

Building Brand Resilience in Digital Markets: The Interplay of Brand Authenticity, Consumer Trust, and Emotional Attachment During Reputational Crises

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the direct and indirect effects of brand authenticity on brand resilience during reputational crises in digital markets, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of consumer trust and emotional attachment. This quantitative, cross-sectional explanatory study was conducted in Tehran, Iran, in 2026 among 412 adult consumers who were active users of digital platforms and had encountered a reputational crisis involving a familiar brand during the previous 12 months. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring brand authenticity, consumer trust, emotional attachment, and consumer-perceived brand resilience. The measurement instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM SPSS AMOS. Confirmatory factor analysis was applied to assess the measurement model, structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized direct relationships, and bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to evaluate indirect effects. Brand authenticity significantly predicted consumer trust ($\beta = .638, p < .001$), emotional attachment ($\beta = .512, p < .001$), and brand resilience ($\beta = .218, p < .001$). Consumer trust ($\beta = .414, p < .001$) and emotional attachment ($\beta = .263, p < .001$) also had significant positive effects on brand resilience. The model explained 61.2% of the variance in brand resilience. Brand authenticity exerted significant indirect effects on brand resilience through consumer trust ($\beta = .264, 95\% \text{ CI } [.198, .342]$) and emotional attachment ($\beta = .135, 95\% \text{ CI } [.081, .203]$). The total indirect effect was .399, while the total effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience was .617, indicating complementary partial mediation. Brand resilience in digital markets is strongly shaped by authenticity-based relational resources, with consumer trust functioning as the most influential mediating mechanism and emotional attachment providing an additional affective pathway through which authentic brands can better withstand and recover from reputational crises.

Keywords: Brand authenticity; Brand resilience; Consumer trust; Emotional attachment; Reputational crisis; Digital markets; Structural equation modeling

Introduction

Digital markets have transformed the architecture of contemporary brand–consumer relationships by increasing the speed, visibility, and interconnectedness through which reputations are created, evaluated, challenged, and restored. In platform-based environments, consumers no longer encounter brands primarily through controlled



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advertising or direct transactional experiences; instead, brand meanings emerge continuously through social media interactions, online reviews, influencer communications, news coverage, electronic word-of-mouth, algorithmically curated content, and user-generated discourse. This environment creates substantial opportunities for firms to develop visibility, reinforce brand identity, and cultivate relationships at scale, but it simultaneously increases reputational vulnerability because negative information can diffuse rapidly across networks and reach consumers before organizations have sufficient time to formulate coordinated responses. Social media has become central to contemporary marketing strategy, enabling brands to develop interactive relationships while also exposing them to immediate public scrutiny (1). The growing importance of online platforms in shaping consumer judgments further suggests that digital information environments can meaningfully influence decision processes and behavioral tendencies (2). For smaller firms, social media visibility may be especially valuable because digital platforms allow businesses to overcome conventional limitations of reach and communication resources (3). At the same time, greater digital exposure creates conditions under which criticism, misinformation, service failures, ethical concerns, and consumer dissatisfaction can become highly visible reputational events. Consequently, effective brand management in digital markets increasingly depends not merely on building positive brand equity under stable conditions but also on developing the capacity to withstand, adapt to, and recover from reputational crises.

Reputational crises are particularly consequential in digital markets because they challenge the interpretive foundations through which consumers judge brand credibility, legitimacy, and relational value. A corporate crisis may originate from product failure, unethical conduct, misinformation, controversial executive behavior, security breaches, ineffective crisis communication, supply-chain concerns, or negative social-media narratives. Once such an event becomes publicly visible, consumers evaluate both the original incident and the brand's subsequent response, often relying on rapidly changing combinations of official statements, peer reactions, online communities, and media narratives. Research on brand scandals has demonstrated that adverse brand events can alter consumer attitudes and create enduring questions regarding trust, blame, identification, and post-crisis behavioral responses (4). Studies of digital crisis management likewise emphasize that networked environments intensify the complexity of brand crises by accelerating information flows and increasing stakeholder participation in the reputational process (5). The growth of online reputation management therefore reflects a broader shift from reputation as a relatively stable organizational asset toward reputation as a continuously negotiated outcome requiring active monitoring, communication, and relationship maintenance (6). This challenge has become more pronounced in the context of cancel culture, in which online criticism can rapidly escalate into coordinated reputational pressure and consumer withdrawal (7). Crisis communication failures may further magnify reputational damage when organizations provide inconsistent messages across traditional and digital channels or fail to respond adequately to stakeholder concerns (8). The Facebook–Cambridge Analytica controversy similarly illustrates how crisis communication practices become central to public interpretations of organizational responsibility and legitimacy in highly visible digital scandals (9).

Against this background, brand resilience has emerged as an increasingly important concept for understanding why some brands retain consumer support and recover after reputational adversity whereas others experience persistent erosion of confidence. Brand resilience can be understood as the capacity of a brand to absorb reputational shocks, adapt to adverse conditions, preserve meaningful stakeholder relationships, and restore legitimacy and market relevance following disruption. Although resilience may have operational, financial, and strategic dimensions, consumer-perceived brand resilience is particularly important in digital markets because

reputational recovery ultimately depends on whether consumers believe that a brand remains credible, viable, and worthy of continued engagement. Research concerning brand-crisis recovery indicates that customer experience and post-crisis relationship management can play critical roles in restoring confidence after damaging events (10). During broader periods of uncertainty, organizational survival similarly depends on the capacity to adapt to changing expectations and maintain relationships despite environmental disruption (11). Digital security also constitutes an increasingly important component of reputational resilience, particularly for service and hospitality brands whose credibility can be undermined by perceived vulnerabilities in digital systems and customer-data protection (12). