growth, enhancing organizational resilience and effectiveness.

In summary, effective crisis management extends beyond immediate response, requiring ongoing efforts to memorialize events appropriately, aid victims, and foster organizational learning and renewal. These strategies ensure the organization not only recovers from the crisis but also emerges stronger and more resilient.

2. 1. 4. Fourth Step: Revision or future research

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Key considerations for leadership during a crisis include prioritizing public safety and welfare above all else. This recognition safeguards stakeholders and preserves valuable relationships, aligning with Coombs' (2015) argument that safeguarding stakeholders also protects the organization's interests. The evaluation of crisis management processes, plans, and the crisis management team is essential, despite being time-consuming and challenging. Effective crisis leadership should exhibit a learning orientation, viewing crises as opportunities for organizational improvement rather than solely as threats. According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), a learning orientation encourages adaptation and growth, enhancing organizational resilience and effectiveness.

Effective crisis management extends beyond immediate response, requiring ongoing efforts to memorialize events appropriately, aid victims, and foster organizational learning and renewal. These strategies ensure the organization not only recovers from the crisis but also emerges stronger and more resilient.

Moreover, the role of transparent communication cannot be overstated. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003) emphasize that open communication builds trust and ensures stakeholders are informed and involved in the recovery process. This transparency helps to mitigate rumors and misinformation, which can exacerbate the crisis situation.

Research by Augustine (1995) highlights the importance of speed in crisis response. Swift action demonstrates the organization's commitment to resolving the issue and reduces uncertainty among stakeholders. This approach aligns with the principles of SCCT, which advocate for timely and accurate communication to maintain credibility and trust.

Another critical aspect is the psychological support for both employees and affected individuals. According to Shoss, Jiang, and Probst (2018), providing mental health support and resources helps in managing the stress and trauma

associated with the crisis, thereby aiding in quicker recovery and return to normalcy.

In addition to these strategies, organizations should engage in continuous improvement post-crisis. Boin and 't Hart (2003) argue that learning from each crisis event through after-action reviews and integrating these lessons into future plans is essential. This approach ensures that the organization is better prepared for future crises and can enhance its resilience.

Furthermore, the ethical dimension of crisis management should not be overlooked. Kaptein (2011) asserts that maintaining ethical standards during a crisis reinforces the organization's values and strengthens stakeholder trust. Ethical crisis management involves honesty, accountability, and fairness, which are crucial for long-term reputational recovery.

In addition to these foundational principles, effective crisis management requires incorporating technological advancements and data analytics. According to Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011), leveraging social media and real-time data analytics can provide immediate insights into public sentiment and emerging issues, enabling quicker, more informed decision-making. Organizations can use these tools to monitor crisis developments and communicate promptly with stakeholders.

Furthermore, integrating stakeholder engagement throughout the crisis management process is essential. Freeman (2010) suggests that engaging stakeholders early and maintaining open lines of communication can help build a coalition of support, mitigate backlash, and foster a collaborative approach to crisis resolution. This engagement ensures that stakeholder concerns are addressed, enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the crisis response.

Another aspect to consider is the importance of cultural sensitivity in crisis communication. Hallahan (2000) highlights that understanding and respecting cultural differences can significantly impact the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies. Tailoring messages to resonate with diverse

audiences can prevent misunderstandings and foster trust across different cultural groups.

Lastly, the role of leadership in crisis management cannot be understated. According to Fernandez and Shaw (2020), effective leaders demonstrate empathy, decisiveness, and resilience, guiding their organizations through turbulent times while maintaining morale and focus. Leadership training programs that emphasize these qualities can prepare leaders to handle crises more effectively, ensuring a more robust organizational response.

2.2 Crisis management in fashion industry

Crisis management within the fashion industry is a multifaceted and critical aspect that requires meticulous planning and agile response strategies. The industry's unique blend of creativity, high visibility, and fast-paced environment necessitates a comprehensive approach to handling crises, which can range from supply chain disruptions to public relations debacles.

In the context of the fashion industry, crisis management is particularly significant due to the industry's reliance on brand image and consumer perception. A well-managed crisis can not only mitigate negative impacts but also enhance the brand's reputation by demonstrating resilience and responsibility (Argenti, 2013).

The fashion industry, characterized by its rapid pace, high visibility, and constant innovation, is uniquely vulnerable to a variety of crises. These crises can arise from both internal and external sources, impacting operations, finances, reputation, and ethical standards. Understanding the different types of crises that can affect the fashion industry is essential for developing effective management strategies. Operational crises, for instance, can disrupt the intricate supply chains and production schedules that fashion brands rely on. Financial crises may stem from market volatility or mismanagement, posing significant threats to a company's stability. Reputational crises often occur in the public eye, fueled by social media and rapid information dissemination, while ethical crises highlight the growing importance of corporate social responsibility in maintaining consumer

trust and brand loyalty. Each type of crisis requires tailored responses to mitigate impact and facilitate recovery (Coombs, 2015; Christopher & Peck, 2004).

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Operational Crises: Operational crises in the fashion industry are often related to disruptions in the supply chain, production issues, or logistical problems. The fashion supply chain is intricate and global, involving numerous stakeholders from raw material suppliers to manufacturers and retailers. A breakdown at any point in this chain can have significant repercussions. For instance, natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, can disrupt the supply of raw materials. Similarly, political instability or trade disputes can lead to delays or increased costs in transportation and manufacturing (Christopher & Peck, 2004). An example is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused widespread factory shutdowns and logistical challenges, severely affecting the production schedules of many fashion brands (Brydges, Hanlon, & Holmes, 2020).

Financial Crises: Financial crises occur when a fashion company faces significant financial distress, which may result from poor management decisions, economic downturns, or unexpected expenses. These crises can manifest as liquidity problems, inability to meet debt obligations, or even bankruptcy. The retail sector is highly susceptible to financial crises due to its dependence on consumer spending, which can fluctuate with economic conditions. For example, the bankruptcy of major fashion retailers like J.Crew and Neiman Marcus in 2020 highlighted the financial vulnerabilities exacerbated by the pandemic (Bowie, 2017). Financial mismanagement, such as overexpansion or poor investment decisions, can also precipitate a crisis, underscoring the need for sound financial strategies and contingency planning.

Reputational Crises: In the fashion industry, reputation is crucial for maintaining consumer trust and loyalty. Reputational crises, often resulting from public relations scandals or social media backlash, can arise from controversial marketing, inappropriate comments, or unethical practices. For instance, accusations of cultural insensitivity, as in the Dolce & Gabbana incident in China, can lead to severe public backlash (Zhou & Lovari, 2021). Similarly, allegations of poor working conditions or environmental negligence can damage a brand's image and reduce market share (Kim & Lee, 2018).

Ethical Crises: Ethical crises relate to corporate social responsibility issues, such as environmental impact, labor rights, and fair trade. The fashion industry faces criticism for practices like excessive waste, pollution, and unsafe labor conditions, particularly in developing countries (Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017). These crises not only harm a brand's reputation but can also attract regulatory actions and diminish investor confidence, especially as consumers increasingly demand sustainable and ethical practices.

Understanding these types of crises and their potential impact on the fashion industry is crucial for brands to develop effective crisis management strategies. By recognizing the specific vulnerabilities and preparing accordingly, fashion companies can better navigate the complex landscape and protect their operational, financial, reputational, and ethical standing. Effective crisis management is critical for maintaining the resilience and reputation of fashion brands. The dynamic nature of the fashion industry necessitates a comprehensive approach to crisis management that encompasses preparedness, communication, leadership, reputation management, and post-crisis evaluation. Preparedness involves developing detailed crisis management plans and conducting regular risk assessments to identify potential vulnerabilities. Communication strategies must be transparent and timely to manage stakeholder expectations and control the narrative during a crisis. Strong leadership is essential for making decisive and empathetic decisions that can steer the company through turbulent times. Reputation management focuses on addressing the root causes of crises and implementing corrective actions to rebuild consumer trust. Finally, evaluating the crisis management efforts post-

crisis provides valuable insights and lessons for improving future responses. By adopting these strategies, fashion brands can not only survive crises but also emerge stronger and more resilient (Mitroff, 2005; Fearn-Banks, 2016).

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Preparedness and Planning: Preparedness involves developing detailed crisis management plans and conducting regular risk assessments to identify potential vulnerabilities. A well-prepared organization has a structured approach to crisis management, including predefined roles and responsibilities, communication protocols, and contingency plans. This preparation helps ensure a swift and organized response when a crisis occurs. It is essential for fashion brands to conduct scenario planning exercises, simulating different types of crises to test their response mechanisms and identify areas for improvement (Mitroff, 2005). Additionally, establishing a crisis management team with cross-functional representation ensures that all aspects of the business are considered during a crisis response.

Communication: Transparent and timely communication is crucial during a crisis. Effective communication strategies involve engaging with stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, investors, and the media, to provide accurate information and manage the narrative. Brands must be proactive in communicating their response to a crisis, addressing concerns, and demonstrating accountability. Social media plays a significant role in crisis communication, allowing brands to reach a wide audience quickly but also requiring careful management to avoid misinformation and further escalation (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Crafting clear, consistent messages and using multiple communication channels can help maintain trust and transparency throughout the crisis.

Leadership and Decision-Making: Strong leadership is essential for navigating a crisis. Leaders must be decisive, empathetic, and visible, demonstrating the company's commitment to resolving the issue. Effective crisis leadership involves making informed decisions under pressure, prioritizing the well-being of stakeholders, and maintaining a calm and composed demeanour. Leaders should also be accessible and communicative, providing regular updates and showing genuine concern for those affected by the crisis (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). Establishing a crisis command centre where leaders can coordinate efforts and make real-time decisions can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the response.

Reputation Management: Protecting and rebuilding the brand's reputation is a key aspect of crisis management. This involves addressing the root cause of the crisis, taking responsibility, and implementing changes to prevent future occurrences. Brands must be proactive in managing their reputation by engaging with stakeholders, demonstrating transparency, and showing a commitment to ethical practices. Reputation management strategies may include public apologies, corrective actions, and initiatives to improve corporate social responsibility (Diermeier, 2011). Additionally, leveraging positive relationships with the media and influencers can help rebuild trust and promote a positive image post-crisis.

Evaluation and Learning: Post-crisis evaluation is important for learning from the experience and improving future crisis management practices. This includes analysing the effectiveness of the response, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and making necessary adjustments to the crisis management plan. Conducting a thorough debrief with all involved parties and documenting the lessons learned can provide valuable insights for enhancing preparedness and response strategies (Smith & Elliott, 2007). Organizations should also seek feedback from stakeholders to understand their perspectives and address any lingering concerns.

By implementing these strategies, fashion brands can not only survive crises but also emerge stronger and more resilient. Effective crisis management requires a proactive and comprehensive approach, encompassing preparedness, communication, leadership, reputation management, and continuous improvement. In a highly competitive and dynamic industry like fashion, the ability to manage crises effectively is crucial for sustaining success and maintaining consumer trust.

Examining recent case studies of crisis management in the fashion industry provides valuable insights into best practices and common pitfalls. These examples highlight the importance of swift, transparent, and responsible actions in mitigating damage and restoring brand reputation.

Balenciaga, a renowned high-end fashion brand, recently faced severe backlash over an advertising campaign that depicted children holding teddy bears dressed in BDSM-inspired outfits. This provocative campaign was widely criticized for being both inappropriate and exploitative, sparking a significant public and media outcry. According to Smith (2022), the depiction of children in such a context was perceived as a blatant disregard for ethical standards in advertising, leading to accusations of normalizing and trivializing inappropriate content.

In response to the intense criticism, Balenciaga acted swiftly to mitigate the damage. The brand removed the controversial ads from circulation, issued a public apology, and initiated an internal investigation to uncover how such an oversight occurred (Johnson, 2022). This investigation aimed to identify the

lapses in the review process that allowed the campaign to be approved and to ensure accountability within the organization.

Furthermore, Balenciaga committed to implementing more stringent review processes for future campaigns. This included setting up additional layers of approval and oversight to prevent similar issues from arising. By doing so, the brand aimed to rebuild trust with its audience and stakeholders, emphasizing a renewed focus on ethical marketing practices (Davis, 2022).

This incident highlights the critical importance of content oversight in the fashion industry. As Davis (2022) notes, provocative marketing strategies can yield significant backlash if not carefully managed. The Balenciaga case serves as a stark reminder of the potential repercussions that brands face when ethical considerations are overlooked in the pursuit of edgy or attention-grabbing content. It underscores the necessity for brands to balance creativity with responsibility, ensuring that their marketing efforts do not cross the boundaries of societal norms and ethical standards.

On November 18, 2018, the Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) released a controversial video across all their social media channels. The video immediately triggered an outcry from the Chinese public, who perceived it as a racist caricature of Chinese culture. The backlash was swift and intense, with many calling for boycotts and condemning the brand for its insensitivity (Chen & Shi, 2019). According to Zhou and Lovari (2021), the controversy highlighted significant cultural missteps and a lack of awareness by the brand.

In response to the crisis, D&G employed several image repair strategies. The company's efforts to address the controversy included issuing apologies and attempting to explain their intentions. However, these responses were met with mixed reactions from the public. Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux (2020) suggest that effective crisis communication must consider the emotional and cultural context of the audience, a factor that D&G appeared to have underestimated.

This study examines D&G's crisis communication efforts from a public-oriented perspective, which contrasts with the traditional corporate-oriented perspectives

commonly found in public relations research (Zhou & Lovari, 2021). By analysing communicative behaviour on Twitter—an increasingly influential platform in China for public discourse—four prominent themes emerged from the public's responses to D&G's crisis communication strategies. The themes identified were: "Apology not enough," "Apology done badly," "Call to unite against D&G," and "Sarcasm, mockery, and abuse" (Wang, 2020).

These themes illustrate the dynamic engagement and critique from the public, highlighting their dissatisfaction with D&G's handling of the situation (Zhou & Lovari, 2021). Coombs (2019) emphasizes that in the age of social media, public perception can quickly shape the narrative of a crisis, making it essential for companies to engage in genuine and culturally sensitive communication.

The case of D&G underscores the theoretical implications of adopting a dynamic, public-oriented perspective (DPOP) on crisis communication. This approach emphasizes the importance of considering public voices and relational dynamics, rather than solely focusing on corporate-oriented strategies (COP). According to Frandsen and Johansen (2021), understanding the public's perspective and engaging in a more interactive communication process can lead to more effective crisis management and repair strategies.

These case studies illustrate that the fashion industry must remain vigilant and proactive in managing potential crises. Brands must prioritize cultural sensitivity, rigorous internal review processes, and swift, sincere responses to public backlash. Effective crisis management not only involves addressing the immediate issue but also implementing long-term changes to prevent future occurrences and rebuild consumer trust.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology section for developing a Crisis Management Plan for Victoria's Secret will adhere to the specificities required for this section. This includes the research design, objectives, details of the sample, materials and instruments used, and the step-by-step procedure.

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for a detailed and nuanced examination of historical events and the response strategies implemented by Victoria's Secret during its crises. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for understanding the complexities and subtleties of crisis management in a corporate setting (Creswell, 2013).

This study employs a qualitative research design to provide an in-depth understanding of Victoria's Secret's crisis management strategies. Qualitative methods are chosen because they allow for a detailed examination of historical events, responses, and outcomes, capturing the complexities and subtleties of crisis management (Creswell, 2013). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the nuanced experiences and strategic decisions made by the brand during various crises.

To begin, we must talk about the objectives of this work. When we talk about general objectives, we find as a general objective "To develop a comprehensive Crisis Management Plan for Victoria's Secret to enhance its crisis management capabilities". But in a more specific way we find:

-Analyze the crisis history. Conduct an in-depth analysis of Victoria's Secret's past crises, including the nature of the crises, the brand's response strategies, and the outcomes. This will involve reviewing a wide range of sources such as press reports, company statements, and academic articles.

-Identify lessons learned. Identify key lessons from past crises to inform future crisis management strategies. This will involve thematic analysis to extract recurring patterns and effective practices from historical data.

-Develop a risk assessment framework. Create a framework to identify and assess potential risks specific to Victoria's Secret, considering factors such as market dynamics, consumer behavior, and operational vulnerabilities.

-Formulate prevention strategies. Develop comprehensive prevention strategies aimed at mitigating identified risks. This will include recommendations for internal and external communication, reputation monitoring, and stakeholder management.

-Design response plans. Formulate detailed response plans for different types of crises, outlining specific steps, roles, and responsibilities of the crisis management team, and effective communication tactics to be employed during a crisis.

-Implement evaluation mechanisms. Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement of the Crisis Management Plan. This will involve setting up regular review processes and incorporating feedback from crisis simulations and actual crisis events.

The sample will include historical documents such as press reports, company statements, academic articles, and previous studies on Victoria's Secret crisis management. Inclusion and exclusion criteria will ensure a representative and comprehensive sample by selecting documents that provide detailed accounts of past crises and responses.

Data will be systematically collected from selected documents, recording information on each crisis, including timelines, actions taken, and outcomes. The data analysis will involve:

-Document review. An extensive review of relevant documents to gather historical and contextual information on Victoria's Secret crises (Bowen, 2009).

-Thematic Analysis. Identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data to draw conclusions on crisis management practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

-Comparative analysis. Evaluating Victoria's Secret crisis strategies against similar brands to identify best practices and areas for improvement (Yin, 2014).

-Data integration. Combining findings from all analysis methods to develop a comprehensive Crisis Management Plan.

Based on the integrated data, develop a Crisis Management Plan comprising the following components:

-Risk identification. Identify primary risks and vulnerabilities faced by the brand, informed by its crisis history and current market trends (Mitroff, 2005).

-Prevention strategies. Develop prevention strategies to mitigate the likelihood of future crises, including recommendations for internal and external communication, reputation monitoring, and stakeholder management (Coombs, 2014).

-Response plans: Formulate detailed response plans for various types of crises, outlining specific steps to be taken, roles and responsibilities of involved teams, and communication tactics to be employed (Fearn-Banks, 2011).

-Evaluation and continuous improvement. Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation of the Crisis Management Plan's effectiveness and periodic updates based on new lessons learned and changes in the business environment (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2011).

This methodology will enable the creation of a robust and adaptable Crisis Management Plan tailored to the specific needs of Victoria's Secret, thereby enhancing its capacity to respond effectively to future crises and ensuring long-term resilience.

Victoria's Secret, a leading brand in the lingerie and beauty industry, has faced numerous challenges over the years, ranging from public relations missteps to evolving market dynamics. Despite its long-standing dominance and strong brand recognition, the company has struggled with maintaining its relevance in an increasingly competitive and socially conscious marketplace. This DAFO (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing Victoria's Secret's current standing and future prospects. By examining the brand's historical crises, this analysis will highlight critical internal and external elements that have shaped its trajectory.

The strengths section explores the inherent advantages that have enabled Victoria's Secret to maintain a prominent position in the market, such as strong brand recognition and resource availability. In contrast, the weaknesses section delves into the internal challenges that have hindered its progress, including public relations missteps and a lack of diversity and inclusivity. The opportunities

section identifies potential areas for growth and improvement, such as embracing inclusivity and expanding digital and e-commerce capabilities. Finally, the threats section outlines external pressures that could further impact the brand's performance, including competitive pressure and changing consumer preferences.

By integrating insights from key academic sources and industry reports, this SWOT analysis aims to provide a strategic framework that Victoria's Secret can leverage to navigate its current challenges and capitalize on future opportunities. This analysis not only sheds light on the brand's past and present but also offers strategic recommendations for enhancing its crisis management and overall market positioning.

Strengths

Strong Brand Recognition: Despite various crises, Victoria's Secret has maintained a strong brand identity and high level of consumer recognition. According to Bhardwaj et al. (2011), brand loyalty can serve as a buffer against negative publicity. This recognition has often acted as a buffer, allowing the brand to retain its market presence even amidst controversies.

Market Leadership: Victoria's Secret has historically been a leader in the lingerie market, which gives it a competitive advantage in terms of market share and customer base (Business Insider, 2019). This leadership has provided a solid foundation for the brand to leverage during recovery phases post-crises.

Resource Availability: As a part of L Brands, Victoria's Secret has access to substantial financial and operational resources, which can be crucial in managing and mitigating crises (Forbes, 2020). These resources enable the brand to implement extensive damage control measures and rebranding efforts.

Weaknesses

Public Relations Missteps: Repeated PR blunders, such as controversial statements from executives, have damaged the brand's image. For instance, former CMO Ed Razek's comments on the exclusion of transgender models

sparked widespread backlash (Mulkerrins, 2019). Such missteps have damaged the brand's image and highlighted a disconnect with contemporary societal values.

Lack of Diversity and Inclusion: The brand has been criticized for its lack of diversity in marketing and runway shows, which has alienated a significant portion of its potential customer base (Rodulfo, 2020). The historical emphasis on a narrow standard of beauty has alienated a broad segment of potential customers, reducing the brand's appeal and relevance.

Outdated Brand Image: The "fantasy" image promoted by Victoria's Secret has been seen as out of touch with modern values of body positivity and inclusivity (Samsioe, 2019). This outdated image has contributed to declining sales and viewership of the annual fashion show.

Opportunities

Shift Towards Inclusivity: There is a significant opportunity to rebrand by embracing inclusivity and diversity, reflecting broader societal changes and consumer expectations (Coombs, 2014). By featuring a diverse range of models and promoting body positivity, the brand can appeal to a wider customer base.

Digital and E-commerce Expansion: The rise of digital marketing and e-commerce presents an opportunity to reach a broader and more diverse audience (Kumar, 2018). Investing in digital transformation and enhancing e-commerce capabilities can help Victoria's Secret engage with younger, digitally savvy consumers.

Partnerships and Collaborations: Engaging in strategic partnerships with influencers and other brands can help Victoria's Secret modernize its image and reach new demographics (Deloitte, 2019). Collaborations with advocates of diversity and inclusion can also bolster the brand's credibility.

Threats

Competitive Pressure: Increasing competition from brands like Savage X Fenty, which emphasize inclusivity and body positivity, poses a significant threat to

Victoria's Secret's market share (Business Insider, 2019). These competitors are setting new industry standards that Victoria's Secret must meet or exceed.

Changing Consumer Preferences: Modern consumers favor brands that align with their values, such as sustainability, diversity, and ethical practices, areas where Victoria's Secret has struggled (Euromonitor International, 2020). Victoria's Secret's historical image conflicts with these preferences, making it challenging to attract and retain customers.

Reputation Damage: Ongoing negative publicity and unresolved issues can lead to long-term reputation damage, affecting customer loyalty and sales (Coombs, 2007). he brand must proactively address past controversies and demonstrate a genuine commitment to change to mitigate this threat.

The SWOT analysis of Victoria's Secret, focused on its historical crises, reveals critical areas for improvement. The brand's strengths, such as strong recognition and market leadership, provide a solid foundation for recovery. However, weaknesses in public relations, diversity, and an outdated brand image need to be addressed urgently. Opportunities lie in rebranding towards inclusivity, digital expansion, and strategic collaborations. Meanwhile, threats from competitive pressure, changing consumer preferences, and potential reputation damage must be managed carefully. By leveraging its strengths and opportunities while mitigating weaknesses and threats, Victoria's Secret can navigate its historical crises and move towards a more inclusive and resilient future.

4. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

4.1 Brief history of the brand: Victoria's Secret

Victoria's Secret, the iconic lingerie brand, has woven itself into the fabric of pop culture, epitomizing glamour, allure, and beauty (Rigby, 2018). Over the decades, it has served as a launching pad for numerous supermodels, from Tyra Banks to Gigi Hadid, shaping the industry's standards of beauty and elegance (Hill, 2018). From its humble beginnings in the late '70s to its recent efforts to redefine its image, Victoria's Secret has experienced a rollercoaster journey of success and challenges (Moin, 2021).

In 1977, Roy Raymond founded Victoria's Secret in response to his discomfort while shopping for lingerie in traditional department stores (Toobin, 1993). His vision was to create a more appealing and intimate shopping experience, catering initially to men with dark, moody aesthetics reminiscent of the "red room" in Fifty Shades of Grey (Stone, 2021). However, despite Raymond's innovative approach, the company struggled financially until Leslie Wexner stepped in and acquired it in 1982 for around $1 million (Goldberg, 2001). Under Wexner's leadership, Victoria's Secret underwent a transformation, shifting its focus to target female consumers with bright, bold lingerie in fun and flirty stores (Pash, 2020).

Throughout the '90s, Victoria's Secret experienced unprecedented success, becoming the largest lingerie retailer in the United States with over 350 stores and sales surpassing $1 billion (Business Insider, 2018). The introduction of the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show in 1995 further solidified its status as a cultural phenomenon, showcasing elaborate lingerie creations and featuring renowned supermodels on the runway (Kwan, 2017).

The brand's iconic Angels, including Candice Swanepoel and Adriana Lima, became the faces of Victoria's Secret, embodying its glamorous image (Wong, 2017). The introduction of the "Fantasy Bra" in 1996, adorned with diamonds and worn by supermodels like Tyra Banks and Heidi Klum, added to the brand's allure and extravagance (Hendrickson, 2017).

However, despite its initial success, Victoria's Secret faced challenges in the 2010s as sales began to decline between 2016 and 2018 (Edelson, 2019). The brand came under scrutiny for its lack of inclusivity, particularly highlighted by controversial remarks made by Ed Razek, the Chief Marketing Officer for L Brands, which owned Victoria's Secret do. Razek's comments underscored a perception of the brand as exclusive and catered only to a narrow standard of beauty (Moniuszko, 2018).

In 2019, the cancellation of the annual Victoria's Secret fashion show marked the end of an era, signaling the need for a new direction (Paton, 2019). Victoria's Secret announced a rebranding effort in 2021, bidding farewell to its Angels and

introducing a new ambassador program focused on diversity and empowerment (Paton, 2021). Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Adut Akech, and Eileen Gu were among the notable names selected to represent the brand's new vision (Lieber, 2021).

Furthermore, Victoria's Secret has taken steps to diversify its offerings and representation. In 2021, Puerto Rican model Sofía Jirau became the first-ever Victoria's Secret model with Down Syndrome, while actor Darren Barnet became the brand's first male ambassador, signaling a shift towards inclusivity and representation across various demographics (Reilly, 2021).

As Victoria's Secret continues to evolve and adapt to changing societal norms and consumer expectations, its journey reflects the broader shifts in the fashion industry towards inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment (Lieber, 2021). Through its rebranding efforts and commitment to social responsibility, Victoria's Secret aims to reclaim its position as a trailblazer in the lingerie industry while championing a more inclusive and diverse definition of beauty (Paton, 2021).

4.2 Motivation behind the brand

4. 2. 1. Mission

Victoria's Secret endeavors to empower women and celebrate their individuality through the provision of lingerie, apparel, and beauty products designed to instill confidence and enhance their sense of beauty. The brand is committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse community where women of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds feel recognized and esteemed. Through a multifaceted approach encompassing product offerings, promotional campaigns, and various initiatives, Victoria's Secret aspires to inspire and elevate women, encouraging them to embrace their distinctive attributes and express their true selves authentically (Victoria's Secret, 2021).

4. 2. 2. Vision

The overarching vision of Victoria's Secret is to emerge as a preeminent global advocate for women's empowerment and inclusivity. Envisioning a world where women are empowered to define their own standards of beauty and sensuality,

independent of societal conventions and constraints, the brand seeks to cultivate an environment of acceptance, diversity, and equality within its organizational framework and among its clientele. By championing diversity and advocating for self-expression, Victoria's Secret aims to cultivate a pervasive sense of empowerment and self-assurance among women across the globe (Victoria's Secret, 2021).

4. 2. 3. SWOT analysis of Victoria's Secret

Strengths:

Victoria's Secret possesses several strengths that have contributed to its success in the lingerie and beauty market. One of its primary strengths is its strong brand recognition, built over decades of successful marketing campaigns and high-profile fashion shows. According to Keller (1993), brand recognition is essential for establishing a competitive advantage and fostering customer loyalty, both of which Victoria's Secret has achieved.

Additionally, Victoria's Secret boasts an extensive product range, including lingerie, apparel, beauty products, and accessories. This diversification allows the brand to cater to a wide range of customer preferences and increase its revenue streams. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) suggest that a diverse product portfolio can enhance a company's competitiveness and appeal to different market segments.

Furthermore, the brand has established a robust presence in the retail market, with numerous brick-and-mortar stores and a strong online presence. This omnichannel approach enables Victoria's Secret to reach customers through various touchpoints, enhancing accessibility and convenience (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016).

Weaknesses:

Despite its strengths, Victoria's Secret faces several weaknesses that pose challenges to its sustainability and growth. One notable weakness is its lack of diversity in marketing and advertising. The brand has been criticized for its limited

representation of diverse body types and ethnicities, which may alienate potential customers and damage its brand image. As noted by Keller (1993), failure to adapt to changing societal norms and consumer preferences can result in negative publicity and declining sales.

Additionally, Victoria's Secret has experienced declining sales in recent years, attributed to changing consumer preferences, increased competition, and controversies surrounding the brand. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) emphasize the importance of staying attuned to market trends and continuously innovating to maintain competitiveness in the industry.

Furthermore, the brand's reliance on traditional marketing strategies, such as fashion shows and celebrity endorsements, may limit its appeal to younger, digitally savvy consumers who prefer authentic and inclusive brand experiences. To remain relevant, Victoria's Secret must adapt its marketing tactics to resonate with evolving consumer preferences and shopping behaviors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

Opportunities:

Despite its weaknesses, Victoria's Secret has several opportunities for growth and expansion. One opportunity is to embrace diversity and inclusivity in its marketing campaigns and product offerings. By featuring a more diverse range of models and celebrating different body types and ethnicities, the brand can appeal to a broader customer base and enhance its brand relevance. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), brands that prioritize inclusivity and authenticity can forge stronger emotional connections with consumers and drive long-term loyalty.

Additionally, Victoria's Secret has the opportunity to expand into new markets and product categories. With the rise of emerging markets and changing consumer preferences, the brand can diversify its offerings to include athleisure wear, loungewear, and sustainable fashion. By leveraging its strong brand equity and customer base, Victoria's Secret can capitalize on new revenue streams and strengthen its competitive position in the market (Keller, 1993).

Furthermore, investing in digital transformation and enhancing its e-commerce capabilities can help Victoria's Secret engage with younger consumers and adapt to shifting shopping habits. By offering personalized shopping experiences, omnichannel integration, and seamless online transactions, the brand can improve customer satisfaction and drive online sales growth (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016).

Threats:

Despite its opportunities, Victoria's Secret faces several threats that could impact its business operations and brand reputation. One significant threat is intense competition from both traditional lingerie retailers and direct-to-consumer brands. As consumers increasingly prioritize authenticity, inclusivity, and sustainability, Victoria's Secret must contend with competitors that offer diverse product ranges, inclusive marketing, and ethical practices. Failure to differentiate itself in a crowded market could result in lost market share and diminished brand relevance (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

Additionally, negative publicity and ongoing controversies surrounding the brand pose a threat to its reputation and customer trust. In an era of social media and heightened transparency, brands are subject to greater scrutiny, and missteps can quickly escalate into public relations crises. Victoria's Secret must proactively address issues related to diversity, inclusivity, and ethical practices to mitigate reputational damage and maintain consumer loyalty (Keller, 1993).

Furthermore, economic uncertainty and fluctuations in consumer spending pose risks to Victoria's Secret's sales and profitability. Economic downturns and shifts in consumer behavior could impact demand for discretionary products like lingerie and beauty products, leading to reduced sales and revenue. To mitigate these risks, the brand must remain agile and responsive to changes in the macroeconomic environment, while also focusing on cost management and operational efficiency.

In conclusion, Victoria's Secret faces a complex set of internal and external factors that influence its competitive position and prospects. By leveraging its

strengths, addressing its weaknesses, capitalizing on opportunities, and mitigating threats, the brand can navigate the evolving landscape of the lingerie and beauty market and position itself for sustainable growth and success.

5. PRACTICAL STEP: CREATION OF A CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR VICTORIA'S SECRET

Victoria's Secret, a prominent name in the lingerie and beauty industry, has faced significant crises over the years, challenging its market dominance and brand reputation. These crises range from public relations blunders to criticisms regarding inclusivity and body positivity, reflecting broader societal changes and evolving consumer expectations. The necessity for a robust Crisis Management Program (CMP) is paramount for the brand to navigate these turbulent waters effectively and maintain its competitive edge.

Developing a CMP for Victoria's Secret involves a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that draws on past crises to inform future strategies. This process is essential not only for immediate crisis resolution but also for long-term brand resilience and reputation management. The methodological approach leverages qualitative research techniques to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in corporate crisis management (Creswell, 2013).

By examining Victoria's Secret's historical crises through document analysis and thematic and comparative analysis, this study aims to develop a tailored CMP that addresses the unique challenges and vulnerabilities of the brand. This program will incorporate best practices from industry leaders and adapt them to Victoria's Secret's specific context, ensuring that the brand is better prepared to handle future crises effectively.

5. 1. Analysis of crises in Victoria's Secret

The evolution of brand management in the contemporary retail industry is often marked by pivotal crises that compel organizations to re-evaluate their strategies and ethos. A quintessential case study in this regard is Victoria's Secret, a brand historically synonymous with the idealized standards of beauty. The trajectory of Victoria's Secret, especially over the past decade, underscores significant

challenges and transformations within the realm of marketing and consumer engagement.

In 2018, Ed Razek, the Chief Marketing Officer of Victoria's Secret, made controversial comments that excluded transgender models from the brand's fashion shows. This incident ignited widespread backlash, casting a spotlight on the brand's exclusivity and perceived insensitivity to contemporary social values (Smith, 2018). The public outcry was immediate and intense, leading to a substantial reputational damage for Victoria's Secret. The company's response involved issuing an apology, and eventually, Razek's departure from his role, which marked the beginning of a rebranding effort aimed at fostering inclusivity (Johnson & Thompson, 2019).

Victoria's Secret has also been consistently criticized for its lack of diversity in both marketing campaigns and runway presentations. Scholars such as Brown and Williams (2020) highlight that the exclusionary practices not only alienated a diverse customer base but also contributed to declining sales and a tarnished brand image. In response, the company-initiated measures to feature more diverse models, thereby attempting to realign its image with a broader and more inclusive representation of beauty (Miller, 2021).

The brand's adherence to a narrow and idealized beauty standard has increasingly clashed with the evolving societal values of body positivity and inclusivity. The academic discourse by Garcia and Lee (2019) suggests that this disconnect has significantly contributed to consumer alienation. The rise of inclusive competitors such as Savage X Fenty, which embraces a wide range of body types and ethnicities, further exacerbated Victoria's Secret's challenges. Consequently, the brand has undertaken leadership changes and launched comprehensive rebranding efforts, including the cancellation of its annual fashion show, to modernize its image and resonate with contemporary consumer values (Davis, 2020).

To provide a comprehensive understanding of effective crisis management, it is valuable to compare Victoria's Secret's approach with that of its competitors, particularly Savage X Fenty, which has successfully implemented inclusive

practices since its inception. Founded by Rihanna, Savage X Fenty has built its brand identity on inclusivity and diversity, catering to a wide range of body types, ethnicities, and genders. This commitment to representation has not only strengthened its brand reputation but also positioned it as a direct competitor to Victoria's Secret, appealing to modern consumers who prioritize values of authenticity and inclusivity in their purchasing decisions (Fournier & Herman, 2021).

Savage X Fenty's inclusivity strategy extends beyond mere marketing; it is embedded in every aspect of the brand's operations and product design. By showcasing models of diverse backgrounds and body types in its advertising campaigns and runway shows, Savage X Fenty has successfully redefined beauty standards within the lingerie industry, gaining consumer loyalty and brand equity. According to Wallace and Bennett (2020), this approach has shielded Savage X Fenty from reputational crises related to inclusivity, as the brand aligns with societal demands for representation and authenticity.

In contrast, Victoria's Secret has historically adhered to a more traditional, exclusive portrayal of beauty, which has become increasingly out of step with contemporary social expectations. This disconnect contributed to its struggles with consumer perception and necessitated rebranding efforts to address its outdated image (Davis, 2020). The inclusion of a decision matrix within Victoria's Secret's crisis management framework, as discussed earlier, could guide the Crisis Management Team (CMT) in making prompt, criteria-based decisions, helping to avoid public backlash related to inclusivity issues. For instance, Savage X Fenty's decision-making model prioritizes diversity and representation, factors that could strengthen Victoria's Secret's crisis response strategy.

This comparative perspective illustrates that adopting inclusive practices from the outset, as demonstrated by Savage X Fenty, can prevent certain types of crises altogether, supporting the need for proactive reputation management strategies (Kim & Lee, 2018).

The cancellation of the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show in 2019 symbolizes a critical juncture in the brand's strategy. Once a hallmark event, the fashion show

had become emblematic of the brand's outdated and exclusive image (Harris, 2020). The declining viewership and growing criticism underscored the need for a strategic pivot. By canceling the show, Victoria's Secret aimed to align its marketing approach with the inclusive and diverse ethos increasingly demanded by today's consumers (Clark, 2021).

In summary, the crises faced by Victoria's Secret over the past years highlight a significant shift in brand management practices within the retail industry. The company's journey from controversy to rebranding reflects broader trends towards inclusivity and diversity, underscoring the imperative for brands to adapt to changing societal values in order to sustain relevance and consumer trust (Rodriguez & Evans, 2021).

5. 1. 1 2018 Controversial Comments by CMO Ed Razek

In 2018, Ed Razek, the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of L Brands, the parent company of Victoria's Secret, made controversial comments in an interview with Vogue. These comments sparked significant backlash and highlighted ongoing issues of inclusivity and diversity within the fashion industry. This report examines the incident, its implications, and the broader context within the fashion sector, citing relevant academic literature.

During the interview, Razek made remarks about the inclusion of transgender and plus-size models in the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. He stated, "Shouldn't you have transsexuals in the show? No. No, I don't think we should. Well, why not? Because the show is a fantasy. It's a 42-minute entertainment special. That's what it is" (Vogue, 2018). These comments were widely criticized for being exclusionary and out of touch with evolving societal norms regarding gender and body diversity.

The comments by Razek were met with immediate backlash from the public, media, and advocacy groups. The controversy underscored the growing demand for greater representation and inclusivity in fashion, as consumers increasingly expect brands to reflect diverse body types and gender identities.

According to Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the effectiveness of a crisis response is significantly influenced by the perceived appropriateness and sensitivity of the organization's communication. In this instance, Victoria's Secret's initial response was perceived as dismissive, exacerbating the negative reaction. Coombs states, "Effective crisis communication is built on a foundation of transparency and accountability."

The fallout from Razek's comments had significant repercussions for Victoria's Secret. The brand, which had already been facing declining sales and criticism for its lack of inclusivity, saw further damage to its reputation. This incident contributed to a broader critique of the brand's outdated business model and marketing strategies.

According to Huber et al. (2015), consumers are increasingly valuing corporate social responsibility (CSR) and are more likely to support brands that demonstrate ethical practices and inclusivity. The study highlights, "Addressing ethical concerns proactively and incorporating CSR into the brand's core values can enhance resilience during a crisis." Victoria's Secret's failure to align with these values likely contributed to its continued struggles.

The incident with Razek reflects a larger issue within the fashion industry regarding inclusivity and representation. The industry's historical emphasis on narrow beauty standards has been increasingly challenged by a push for diversity. As Kietzmann et al. (2011) note, "Social media allows brands to engage directly with their audience, providing real-time updates and addressing concerns promptly." The swift spread of Razek's comments on social media platforms amplified the public's reaction and underscored the need for brands to be more inclusive and responsive to consumer expectations.

In the Vogue interview review in which the scandal broke out Ed Razek defended Victoria's Secret's traditional image, emphasizing the fantasy element of its fashion shows. He acknowledged the criticism regarding inclusivity but maintained that the brand targeted a specific market segment. The interview addressed the decreasing viewership of the annual fashion show, attributing it to changes in media consumption and increased competition from digital platforms.

Razek and Mitro spoke about efforts to modernize the brand, though critics viewed these changes as insufficient.

Razek stated that Victoria's Secret would not include transgender or plus-size models in its fashion show, as it is a "fantasy." This remark was seen as exclusionary and out of touch with contemporary values. The comments were met with immediate criticism from the public and industry professionals, highlighting a disconnect between the brand and modern consumer expectations. Despite Razek's public apology, the incident severely damaged the brand's reputation, underscoring the need for significant changes within Victoria's Secret.

Abbott's chapter, "Bodies Under Scrutiny" (2022) discusses the longstanding exclusion and misrepresentation of transgender individuals in American media, highlighting the importance of inclusive representation. The article emphasizes how media representation shapes societal attitudes, with positive portrayal fostering acceptance and negative portrayal perpetuating stigma. Abbott critiques how media reinforces traditional gender norms, with inclusive representation challenging these norms and promoting broader acceptance. Abbott's analysis supports the criticism against Razek's comments, illustrating the necessity for inclusivity in media and fashion to align with evolving societal values.

The controversy surrounding Ed Razek's comments can be analyzed through several themes:

- Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity: Razek's comments reflect an exclusivity that has traditionally characterized Victoria's Secret's brand image. This contrasts sharply with the modern emphasis on inclusivity, where brands are increasingly expected to represent diverse body types and gender identities. Abbott's analysis underscores this shift, showing how media representation has evolved to become more inclusive.

- Consumer Expectations and Brand Relevance: The public backlash against Victoria's Secret highlights a growing disconnect between the brand and contemporary consumer expectations. As noted in the reviews, consumers today value diversity and inclusivity, and brands that fail to align with these

values risk losing relevance. The decline in the viewership of the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show and the company's struggling sales are indicative of this broader trend.

- Crisis Management and Corporate Responsibility: According to Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the effectiveness of a crisis response is significantly influenced by the perceived appropriateness and sensitivity of the organization's communication. Victoria's Secret's initial dismissive response exacerbated the negative reaction, highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability in crisis management.

- Impact of social media: Social media played a crucial role in amplifying the public's reaction to Razek's comments. As Kietzmann et al. (2011) note, social media allows brands to engage directly with their audience, providing real-time updates and addressing concerns promptly. The swift spread of Razek's comments on social media platforms underscores the need for brands to be responsive and inclusive in their communication strategies.

The data from various sources, including academic literature, media reviews, and public reactions, provide a comprehensive understanding of the crisis faced by Victoria's Secret in 2018. The integration of these data points highlights several key insights:

The importance of inclusivity in modern branding: As Huber et al. (2015) highlight, consumers increasingly value corporate social responsibility and ethical practices. Brands that demonstrate inclusivity are more likely to garner consumer support and maintain resilience during crises.

The evolving landscape of media representation: Abbott's analysis of trans representation in media underscores the necessity for brands to evolve with societal norms. Inclusive representation in media fosters acceptance and challenges traditional gender norms, aligning with contemporary values.

The critical role of effective crisis communication: Coombs' SCCT emphasizes the need for transparent and accountable communication during crises. Victoria's

Secret's failure to effectively manage the crisis following Razek's comments contributed to the further erosion of its brand reputation.

The 2018 crisis faced by Victoria's Secret, triggered by Ed Razek's controversial comments, highlighted significant issues within the brand and the fashion industry. The incident underscored the importance of inclusivity and representation in modern media and fashion. As societal values continue to evolve towards greater acceptance and diversity, brands must adapt to remain relevant and maintain consumer trust. The reviews of the Vogue interview, the Vanity Fair article, and T.B. Abbott's scholarly analysis collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the controversy and its broader implications for Victoria's Secret and the fashion industry.

5. 1. 2. Diversity and Inclusivity Criticisms

Victoria's Secret has faced significant criticism regarding its diversity and inclusivity efforts over the years. Historically, the brand was known for its annual fashion shows featuring a narrow standard of beauty centered on thin, predominantly white supermodels. This approach led to backlash as societal values shifted towards greater inclusivity and representation in media and fashion.

In 2018, Ed Razek, then the Chief Marketing Officer, sparked outrage with his controversial comments about not including transgender and plus-size models in the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, describing the show as a "fantasy" that did not cater to these groups. This incident highlighted the brand's outdated perspectives and further damaged its reputation.

In response to declining sales and mounting criticism, Victoria's Secret undertook a major rebranding effort starting in 2021. This included introducing the "VS Collective," a group of diverse and influential women such as Megan Rapinoe and Priyanka Chopra, replacing the traditional "Angels." The company also diversified its leadership, with six out of seven board members now being women.

Despite these efforts, the brand's rebranding has been met with skepticism. Critics argue that the changes are superficial and primarily a reaction to market

pressures rather than a genuine commitment to inclusivity. They point to the slow pace of change and the brand's historical issues, such as past misogyny and lack of diversity in its campaigns, as indicators of a deeper problem that a rebranding alone cannot fix.

Moreover, some feel that Victoria's Secret's attempts to emulate more inclusive brands like Savage X Fenty and Aerie come across as inauthentic and belated. These newer brands had already captured market share by addressing the needs of a more diverse customer base, offering a wider range of sizes and more inclusive marketing much earlier than Victoria's Secret.

Overall, while Victoria's Secret has made strides towards a more inclusive image, the brand continues to face challenges in convincing the public of its sincerity and overcoming the negative legacy of its past practices. Victoria's Secret, once a dominant force in the lingerie market, has faced significant criticism and challenges over its approach to diversity and inclusivity. This document reviews the brand's historical context, rebranding efforts, criticisms, and strategic implications based on detailed analyses from Adweek, Impakter, Business Insider Africa, and Northeastern Global News.

Victoria's Secret established itself with a narrow, sexualized ideal of femininity. This image was heavily promoted through their fashion shows and marketing campaigns, leading to widespread criticism for perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards (Adweek, 2022). Competitors like Aerie and Savage X Fenty embraced diversity and body positivity early on, capturing significant market share and shifting consumer expectations (Business Insider Africa, 2024).

The VS Collective features diverse and influential women from various fields, including Megan Rapinoe and Paloma Elesser, aiming to project a more inclusive brand image. The company appointed a predominantly female board and implemented new initiatives focusing on inclusivity and women's issues (Impakter, 2024).

The fashion show was reimagined as a feature-length film, in collaboration with Amazon, to broaden its reach (Business Insider Africa, 2024).

Critics argue that despite featuring diverse models, the underlying beauty standards remain unchanged, making the inclusivity efforts seem superficial (Adweek, 2022). The rebranding efforts are perceived as reactionary, prompted by market pressures rather than a genuine commitment to change. The brand's past controversies, including ties to Jeffrey Epstein and allegations of sexual harassment, further undermine its credibility (Business Insider Africa, 2024; Northeastern Global News, 2021). Idealized imagery continues to harm self-esteem, particularly among adolescents, and the brand's efforts have been criticized for not fully breaking away from established norms (Northeastern Global News, 2021).

Restoring trust requires more than rebranding; it necessitates a cultural overhaul reflected in all aspects of the brand's operations and messaging. Authentic engagement with diverse communities and consistent representation are crucial. While rebranding has shown some positive financial impacts, sustained success will depend on profound and genuine cultural shifts within the company (Impakter, 2024). True inclusivity involves ongoing efforts to diversify representation, address past wrongs transparently, and demonstrate a consistent commitment to ethical practices.

Victoria's Secret's journey towards inclusivity highlights both positive strides and significant challenges. The brand's efforts to rebrand and embrace diversity are steps in the right direction, but true transformation requires authentic cultural change and sustained commitment. The critical analyses emphasize the importance of moving beyond superficial adjustments to foster a more inclusive and authentic brand identity.

In recent years, the fashion industry has witnessed a paradigm shift towards inclusivity and diversity, largely influenced by consumer demand for representation and ethical corporate practices. Brands like Savage X Fenty and Aerie have been at the forefront of this movement, setting new industry standards through proactive inclusivity and transparent brand messaging. Comparing Victoria's Secret's strategies to those of Savage X Fenty and Aerie provides

insight into the effectiveness of varying approaches within the competitive landscape.

Savage X Fenty, led by Rihanna, exemplifies a brand that has embedded inclusivity into its core identity. The brand's runway shows, featuring models of diverse body types, ethnicities, and gender identities, have been celebrated for challenging traditional beauty norms (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This inclusive approach has resonated strongly with consumers, contributing to a 200% sales increase in 2019 and an estimated 15% market share in the U.S. lingerie market by 2021 (Business Insider, 2021). Savage X Fenty's success illustrates the value of a proactive inclusivity strategy that aligns with contemporary consumer values.

Similarly, Aerie's #AerieREAL campaign, launched in 2014, committed to not retouching photos of models, promoting natural beauty and inclusivity. This campaign has been particularly effective among younger demographics who value authenticity. The brand reported a 32% year-over-year revenue increase in 2020, underscoring the financial viability of ethical branding (American Eagle Outfitters, 2020). By addressing societal values directly in its campaigns, Aerie has built a loyal customer base and differentiated itself from competitors such as Victoria's Secret.

These examples highlight the stark contrast between Victoria's Secret's reactive approach and the proactive stances taken by Savage X Fenty and Aerie. While Victoria's Secret has made strides towards inclusivity, these efforts have often been perceived as belated and reactionary. For example, the introduction of the VS Collective, a group of diverse brand ambassadors, in 2021 was seen by some consumers as a superficial response to market pressures rather than a genuine shift in brand philosophy (RetailWire, 2021). In contrast, Savage X Fenty and Aerie's inclusivity initiatives appear more organic, resonating with consumers who prioritize authenticity in brand messaging (Brown & Williams, 2020).

Implications for Victoria's Secret Victoria's Secret can learn valuable lessons from these competitors. Embracing a more authentic approach to diversity and ensuring that its inclusivity efforts are reflected in all areas of its brand, not just in marketing, could enhance its reputation and align it with contemporary values. A

shift towards transparency, combined with an honest engagement with diverse communities, would foster greater public trust and help Victoria's Secret regain its footing in the competitive lingerie market.

5. 1. 3. Outdated Brand Image

Victoria's Secret has faced significant challenges in recent years regarding its outdated brand image, leading to a series of crises and efforts to rebrand. Historically, the brand's marketing focused heavily on a hypersexualized, glamorous aesthetic that began to fall out of favor as societal attitudes towards body diversity and inclusivity evolved. This shift became particularly pronounced during the #MeToo era, which emphasized the importance of diverse and realistic body images in media and advertising.

Between 2016 and 2018, Victoria's Secret saw a substantial decline in market share, dropping from 33% to 24% in the US. Critics and consumers alike pointed out the brand's slow adaptation to trends favoring more comfortable and inclusive lingerie options, such as bralettes and sports bras, which competitors like Aerie capitalized on effectively. Additionally, controversial comments by executives and the over-sexualized nature of their fashion shows exacerbated the perception of the brand as out of touch and insensitive.

In response, Victoria's Secret has made several attempts to revamp its image. This included discontinuing its famous Angels and fashion show, and instead introducing the "VS Collective," featuring diverse figures such as soccer star Megan Rapinoe, actress Priyanka Chopra, and model Paloma Elsesser. These ambassadors were chosen to promote a message of empowerment and inclusivity. However, the rebranding efforts have faced backlash, with some consumers perceiving the changes as insincere or reactionary rather than genuine commitments to change. The authenticity of these efforts has been questioned, and the brand has struggled to win back trust and regain market share.

While the shift towards inclusivity is seen as a necessary step, it has also alienated some of Victoria's Secret's traditional customer base who feel

disconnected from the new brand direction. The company continues to navigate these challenges as it seeks to balance its heritage with modern expectations of diversity and authenticity in its branding.

Victoria's Secret, once a dominant force in the lingerie industry, has faced a significant crisis regarding its outdated brand image. This document review synthesizes findings from various sources, examining the brand's rebranding efforts, challenges, and the broader implications for its market position.

The primary themes emerging from the review include:

- Historical Context and Market Position: Historically, Victoria's Secret capitalized on a hypersexualized image, exemplified by its famous "Angels" and annual fashion shows. This image began to clash with evolving societal values emphasizing body positivity and inclusivity.

- Rebranding Efforts: In response to declining sales and market share, Victoria's Secret initiated a rebranding strategy, replacing the "Angels" with the VS Collective. This group includes diverse figures such as athletes, activists, and plus-sized models (RetailWire, 2021). The rebranding also involved expanding product lines to include more inclusive options and reducing the overtly sexual nature of its advertisements (Brand Vision, 2024).

- Challenges and Criticisms: The rebranding has faced skepticism regarding its authenticity. Critics argue that the efforts seem reactionary rather than genuine, risking alienation of the brand's traditional customer base (Business Insider, 2024). Issues with product quality and execution timing further complicated the brand's transformation (Northeastern Global News, 2024).

Comparing Victoria's Secret to competitors such as Aerie and Savage X Fenty highlights key differences:

- Inclusivity and Body Positivity: Aerie and Savage X Fenty embraced inclusivity early on, featuring diverse models and promoting body positivity. This proactive approach contrasts with Victoria's Secret's perceived reactionary shift (Business Insider, 2024).

- Market Response: Victoria's Secret's rebranding, while necessary, has struggled to regain market share lost to these competitors, who are seen as more authentic in their inclusive messaging (RetailWire, 2021).

Data from various sources illustrate the impact of these branding issues. For example, a market share decline between 2016 and 2018, Victoria's Secret's market share in the US dropped from 33% to 24% (Business Insider, 2024). Surveys indicate mixed reactions to the rebranding, with some applauding the inclusivity while others miss the traditional glamorous image (RetailWire, 2021).

Victoria's Secret's efforts to modernize its brand image highlight the complexities of rebranding in response to shifting societal values. While necessary, the success of these efforts hinges on the brand's ability to authentically integrate new values without alienating its core customer base.

5. 1. 4. Fashion Show Cancellation

The cancellation of the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show in 2019 marked a significant turning point for the brand, which had faced increasing criticism for its lack of diversity and inclusivity. The decision to cancel the show was influenced by multiple factors, including declining viewership, controversies over the brand's portrayal of women, and growing competition from more inclusive brands like Savage x Fenty by Rihanna and Aerie.

The controversy was fueled by comments from Victoria's Secret's former Chief Marketing Officer, Ed Razek, who made dismissive remarks about including plus size and transgender models in the show, framing the event as a "fantasy" that did not align with such representations. This narrow view of beauty sparked backlash and further damaged the brand's reputation.

In response to these issues, Victoria's Secret attempted a rebrand, launching "The Victoria's Secret World Tour" in 2023. This new format aimed to celebrate diversity and creativity by featuring global designers and artists. The show, presented as a documentary-style film, focused on fashion, art, and culture from cities like Bogotá, Lagos, London, and Tokyo. Despite these efforts, the reimagined show received mixed reviews. Critics noted that while there was an

effort to include more diverse models, the predominant focus remained on traditionally slim body types, and the representation of disabled models was notably absent.

Overall, the cancellation and subsequent rebranding efforts reflect Victoria's Secret's struggle to adapt to a changing market that increasingly values inclusivity and authentic representation. The brand's future success will likely depend on its ability to genuinely embrace these values and move away from its historically narrow standards of beauty.

Victoria's Secret's decision to cancel its iconic fashion show in 2019 marked a significant shift for the brand, reflecting broader cultural changes and consumer expectations regarding diversity and inclusivity. This review synthesizes findings from multiple sources, including Madison Chastain's article in the National Catholic Reporter, Katherine Singh's article in FASHION Magazine, and a Victoria's Secret press release.

The primary themes emerging from the sources include the critique of Victoria's Secret's traditional beauty standards, the impact of consumer activism, and the brand's attempts at rebranding and inclusion.

- Critique of Traditional Beauty Standards: Chastain and Singh both highlight the problematic aspects of Victoria's Secret's historical portrayal of women. Chastain notes that despite rebranding efforts, the emphasis on slim models persists, with limited representation of plus size and disabled models (Chastain, 2023). Singh echoes this by discussing the backlash against Ed Razek's comments and the brand's narrow definition of beauty, which failed to keep pace with societal shifts (Singh, 2019).

- Impact of Consumer Activism: Both articles emphasize the role of consumer activism in driving the cancellation of the fashion show. Singh points out that younger, more socially conscious consumers demand brands reflect their values, leading to a decline in Victoria's Secret's popularity and sales (Singh, 2019). Chastain also touches on this shift, suggesting that consumer

expectations for genuine inclusivity have pressured the brand to reconsider its approach (Chastain, 2023).

- Rebranding and Inclusion Efforts: The Victoria's Secret press release outlines a new direction for the brand, focusing on global diversity and artistic collaboration (Victoria's Secret, 2023). However, both Chastain and Singh question the authenticity and effectiveness of these efforts, suggesting that the changes may be more cosmetic than substantive.

Comparing the sources reveals a consistent narrative, Victoria's Secret's rebranding efforts have been met with skepticism due to the persistent issues of exclusion and superficial changes. Chastain provides a detailed critique of the rebranded show, noting the lack of genuine inclusivity despite the new format. Singh, on the other hand, focuses more on the historical context and the brand's failure to adapt to changing consumer values. Both authors agree that the rebranding has not fully addressed the underlying issues. The press release presents an optimistic view of the rebranding, emphasizing artistic collaboration and diversity (Victoria's Secret, 2023). However, the critiques by Chastain and Singh highlight the discrepancy between the brand's messaging and its actual practices, suggesting that more substantive changes are needed.

To integrate data, consider the following points:

- Declining Viewership and Sales: Singh (2019) notes the decline in viewership for the fashion show and the drop in sales, which can be attributed to the brand's outdated portrayal of beauty.

- Consumer Preferences: Both Chastain and Singh highlight the shift in consumer preferences towards more inclusive and diverse representations in fashion, driven by brands like Savage x Fenty.

- Rebranding Outcomes: The press release indicates an attempt to redefine the brand through "The Victoria's Secret World Tour" (Victoria's Secret, 2023), but the critiques suggest that these efforts have not yet resonated fully with the intended audience.

Victoria's Secret's cancellation of its fashion show and subsequent rebranding efforts reflects a critical juncture for the brand. Despite attempts to embrace diversity and inclusivity, significant skepticism remains about the authenticity and impact of these changes. Future success will likely depend on the brand's ability to make deeper, more meaningful transformations that align with contemporary cultural values.

5.2. Victoria's Secret Crisis Management Plan

Victoria's Secret, a leading name in the lingerie industry, has experienced significant challenges in recent years, necessitating a profound reevaluation of its brand management strategies. Historically celebrated for its glamorous and highly sexualized image, the brand has faced intense scrutiny and backlash due to its perceived exclusivity and insensitivity to evolving societal values around body positivity and inclusivity. This shift in consumer expectations and the subsequent brand crises offer a compelling case study for examining modern crisis management practices within the fashion industry. Given the current market challenges, where consumers increasingly prioritize diversity, inclusivity, and ethical practices, a robust crisis management plan is crucial for Victoria's Secret to regain its market relevance and consumer trust.

In the contemporary fashion market, consumer values are rapidly evolving towards inclusivity, diversity, and ethical practices. Brands that fail to align with these values face significant risks, including reputational damage and loss of market share. Victoria's Secret has encountered such challenges, underscoring the need for a robust and adaptive crisis management plan to ensure long-term resilience and market relevance.

5. 2. 1. Document review

To enhance clarity, a detailed timeline of past crises should be included. The review of Victoria's Secret's crises highlights significant challenges in corporate communication and inclusivity. In 2018, Ed Razek, the Chief Marketing Officer of Victoria's Secret, made controversial remarks in a Vogue interview, stating that transgender and plus-size models should not be included in the Victoria's Secret

Fashion Show. These comments sparked widespread backlash, perceived as exclusionary and insensitive, underscoring the growing demand for diversity in fashion (Smith, 2018; Johnson & Thompson, 2019).

The brand's initial response, perceived as dismissive, exacerbated the negative reaction. This incident, alongside ongoing criticisms about diversity and the eventual cancellation of the annual fashion show, highlights recurrent themes of exclusivity and outdated brand image. Coombs (2007) articulates the importance of sensitive and appropriate crisis communication, a standard that Victoria's Secret initially failed to meet.

Victoria's Secret's broader struggles with diversity and inclusivity have been well-documented. Brown and Williams (2020) critique the brand's historical emphasis on a narrow beauty standard, noting that this approach has alienated a significant portion of the potential customer base. The declining sales and viewership of the annual fashion show, from 9.7 million viewers in 2013 to 3.3 million in 2018, reflect a broader trend of consumer dissatisfaction with the brand's image (Davis, 2020).

The cancellation of the annual fashion show in 2019 was a significant turning point, seen as a necessary response to both declining viewership and increasing criticism over the brand's lack of diversity (Brown & Williams, 2020). Razek's resignation in 2019, following the backlash from his comments, was part of the brand's broader efforts to address its inclusivity issues and rebrand its image (Johnson & Thompson, 2019).

Victoria's Secret began rebranding efforts to include more diverse models and promote body positivity. These efforts were met with mixed reactions; some consumers applauded the changes, while others remained skeptical (RetailWire, 2021; Miller, 2021). The decline in market share, from 33% in 2016 to 24% in 2018, starkly contrasts with the growth of competitors like Aerie and Savage X Fenty, highlighting the brand's struggles to maintain relevance (Business Insider Africa, 2024).

The role of social media in amplifying public reaction to crises cannot be understated. Kietzmann et al. (2011) highlights how platforms like Twitter and Instagram provide consumers with a voice, allowing them to hold brands accountable in real-time. This dynamic played a significant role in the swift backlash to Razek's comments, underscoring the need for brands to engage authentically and transparently with their audiences.

Victoria's Secret's journey from controversy to rebranding offers crucial insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by modern brands in a rapidly evolving market. The need for inclusivity, effective crisis communication, and genuine engagement with societal values is more critical than ever. By examining the brand's crises through the lens of academic theories and comparative industry practices, it becomes clear that successful brand management in today's landscape requires a deep commitment to diversity, transparency, and continuous adaptation.

The review of Victoria's Secret's crises, particularly the controversial comments made by Ed Razek in 2018, highlights significant challenges in corporate communication and inclusivity. Razek's remarks about excluding transgender and plus-size models from the brand's fashion show sparked widespread backlash, underscoring the growing demand for diversity in fashion (Smith, 2018). The brand's initial response, perceived as dismissive, exacerbated the negative reaction, reflecting the importance of sensitive and appropriate crisis communication as articulated by Coombs (2007).

The company's broader struggles with diversity and inclusivity have been well-documented. Brown and Williams (2020) critique the brand's historical emphasis on a narrow beauty standard, noting that this approach has alienated a significant portion of the potential customer base. The rise of inclusive competitors like Savage X Fenty further highlights the competitive disadvantages faced by brands slow to adapt to these shifts (Garcia & Lee, 2019).

Specific examples of successful crisis management from other brands can provide valuable insights. Several fashion brands have successfully navigated crises through effective management strategies, providing valuable case studies

in the industry. Notably, brands like Burberry, Nike, and H&M have demonstrated strong crisis management practices that align with academic theories on corporate communication and public relations.

In 2018, Burberry faced a significant backlash after it was revealed that the company had destroyed unsold goods worth millions to protect its brand from counterfeiting and discounting. This practice, although not uncommon in the luxury industry, was met with public outrage and accusations of environmental irresponsibility. Burberry's crisis management involved a swift and comprehensive response. The brand issued a public apology and committed to ceasing the practice immediately. Marco Gobbetti, the CEO, stated that Burberry would find more sustainable ways to manage excess inventory, such as recycling and donating products. This commitment was followed by transparent reporting on their progress, which helped to restore the brand's reputation. As demonstrated by Coombs (2007), the combination of timely communication, accountability, and actionable steps is crucial in mitigating the impact of a crisis.

Nike faced both acclaim and backlash in 2018 when it featured Colin Kaepernick, a controversial figure known for his protests against racial injustice, in its "Just Do It" campaign. While the campaign alienated some customers, it resonated strongly with Nike's core demographic and sparked significant social media engagement. Nike's crisis management strategy was to stand firm in its values, emphasizing the importance of social justice and aligning with the brand's long-term commitment to social causes. According to Huber et al. (2015), aligning corporate actions with the values and expectations of consumers can strengthen brand loyalty, even amidst controversy. Nike's approach not only weathered the initial backlash but also resulted in a 31% increase in sales, showcasing the power of principled stances in crisis situations.

H&M encountered a crisis in 2018 when it featured a black child wearing a hoodie with the slogan "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle," which was widely condemned as racially insensitive. The backlash was immediate and severe, with calls for boycotts and widespread criticism on social media. H&M's response involved a multi-faceted strategy. The company issued an immediate apology, removed the

offending image from all platforms, and halted sales of the product. Additionally, H&M hired a diversity leader to ensure better oversight and prevent future incidents. The brand also engaged in dialogues with stakeholders and affected communities to address the concerns and rebuild trust. This approach aligns with the principles outlined by Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux (2020), who highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the emotional impact of a crisis on stakeholders. H&M's commitment to improving internal practices and fostering open communication demonstrated their dedication to learning from the incident and making meaningful changes.

These examples highlight different aspects of effective crisis management in the fashion industry. Burberry's emphasis on transparency and sustainability, Nike's principled stand on social justice, and H&M's proactive measures to address and prevent discrimination each illustrate critical components of successful crisis management. According to Frandsen and Johansen (2021), effective crisis management involves a combination of timely communication, accountability, and alignment with core values, all of which were demonstrated in these cases.

By analyzing these responses through the lens of academic theories and best practices in public relations, it becomes evident that successful crisis management requires a proactive, transparent, and value-driven approach. Brands that effectively navigate crises not only address immediate concerns but also take steps to align their actions with the evolving expectations of their consumers and broader societal values.

Additionally, internal communication issues contributing to past failures must be discussed to identify areas for improvement. Internal communication issues at Victoria's Secret have played a critical role in contributing to past failures and crises. Effective internal communication is pivotal in aligning an organization's strategies with its operational execution and ensuring that all employees understand and support the company's vision and values. The case of Victoria's Secret highlights several key areas where internal communication breakdowns have exacerbated the company's struggles with inclusivity, brand image, and crisis management.

One of the major issues at Victoria's Secret has been the lack of inclusivity in its internal communication practices. Historically, the brand has been criticized for promoting a narrow and exclusive standard of beauty, which was reflected not only in its marketing campaigns but also within its corporate culture. According to Brown and Williams (2020), the internal culture at Victoria's Secret has long been aligned with a specific, idealized image that did not resonate with broader societal shifts towards diversity and body positivity. This disconnect likely contributed to the controversial comments made by Ed Razek in 2018, indicating a broader issue of insensitivity and exclusion within the organization.

The failure to foster an inclusive internal environment can lead to a lack of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes, resulting in campaigns and statements that are out of touch with contemporary societal values. As Huber et al. (2015) emphasize, diversity in internal communication is crucial for understanding and addressing the needs and preferences of a diverse customer base.

Another significant issue has been the apparent lack of effective crisis communication training for key executives and employees. The initial dismissive response to the backlash following Razek's comments exemplifies this problem. Crisis communication theory, particularly Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), underscores the importance of prompt, transparent, and empathetic responses during a crisis. Victoria's Secret's initial reaction failed to meet these standards, suggesting a gap in internal training and preparedness for handling public relations crises.

Effective crisis communication training should include regular simulations and role-playing exercises to prepare employees at all levels to respond appropriately to potential crises. This training helps ensure that everyone within the organization understands their role in a crisis and can act swiftly and cohesively, mitigating negative impacts on the brand's reputation.

A further internal communication issue at Victoria's Secret has been the disconnect between leadership and employees. Research by Johnson and Thompson (2019) indicates that effective internal communication requires not

only top-down directives but also bottom-up feedback mechanisms. This two-way communication ensures that the concerns and insights of frontline employees are heard and considered in strategic decision-making.

At Victoria's Secret, the lack of robust feedback channels may have prevented the company from recognizing and addressing growing consumer demands for diversity and inclusivity. Employees who interact directly with customers can provide valuable insights into changing consumer preferences, but without a culture that encourages open communication, these insights may be overlooked.

The communication of CSR initiatives internally is another critical area where Victoria's Secret has faced challenges. As Huber et al. (2015) note, effective communication of CSR initiatives can enhance employee engagement and ensure that all members of the organization are aligned with the company's ethical commitments. Victoria's Secret's struggles to convincingly rebrand itself as an inclusive and socially responsible company suggest that internal communication about these initiatives has been insufficient or ineffective.

To address these issues, Victoria's Secret needs to enhance its internal communication strategies significantly. This includes fostering a more inclusive internal culture, improving crisis communication training, establishing effective feedback mechanisms, and ensuring transparent and consistent communication of CSR initiatives. By addressing these internal communication gaps, the company can better align its operations with its strategic goals and societal expectations, ultimately leading to more effective crisis management and a stronger brand reputation.

5. 2. 2. Thematic Analysis

Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity: The thematic analysis reveals a significant shift in consumer expectations towards inclusivity and representation. Historically, Victoria's Secret's branding was built on a fantasy of idealized beauty, which increasingly appeared out of touch with contemporary values. Abbott (2022) discusses how inclusive representation in media can challenge traditional gender

norms and promote broader acceptance, illustrating the disconnect between Victoria's Secret's image and modern societal values.

Crisis Communication and Corporate Responsibility: Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in crisis communication. Victoria's Secret's handling of the 2018 controversy demonstrates the detrimental effects of failing to meet these standards. The company's eventual apology and efforts to rebrand were necessary but also highlighted the need for more proactive and genuine engagement with inclusivity.

Consumer Expectations and Brand Relevance: Huber et al. (2015) emphasize the increasing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in consumer purchasing decisions. Victoria's Secret's struggles underscore the risks brands face when they fail to align with these values. The declining sales and viewership of the annual fashion show reflect a broader trend of consumer preference for brands that authentically embrace diversity and inclusivity (Davis, 2020).

With this and the detailed SWOTS that we have had we can help identify specific areas for improvement. One critical area for improvement in Victoria's Secret's crisis management plan is the enhancement of internal communication. Previous crises have underscored significant gaps in how information is disseminated and understood within the company, particularly regarding inclusivity and sensitivity. Effective crisis communication training is essential to ensure that all employees, from executives to frontline staff, are equipped to respond appropriately during a crisis.

Training programs should focus on developing skills in crisis communication, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity. These programs should include regular training sessions, crisis simulations, and the establishment of clear communication protocols. As Coombs (2007) emphasizes, the ability to respond swiftly and appropriately to a crisis can significantly mitigate its negative impact. By improving internal communication, Victoria's Secret can foster a more cohesive and prepared organizational response to future crises.

Victoria's Secret must undertake authentic rebranding efforts to address its outdated image and align more closely with contemporary values of diversity and inclusivity. The brand has historically been criticized for promoting a narrow and exclusive standard of beauty, which has alienated a significant portion of its potential customer base (Brown & Williams, 2020). Effective rebranding should go beyond superficial changes and reflect a genuine commitment to inclusivity in all aspects of the business.

To achieve this, Victoria's Secret should collaborate with diverse influencers and thought leaders who can help reshape its public image. Additionally, revising product lines to include a broader range of body types and ethnicities will demonstrate a commitment to representation and inclusivity. Engaging in community initiatives that promote diversity can also enhance the brand's credibility and strengthen its relationship with consumers (Garcia & Lee, 2019).

Utilizing social media for proactive engagement with consumers is another essential improvement area for Victoria's Secret. Social media platforms provide a valuable channel for transparent and real-time communication, which is crucial during a crisis. The backlash following Ed Razek's comments highlighted the need for the brand to engage more authentically and transparently with its audience (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Victoria's Secret should establish a dedicated social media team responsible for crisis management and regular engagement with consumers. This team should monitor social media trends, respond promptly to concerns, and highlight positive changes within the brand. By fostering a two-way dialogue with consumers, Victoria's Secret can build trust and manage public perception more effectively.

Forming strategic partnerships with organizations and influencers that advocate for diversity and inclusivity can significantly enhance Victoria's Secret's crisis management capabilities. Such partnerships can help the brand stay informed about emerging societal trends and ensure that its marketing and communication strategies are inclusive and representative of its diverse consumer base.

Identifying and collaborating with key figures and organizations aligned with the brand's values will not only improve its public image but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to diversity. These partnerships can provide valuable insights and support during crises, helping Victoria's Secret navigate challenging situations more effectively (Miller, 2021).

Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is crucial for the continuous improvement of Victoria's Secret's crisis management plan. Regular reviews of the plan, incorporating new insights and addressing emerging risks, should be conducted annually. Feedback from crisis simulations and actual events should be integrated to refine strategies and response plans.

Advanced analytics tools can be employed for real-time monitoring of brand sentiment and emerging issues. Regular customer surveys and feedback loops from employees and stakeholders will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the crisis management strategies. Developing metrics to evaluate the plan's performance, such as response time, media coverage sentiment, and impact on sales and reputation, will help Victoria's Secret benchmark its performance and identify areas for enhancement (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2011).

By addressing these areas of improvement, Victoria's Secret can enhance its resilience and better align with contemporary consumer values. This approach will lead to more effective crisis management and a stronger, more inclusive brand identity, ensuring the company's continued relevance and success in the competitive fashion industry.

5. 2. 3. Comparative Analysis

Comparing Victoria's Secret with competitors such as Savage X Fenty, Aerie, and other emerging brands highlights the strategic missteps of the former. While Victoria's Secret has been criticized for its slow and reactionary approach to inclusivity, competitors have proactively embraced diversity and body positivity, captured significant market share and set new industry standards.

Savage X Fenty, led by Rihanna, has revolutionized the lingerie industry by embracing diversity from the outset. The brand features a wide range of body types and ethnicities, reflecting an inclusive and realistic portrayal of beauty. This proactive approach has resonated strongly with consumers, allowing Savage X Fenty to capture significant market share. According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), the brand's innovative fashion shows, which are streamed online and feature models of all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds, have set new industry standards and garnered widespread acclaim.

Quantitative data supports the success of Savage X Fenty's strategy. The brand reported a 200% increase in sales in 2019 and continued to experience robust growth in subsequent years. As of 2021, Savage X Fenty held an estimated 15% market share in the U.S. lingerie market, a significant achievement for a relatively new entrant (Business Insider, 2021).

Aerie, a subsidiary of American Eagle Outfitters, has similarly focused on body positivity and realistic portrayals of women. The #AerieREAL campaign, launched in 2014, committed to not retouching photos of its models and promoted natural beauty and inclusivity. This strategy has resonated deeply with consumers, particularly younger demographics, who value authenticity and inclusivity in brand messaging.

The impact of Aerie's strategy is evident in its financial performance. Aerie's sales increased by 20% in the first quarter following the campaign's launch, and the brand has continued to grow, with a 32% year-over-year increase in revenue reported in 2020 (American Eagle Outfitters, 2020). By aligning with evolving societal values, Aerie has successfully differentiated itself from competitors and built a loyal customer base.

Other emerging brands, such as ThirdLove and Knix, have also capitalized on the demand for inclusivity and body positivity. ThirdLove, founded in 2013, offers a wide range of bra sizes and uses inclusive marketing that features real women of all shapes and sizes. Knix, known for its comfortable and functional lingerie, has focused on body positivity and inclusivity from its inception. Both brands have

experienced rapid growth, reflecting the shifting consumer preferences towards inclusive and diverse representations in fashion.

Leadership has played a critical role in the successes and failures of these brands. At Victoria's Secret, the leadership's slow response to changing market dynamics and societal values has been a significant factor in the brand's decline. The controversial comments made by former Chief Marketing Officer Ed Razek in 2018, which excluded transgender and plus-size models from the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, highlighted a disconnect between leadership and contemporary consumer expectations (Smith, 2018).

In contrast, the leadership at Savage X Fenty and Aerie has been proactive in embracing inclusivity and body positivity. Rihanna's personal involvement in Savage X Fenty has been pivotal in shaping the brand's inclusive image and resonating with consumers. Similarly, Aerie's leadership has consistently championed body positivity and transparency, reinforcing the brand's commitment to these values.

Quantitative data further illustrates the impact of these strategies. Victoria's Secret's market share in the U.S. lingerie market declined from 33% in 2016 to 24% in 2018, reflecting its struggles to maintain relevance (Business Insider Africa, 2024). In contrast, Aerie's market share increased from 8% to 15% during the same period, and Savage X Fenty captured an estimated 10% market share shortly after its launch (American Eagle Outfitters, 2020; Business Insider, 2021).

These comparisons illustrate how brands that anticipate and align with evolving societal values can not only avoid crises but also achieve substantial market success. Victoria's Secret can learn valuable lessons from the proactive and inclusive strategies of its competitors. By embracing inclusivity, leveraging digital platforms, and maintaining authenticity in its messaging, Victoria's Secret can reestablish itself as a leader in the lingerie industry and rebuild its brand image.

5. 2. 4. Data Integration

Integrating data from various sources provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of these branding issues. For instance, the market share decline of

Victoria's Secret between 2016 and 2018, from 33% to 24%, starkly contrasts with the growth of competitors like Aerie and Savage X Fenty (Business Insider Africa, 2024). Surveys indicate mixed reactions to Victoria's Secret's rebranding efforts, with some consumers applauding the inclusivity while others remain skeptical (RetailWire, 2021).

Customer feedback and survey data further illuminate public perception. According to a survey by YouGov in 2020, 45% of respondents felt that Victoria's Secret was out of touch with modern values, while 38% expressed that the brand's recent efforts towards inclusivity seemed insincere. Conversely, 17% appreciated the changes, indicating a need for more authentic and substantial shifts in brand strategy.

The role of social media in amplifying public reaction to crises cannot be understated. Kietzmann et al. (2011) highlights how platforms like Twitter and Instagram provide consumers with a voice, allowing them to hold brands accountable in real-time. This dynamic played a significant role in the swift backlash to Razek's comments, underscoring the need for brands to engage authentically and transparently with their audiences. Social media analytics tools, such as Brandwatch and Hootsuite Insights, can track real-time sentiment and identify key influencers. These tools enable brands to monitor public opinion closely and respond proactively to emerging issues.

Victoria's Secret's journey from controversy to rebranding offers crucial insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by modern brands in a rapidly evolving market. The need for inclusivity, effective crisis communication, and genuine engagement with societal values is more critical than ever. By examining the brand's crises through the lens of academic theories and comparative industry practices, it becomes clear that successful brand management in today's landscape requires a deep commitment to diversity, transparency, and continuous adaptation.

The dynamic landscape of the fashion industry necessitates robust crisis management strategies, particularly for prominent brands like Victoria's Secret. This communication plan aims to provide a comprehensive approach to

managing and mitigating crises, informed by historical analysis, thematic evaluations, and strategic foresight. The plan encompasses detailed methodologies and activities designed to enhance Victoria's Secret's resilience and alignment with contemporary values.

Key components of the Communication Plan:

-Customer feedback integration

To develop a more responsive crisis management strategy, integrating customer feedback is essential. Regular surveys and focus groups should be conducted to gauge consumer sentiment and expectations. Platforms such as SurveyMonkey and Qualtrics can be utilized to collect and analyze this data, ensuring that the brand's strategies are informed by real-time consumer insights.

-Social media analytics

Leveraging social media analytics tools is crucial for tracking public sentiment and identifying influential voices in the conversation. Tools like Brandwatch and Hootsuite Insights provide comprehensive analytics on brand mentions, sentiment analysis, and influencer identification. These insights can guide the brand's social media strategy, ensuring timely and appropriate responses to public concerns.

-Proactive engagement strategies

Victoria's Secret should adopt proactive engagement strategies to build and maintain a positive brand image. This involves consistent communication of the brand's commitment to inclusivity and diversity through various channels, including social media, public statements, and marketing campaigns. Engaging with consumers directly and transparently can help rebuild trust and credibility.

-Continuous improvement

The communication plan should include mechanisms for continuous improvement. Regular reviews of the plan, informed by new data and feedback, will help refine strategies and address emerging challenges. This iterative

approach ensures that the brand remains agile and responsive in a rapidly changing market.

By integrating these components into its crisis management plan, Victoria's Secret can better navigate future challenges and align its brand with contemporary values. The commitment to diversity, transparency, and continuous adaptation will be key to regaining consumer trust and securing long-term success.

5. 2. 5. Analyzing the Crisis History

Victoria's Secret's history is punctuated by notable crises, each underscoring significant vulnerabilities within its brand management. The 2018 controversy involving Ed Razek, the former Chief Marketing Officer, who made exclusionary comments regarding transgender and plus-size models, exemplifies the brand's struggles with inclusivity (Smith, 2018). This incident, alongside ongoing criticisms about diversity and the eventual cancellation of the annual fashion show, highlights recurrent themes of exclusivity and outdated brand image.

The methodology for analyzing these crises involves a thorough review of press reports, company statements, academic articles, and other relevant sources. Data collection focuses on compiling comprehensive records of major incidents, their immediate and long-term impacts, and the brand's responses. Evaluating the effectiveness of these responses entails assessing public reactions and examining how each crisis influenced the brand's reputation, market position, and consumer trust.

For instance, the immediate backlash to Razek's comments led to his resignation and a public apology from Victoria's Secret, yet the damage to the brand's inclusivity credentials persisted (Johnson & Thompson, 2019). This underscores the need for a nuanced and proactive crisis management approach that goes beyond reactive measures.

To document future crises effectively, a detailed incident report template should be utilized. This template will facilitate comprehensive and structured documentation, ensuring that all relevant information is captured systematically.

Incident Report Template

-Incident Details:

       Date and time of incident

       Location

       Description of the incident

       Key individuals involved

-Immediate Actions Taken:

       Steps taken to mitigate the crisis

       Communication issued

       Stakeholders notified

-Impact Analysis:

       Short-Term and Long-Term impacts on brand reputation

       Market position

       Consumer trust and sentiment

-Response Evaluation:

       Effectiveness of Crisis Management strategies

       Public and media reactions

       Internal Feedback

-Follow-Up Actions:

       Corrective measures implemented

       Preventive strategies for future crises

Lessons learned

Incorporating stakeholder analysis is crucial to understand the impact of crises on various groups and to tailor responses accordingly. Different stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and advocacy groups, may have varied perspectives and concerns during a crisis.

Stakeholder Analysis

-Customers:

Impact on customer trust and loyalty

Changes in consumer behavior

Feedback and sentiment analysis

-Employees:

Internal morale and job satisfaction

Communication effectiveness

Employee feedback and engagement

-Investors:

Impact on share prices and financial stability

Investor confidence

Statements from major shareholders

-Advocacy Groups:

Reactions from diversity and inclusion advocates

Partnerships and collaborations

Public statements and campaigns

-Media:

    Media coverage and publicity

    Sentiment analysis in news reports

    Long-term media relations

The 2018 incident involving Ed Razek, among other crises, highlighted the need for a more proactive and inclusive approach to crisis management at Victoria's Secret. By utilizing a detailed incident report template and conducting thorough stakeholder analysis, the brand can better understand the multifaceted impacts of crises and develop more effective strategies to address them.

5. 2. 6. Identifying Lessons Learned

Identifying lessons from past crises involves conducting a thematic analysis to extract recurring patterns and effective practices. Common themes include issues related to inclusivity, brand image, and communication missteps. The failure to align with evolving societal values on diversity and body positivity has been a critical factor in the brand's declining market relevance (Brown & Williams, 2020).

Effective practices from past crises, such as engaging diverse influencers and improving internal communication, highlight the importance of authenticity and proactive engagement. Comparing Victoria's Secret's responses with those of more inclusive competitors like Savage X Fenty and Aerie reveals best practices in crisis management. These brands have successfully embraced inclusivity from the outset, thereby avoiding many of the pitfalls that have beset Victoria's Secret (Garcia & Lee, 2019).

To ensure that lessons from past crises lead to meaningful changes, Victoria's Secret should develop a robust framework for continuous learning and improvement. This framework would institutionalize the process of analyzing past crises and implementing changes based on the insights gained. Components of the framework:

- Crisis review sessions: Conduct regular review sessions after any significant crisis to analyze what happened, how it was handled, and what could be improved. These sessions should involve key stakeholders from all relevant departments.

- Documentation and knowledge sharing: Create comprehensive reports documenting each crisis, the responses taken, and the outcomes. These reports should be accessible to all employees and integrated into training programs to ensure that the lessons learned are widely disseminated.

- Scenario planning and simulations: Implement regular crisis simulations based on past incidents and potential future scenarios. These exercises will help employees practice responses and improve their readiness for actual crises.

- Benchmarking and best practices: Continuously benchmark against industry best practices and competitors. This involves staying informed about how other brands handle similar issues and integrating successful strategies into Victoria's Secret's crisis management plans.

A key element of continuous improvement is establishing an effective feedback loop. Regular stakeholder meetings can provide valuable insights and ensure that the brand remains responsive to the needs and concerns of its diverse audience. Steps to implement the feedback loop:

- Regular stakeholder meetings: Schedule quarterly meetings with key stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and advocacy groups. These meetings should provide a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns, offer suggestions, and discuss the brand's performance.

- Surveys and feedback forms: Complement stakeholder meetings with regular surveys and feedback forms. This allows for the collection of a broader range of insights and ensures that all voices are heard, not just those present at the meetings.

- Transparent reporting: Share the outcomes of these meetings and surveys with all stakeholders. Transparency in how feedback is received and acted upon

can build trust and demonstrate the brand's commitment to continuous improvement.

-        Actionable insights: Develop actionable plans based on the feedback received. Each feedback session should result in concrete steps that the company will take to address the issues raised. Progress on these actions should be reported in subsequent meetings, creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

By developing a framework for continuous learning and implementing a feedback loop with regular stakeholder meetings, Victoria's Secret can create a culture of responsiveness and adaptability. This will enable the brand to better align with contemporary societal values and improve its crisis management capabilities.

The thematic analysis of past crises at Victoria's Secret highlights critical areas for improvement, particularly regarding inclusivity, brand image, and communication. By adopting a framework for continuous learning and implementing regular stakeholder feedback mechanisms, the brand can ensure that it not only learns from past mistakes but also continuously evolves to meet the expectations of its diverse customer base. This proactive approach will be essential for Victoria's Secret to rebuild its reputation and maintain market relevance.

5. 2. 7. Developing a Risk Assessment Framework

To safeguard against future crises, it is essential to develop a robust risk assessment framework. This framework involves identifying potential risks based on historical crises, current market dynamics, consumer behavior trends, and operational vulnerabilities. Risks are categorized into reputational, operational, strategic, and compliance areas, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of their potential impact on the brand.

The risk assessment matrix prioritizes risks based on their likelihood and potential to harm the brand's reputation and market position. For example, the risk of further backlash due to inclusivity failures is high given the increasing consumer demand for diversity and ethical branding (Huber et al., 2015). Addressing these

risks proactively is crucial for maintaining consumer trust and competitive advantage.

Incorporating scenario planning exercises into the risk assessment framework is crucial for anticipating future crises. Scenario planning involves creating detailed and plausible scenarios that could impact the brand, enabling the organization to prepare responses for various potential crises. According to Schwartz (1991), scenario planning helps organizations develop flexible strategies and enhance their ability to adapt to unexpected events. By regularly conducting scenario planning exercises, Victoria's Secret can identify potential vulnerabilities and develop contingency plans to address them effectively.

Utilizing risk heat maps to visualize and prioritize risks is another critical component of an effective risk assessment framework. Risk heat maps provide a visual representation of the likelihood and impact of various risks, helping organizations prioritize their response efforts. Hillson and Simon (2012) emphasize that risk heat maps are valuable tools for identifying the most significant threats to an organization and ensuring that resources are allocated appropriately to mitigate these risks. Victoria's Secret can use risk heat maps to assess the potential impact of different crises and develop targeted strategies to address the highest-priority risks.

The risk assessment matrix prioritizes risks based on their likelihood and potential to harm the brand's reputation and market position. For example, the risk of further backlash due to inclusivity failures is high given the increasing consumer demand for diversity and ethical branding (Huber et al., 2015). Addressing these risks proactively is crucial for maintaining consumer trust and competitive advantage.

By integrating scenario planning exercises and risk heat maps into its risk assessment framework, Victoria's Secret can enhance its preparedness for future crises and ensure a more resilient and adaptive approach to risk management. This proactive strategy will help the brand maintain consumer trust and secure a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving market.

Developing a robust risk assessment framework is essential for Victoria's Secret to safeguard against future crises and maintain a competitive edge in the dynamic fashion industry. By incorporating scenario planning exercises and utilizing risk heat maps, the brand can anticipate potential crises and prioritize risks effectively. This approach ensures that Victoria's Secret can prepare for and respond to various scenarios, thereby enhancing its resilience and adaptability.

The integration of these strategic tools into the risk assessment framework allows for a comprehensive evaluation of potential risks, categorized into reputational, operational, strategic, and compliance areas. Addressing high-priority risks proactively, such as inclusivity failures, is crucial for maintaining consumer trust and aligning with contemporary societal values.

By adopting a proactive and systematic approach to risk management, Victoria's Secret can better navigate the complexities of the modern market. This strategy not only helps mitigate potential threats but also reinforces the brand's commitment to diversity, transparency, and continuous improvement, ultimately securing its long-term success and relevance.

5. 2. 8. Formulating Prevention Strategies

Prevention strategies are designed to mitigate identified risks through comprehensive internal and external communication, reputation monitoring, and stakeholder management. Internal communication strategies include implementing training programs on inclusivity, diversity, and sensitivity in communication. Establishing clear guidelines for public statements and media interactions ensures consistency and appropriateness in external communications (Coombs, 2014).

To enhance its internal communication strategies, Victoria's Secret should develop a comprehensive training program focused on crisis management and inclusivity. This program should aim to equip employees at all levels with the skills and knowledge necessary to handle crises effectively and foster an inclusive workplace culture. As noted by Huber et al. (2015), training programs that emphasize diversity and crisis preparedness can significantly improve an

organization's resilience and responsiveness. The training program should include modules on:

-Crisis communication: Techniques for managing communication during a crisis, including message framing, media relations, and stakeholder engagement.

-Inclusivity and diversity: Understanding the importance of diversity in the workplace, recognizing biases, and promoting inclusive practices.

-Sensitivity training: Approaches to handle sensitive issues with empathy and cultural competence.

Another critical element of the prevention strategy is the establishment of a crisis communication handbook. This handbook should provide detailed protocols and guidelines for managing various types of crises. According to Coombs (2014), having a well-documented crisis communication plan is essential for ensuring a coordinated and effective response. The crisis communication handbook should include:

-Crisis identification and assessment: Procedures for identifying and assessing the severity of a crisis.

-Roles and responsibilities: Clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of team members during a crisis.

-Communication protocols: Step-by-step guidelines for internal and external communications, including templates for press releases, social media posts, and stakeholder updates.

-Media relations: Best practices for interacting with the media, including how to handle interviews and press conferences.

-Post-Crisis evaluation: Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the crisis response and identifying areas for improvement.

Externally, developing a proactive social media strategy enables swift identification and addressing of potential issues. Engaging with diverse

influencers and thought leaders helps ensure that marketing campaigns are inclusive and representative of a broad audience. Continuous reputation monitoring through advanced analytics tools and regular customer surveys allows for real-time insights into brand sentiment and emerging issues (Miller, 2021).

Stakeholder management involves maintaining transparent communication with employees, investors, and customers. Fostering partnerships with organizations advocating for diversity and inclusion enhances the brand's credibility and demonstrates a genuine commitment to these values. According to Miller (2021), transparent and proactive stakeholder engagement is crucial for building trust and loyalty.

By implementing comprehensive training programs on crisis management and inclusivity, establishing a detailed crisis communication handbook, and developing proactive external communication strategies, Victoria's Secret can effectively mitigate identified risks. These measures will not only enhance the brand's resilience but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusivity, thereby maintaining consumer trust and competitive advantage.

5. 2. 9. Designing Response Plans

Formulating detailed response plans for different types of crises is critical to effective crisis management. This involves assembling a dedicated Crisis Management Team (CMT) with defined roles and responsibilities and conducting regular training and simulations to prepare for various crisis scenarios. Specific response plans are developed for anticipated crises such as public controversies, inclusivity criticisms, and operational disruptions. Clear communication strategies for each scenario include key messages, designated spokespersons, and appropriate communication channels. Ensuring timely and transparent communication helps manage public perception and maintain trust during a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2011).

Conducting regular crisis simulations and drills is essential to test response plans and ensure preparedness. These exercises allow the CMT to practice their roles and refine their responses in a controlled environment. As highlighted by Coombs

(2014), simulations help identify weaknesses in the crisis management plan and provide opportunities for improvement. Regular drills also enhance the team's ability to respond quickly and effectively to real-life crises.

In addition to these foundational practices, implementing a decision matrix to guide the CMT during crises can significantly enhance decision-making processes. A decision matrix provides a structured framework for evaluating different response options based on predefined criteria such as impact, urgency, and resource availability. According to Hillson and Simon (2012), decision matrices help ensure that responses are consistent, rational, and aligned with the organization's strategic objectives. By using a decision matrix, the CMT can make informed decisions quickly, reducing the potential for missteps during a crisis.

The decision matrix operates by assigning scores to each response option based on its alignment with impact, urgency, and resource availability. For example, during a reputational crisis involving inclusivity criticisms, the CMT could evaluate options based on their potential to mitigate public backlash, address stakeholder concerns, and align with available resources. This quantitative approach allows the CMT to prioritize actions that will be most effective in managing the crisis efficiently and strategically. As a result, the decision matrix facilitates swift, data-driven decision-making, ensuring that responses are not only timely but also strategically sound.

An effective addition to Victoria's Secret's Crisis Management Program (CMP) is the inclusion of a decision matrix to guide the Crisis Management Team (CMT) in evaluating and selecting response options during a crisis. A decision matrix serves as a structured tool that enables the team to assess different response strategies based on specific criteria such as impact, urgency, and resource availability. According to Hillson and Simon (2012), this approach aids in making informed and consistent decisions by providing a systematic framework that aligns with the organization's strategic priorities.

The decision matrix operates by assigning weighted values to each criterion, allowing the CMT to score potential responses and identify the most effective course of action under pressing circumstances. For instance, if a crisis involves

reputational risk, the matrix can prioritize responses that mitigate public backlash while preserving brand integrity and stakeholder trust. Integrating this tool ensures that decisions are not only reactive but are also grounded in a balance of urgency, impact, and available resources, enhancing the CMP's overall responsiveness and effectiveness.

The structured decision-making process provided by the matrix is particularly beneficial in high-stakes environments like the fashion industry, where crisis scenarios often demand rapid, well-considered responses. As emphasized by Coombs (2014), tools that enhance rational decision-making in crisis situations contribute to organizational resilience by reducing the likelihood of inconsistent or impulsive actions. Therefore, incorporating a decision matrix into Victoria's Secret's CMP is a proactive step towards refining the brand's crisis response capability.

To ensure an effective crisis management framework, the following components should be included:

-Dedicated Crisis Management Team (CMT): Assemble a team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Ensure the team is trained and equipped to handle various crisis scenarios.

-Regular training and simulations: Conduct crisis simulations and drills to test response plans. Use these exercises to identify weaknesses and improve strategies.

-Detailed Response plans: Develop specific response plans for anticipated crises, such as public controversies, inclusivity criticisms, and operational disruptions. Ensure each plan includes key messages, designated spokespersons, and appropriate communication channels.

-Communication strategies: Formulate clear communication strategies for each crisis scenario. Ensure timely and transparent communication to manage public perception and maintain trust.

-Decision matrix: Create a decision matrix to guide the CMT during crises. Use the matrix to evaluate response options based on impact, urgency, and resource availability.

Formulating detailed response plans and conducting regular crisis simulations are critical components of effective crisis management. By assembling a dedicated CMT, developing specific response plans, and using a decision matrix to guide decision-making, Victoria's Secret can enhance its preparedness and ability to respond to various crises. These measures will help the brand maintain public trust and effectively manage its reputation during challenging situations.

5. 2. 10. Implementing Evaluation Mechanisms

Ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement of the Crisis Management Plan are essential for its effectiveness. Regular reviews of the plan, incorporating new insights and addressing emerging risks, are scheduled annually. Feedback from crisis simulations and actual events is integrated to refine strategies and response plans. Setting up continuous feedback channels from employees, stakeholders, and customers enables iterative improvements to the plan. Developing metrics to evaluate the plan's effectiveness, such as response time, media coverage sentiment, and impact on sales and reputation, allows for benchmarking performance and identifying areas for enhancement (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2011).

To enhance the continuous evaluation of the Crisis Management Plan, Victoria's Secret should develop a dashboard for real-time monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs). A dashboard provides a visual representation of critical metrics, allowing for immediate insights into the effectiveness of crisis management efforts. According to Kaplan and Norton (1996), real-time data visualization tools facilitate quick decision-making and strategic adjustments. Key KPIs to monitor might include:

-Response time: Tracking the duration from crisis onset to first public response and subsequent communications can reveal response agility. Studies highlight that faster responses correlate with better crisis outcomes (Coombs, 2015).

-Media coverage sentiment: Monitoring sentiment across media platforms, traditional and social, offers insights into public perception. Sentiment can be quantified through natural language processing (NLP) tools, allowing the Crisis Management Team (CMT) to gauge reputation impact in real-time (Bowen, 2009).

-Impact on sales and reputation: Direct metrics, such as sales data and net promoter scores (NPS), post-crisis helps measure the tangible effects on business performance. Sales decline or recovery trends indicate consumer loyalty shifts, while NPS reflects brand trust restoration (Fearn-Banks, 2011).

-Social Media engagement: Real-time tracking of social media discussions and sentiment.

Implementing such a dashboard will enable Victoria's Secret to continuously monitor its crisis management performance and make data-driven decisions to improve its strategies. To streamline data analysis and ensure timely decision-making, a real-time dashboard should be implemented. This dashboard would integrate data feeds from various sources, such as social media analytics, sentiment analysis, and sales performance metrics, enabling the CMT to respond proactively to emerging patterns. Real-time data visualization enhances situational awareness, allowing the team to adjust strategies quickly, thereby mitigating potential long-term impacts on brand reputation and sales (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Setting up an external review board is another critical step for providing unbiased feedback on the crisis management plan. An external review board, composed of experts in crisis management, public relations, and diversity and inclusion, can offer valuable perspectives and identify areas for improvement that may not be apparent to internal stakeholders. According to Coombs (2014), external reviews provide an objective assessment that enhances the credibility and effectiveness of crisis management plans.

The external review board should meet regularly to evaluate the Crisis Management Plan and provide recommendations. Their feedback should be

integrated into the plan's annual reviews to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with best practices in the industry.

Victoria's Secret's journey through various crises underscores the importance of robust crisis management strategies in the fashion industry. By analyzing past crises, identifying lessons learned, developing a risk assessment framework, formulating prevention strategies, designing detailed response plans, and implementing evaluation mechanisms, the brand can navigate future challenges more effectively.

The integration of these elements into a comprehensive communication plan will enable Victoria's Secret to align more closely with contemporary values of inclusivity and diversity, thereby enhancing its resilience and market relevance. Developing a real-time monitoring dashboard for KPIs and establishing an external review board will further strengthen the brand's ability to manage crises proactively and maintain consumer trust.

In conclusion, continuous evaluation and improvement of the Crisis Management Plan are vital for ensuring its effectiveness. By implementing a real-time KPI dashboard and setting up an external review board, Victoria's Secret can enhance its ability to respond to crises swiftly and efficiently. These measures, combined with regular plan reviews and stakeholder feedback, will help the brand remain resilient and relevant in an ever-changing market.

To conclude about the Crisis Management Plan, Victoria's Secret's journey through various crises underscores the critical need for robust and adaptive crisis management strategies. The brand's historical focus on exclusivity has proven misaligned with evolving societal values emphasizing diversity and inclusivity, leading to significant backlash and market decline.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive Crisis Management Plan must be implemented, incorporating:

-Document review and analysis: Systematic documentation and analysis of past crises to identify patterns and lessons learned.

-Prevention strategies: Developing training programs on crisis management and inclusivity and creating a crisis communication handbook.

-Response plans: Formulating detailed response plans, conducting regular simulations, and using a decision matrix to guide actions.

-Evaluation mechanisms: Implementing a real-time KPI dashboard and establishing an external review board for unbiased feedback.

These components ensure a proactive, transparent, and value-driven approach to crisis management, enhancing the brand's resilience and alignment with contemporary values. Continuous evaluation and adaptation will help Victoria's Secret regain consumer trust and secure long-term success.

5.2.11 Integrating Technological Innovations in Crisis Management

In today's digital landscape, real-time monitoring and rapid response are critical components of an effective crisis management strategy. To enhance Victoria's Secret's ability to anticipate and respond to crises, the integration of advanced technological tools, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics, is recommended. AI-driven platforms can monitor social media and news outlets in real-time, allowing the Crisis Management Team (CMT) to identify and address potential reputational issues before they escalate.

- Real-Time Social Media Monitoring

Artificial intelligence enables the continuous monitoring of social media platforms, identifying negative trends, keywords, or topics associated with the brand. By using natural language processing (NLP) algorithms, AI can detect shifts in public sentiment and provide alerts on emerging controversies or public dissatisfaction. This allows the CMT to proactively manage crises, engaging with consumers or stakeholders before issues spiral into full-blown crises (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011).

- Predictive Analytics for Crisis Anticipation

Beyond immediate monitoring, predictive analytics can be applied to anticipate potential crises based on historical data and current trends. By analyzing patterns from past incidents or social media conversations, predictive models can help the CMT prepare response plans for recurring issues, such as inclusivity criticisms or public backlash on marketing campaigns. According to Chen, Chiang, and Storey (2012), predictive analytics enhances decision-making capabilities, allowing organizations to develop preemptive strategies that align with emerging social dynamics and consumer expectations.

- Decision Matrix Integration with AI Insights

Integrating AI insights into a decision matrix offers a structured framework for the CMT to evaluate response options based on data-driven factors like impact, urgency, and available resources. The AI-enhanced decision matrix enables quicker, more rational decision-making by presenting real-time risk assessments. This method not only enhances responsiveness but also aligns the response with strategic objectives, as outlined by Hillson and Simon (2012). Incorporating AI insights ensures that responses are tailored to the specific context of each crisis, increasing the effectiveness and consistency of the brand's crisis management efforts.

- Data Privacy and Ethical Considerations

While leveraging AI and data analytics, it is essential to address data privacy and ethical considerations. Victoria's Secret must ensure that all data collection and monitoring practices comply with privacy regulations such as GDPR. Maintaining transparency in data usage reinforces trust with stakeholders, especially during times of crisis (Kaptein, 2011).

6. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study has delved into the intricacies of crisis management, particularly focusing on Victoria's Secret, a brand that has faced significant challenges in recent years. The key components of the proposed crisis management plan include a thorough risk assessment framework, development of prevention strategies, formulation of detailed response plans, and

implementation of continuous evaluation mechanisms. These strategies collectively aim to enhance the brand's preparedness and resilience against future crises.

In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of the fashion industry, crisis management has emerged as a critical function for sustaining brand reputation and operational continuity. Victoria's Secret, a renowned entity in the lingerie and beauty sector, has encountered several significant challenges over recent years. These challenges underscore the necessity of a well-structured crisis management plan that not only addresses immediate issues but also fortifies the brand against future adversities. The proposed crisis management plan for Victoria's Secret is meticulously crafted to encompass four critical stages: pre-crisis prevention, preparation, response, and post-crisis recovery. This structured approach ensures comprehensive risk assessment, effective prevention strategies, detailed response plans, and continuous evaluation mechanisms, collectively enhancing the brand's resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing market. The following sections provide a detailed overview of the key components of this plan.

To effectively address the various challenges Victoria's Secret has faced, the crisis management plan is structured around four critical stages: pre-crisis prevention, preparation, response, and post-crisis recovery. Here is a summary of the key points:

- Risk Assessment Framework: The first step in effective crisis management is identifying potential risks. This involves implementing scenario planning and risk heat maps to anticipate potential crises and prioritize risks effectively. By conducting a comprehensive evaluation of potential risks categorized into reputational, operational, strategic, and compliance areas, the brand can anticipate potential crises and prepare accordingly. This proactive approach ensures that Victoria's Secret can prepare for and respond to various scenarios, thereby enhancing its resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing market.

- Prevention Strategies: Once risks are identified, the next step is to develop comprehensive strategies to prevent these risks from materializing. Prevention strategies are designed to mitigate identified risks through comprehensive internal and external communication, reputation monitoring, and stakeholder management. Internal communication strategies include regular training programs for employees on crisis awareness and response protocols. Externally, the brand will engage in proactive reputation monitoring through social media listening tools and public relations campaigns aimed at enhancing its public image. These strategies aim to mitigate the likelihood of crises and ensure the organization is well-prepared to handle any situation that arises.

- Response Plans: In the event of a crisis, having detailed response plans is crucial. These plans outline specific steps, roles, and responsibilities to manage different types of crises effectively. The crisis management team, comprising representatives from key departments, will be trained to respond swiftly and efficiently. This includes setting up a crisis command center to coordinate the response, regular briefings to stakeholders, and utilizing multiple communication channels to manage the flow of information. By having a clear and structured response plan, Victoria's Secret can respond swiftly and efficiently to minimize the impact of any crisis.

- Evaluation Mechanisms: Continuous improvement is essential for maintaining an effective crisis management plan. This involves establishing mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and incorporating feedback from crisis simulations and real events. Regular reviews and updates ensure the crisis management plan remains relevant and effective in addressing new challenges. Post-crisis, the organization will conduct thorough after-action reviews to identify lessons learned and integrate these insights into future planning. This iterative process of evaluation and adaptation ensures that the crisis management plan evolves in line with emerging risks and industry best practices.

Implementing a robust crisis management plan is a crucial step for any organization aiming to enhance its resilience and safeguard its reputation in times

of uncertainty. For a prominent brand like Victoria's Secret, the advantages of such a comprehensive plan are manifold. By proactively identifying potential risks and developing strategic responses, the brand can navigate crises with confidence and maintain its market position. The following points outline the significant benefits of a well-implemented crisis management plan, highlighting how it contributes to improved security, reduced risks, better preparedness, enhanced reputation, and employee well-being.

Implementing a robust crisis management plan offers numerous benefits that can significantly enhance the brand's overall resilience and reputation:

- Improved Security: By identifying and addressing potential risks proactively, the brand can safeguard its operations and reputation. This leads to a more secure and stable organizational environment. Improved security measures not only protect the brand's assets but also ensure the safety and well-being of employees and customers.

- Reduced Risks: Effective prevention strategies help mitigate the likelihood of crises, thereby reducing the brand's overall risk exposure. This proactive approach ensures potential issues are addressed before they escalate. By reducing risks, the brand can avoid the significant financial and reputational costs associated with crisis management.

- Better Preparedness: Detailed response plans and regular crisis simulations ensure that the crisis management team is well-prepared to handle any situation. This preparedness minimizes the impact of crises and facilitates quicker recovery. Preparedness also involves ensuring that all employees are aware of their roles during a crisis and have the necessary training to execute their responsibilities effectively.

- Enhanced Reputation: A transparent and inclusive approach to crisis management rebuilds consumer trust and enhances the brand's reputation. By demonstrating a commitment to ethical practices and inclusivity, Victoria's Secret can improve its public image. Enhanced reputation management

strategies, such as engaging with influencers and thought leaders, can further bolster the brand's standing in the market.

- Employee Well-being: Providing psychological support and clear communication during crises improves employee morale and engagement. This support helps employees feel valued and secure, contributing to a more positive workplace environment. Initiatives such as mental health support programs and regular communication from leadership can help maintain employee well-being during and after crises.

Ensuring the feasibility of a comprehensive crisis management plan is paramount to its successful implementation and long-term sustainability. For Victoria's Secret, this involves meticulous planning, strategic resource allocation, and the involvement of key personnel across the organization. The following key considerations highlight the steps taken to guarantee that the crisis management plan is not only practical but also effective in achieving its intended goals. By focusing on resource allocation, scheduling, and the involvement of a diverse crisis management team, the brand can confidently move forward with the implementation of the plan, ensuring preparedness and resilience in the face of potential crises.

The feasibility of implementing this crisis management plan is ensured through careful planning and resource allocation. Key considerations include:

- Resource Allocation: Adequate financial and operational resources have been allocated to support the crisis management initiatives. This ensures that all necessary tools and personnel are available to implement the plan effectively. Budgeting for crisis management includes funding for training programs, communication tools, and external consultancy services if needed.

- Schedule: A phased implementation schedule allows for systematic rollout of each component of the plan. This approach provides opportunities for adjustments and improvements along the way, ensuring smooth and efficient implementation. The implementation schedule will be designed to align with key business cycles and other strategic initiatives to minimize disruption.

- Key Personnel: The crisis management team comprises cross-functional representatives, ensuring that all aspects of the business are considered during crisis response. This diverse team brings together expertise from various areas to effectively manage crises. Key personnel will include senior executives, PR specialists, operational managers, and legal advisors, ensuring a comprehensive approach to crisis management.

The success of any crisis management plan hinges on the collective support and approval of all stakeholders involved. For Victoria's Secret, obtaining this backing is crucial to ensure that the proposed strategies can be effectively implemented and sustained. The following points underscore the necessity for timely and decisive action from stakeholders, highlighting how their endorsement is vital for preparing the brand to handle future crises and emerge stronger and more resilient. By committing to this proactive approach, stakeholders are investing in the long-term success and reputation of Victoria's Secret in an increasingly competitive and dynamic market.

Given the detailed analysis and comprehensive strategies outlined, it is crucial for stakeholders to approve and support the proposed crisis management plan. The importance of acting timely and decisively cannot be overstated. By endorsing this plan, stakeholders will ensure that Victoria's Secret is not only prepared to handle future crises but also positioned to emerge stronger and more resilient. Your support is vital for the success and sustainability of the brand in a competitive and ever-changing market. The commitment to proactive crisis management is an investment in the brand's long-term success and reputation.

As the fashion industry evolves and consumer expectations shift, brands must be agile in their strategies to maintain relevance and trust. The following reflection emphasizes how Victoria's Secret's crisis management plan serves as a robust framework for navigating uncertainties and ensuring the brand's future stability and success. By focusing on inclusivity, transparency, and continuous improvement, Victoria's Secret can reaffirm its leadership in the fashion industry while adhering to its commitment to diversity and ethical practices. This journey highlights the critical lessons learned from past crises and underscores the

importance of resilience, adaptability, and strategic management in achieving long-term success.

The journey of Victoria's Secret from controversy to recovery underscores the necessity for continuous adaptation and proactive crisis management. As consumer expectations evolve, so must the strategies employed by brands to maintain relevance and trust. This crisis management plan serves as a robust framework for navigating uncertainties and safeguarding the brand's future. By embracing inclusivity, transparency, and continuous improvement, Victoria's Secret can reclaim its position as a leader in the fashion industry while upholding its commitment to diversity and ethical practices. The lessons learned from past crises highlight the importance of resilience, adaptability, and proactive management. By implementing this comprehensive crisis management plan, Victoria's Secret not only prepares for potential challenges but also sets a new standard for excellence in crisis management within the fashion industry. The path to recovery and sustained success lies in a committed, strategic approach to managing and mitigating crises.

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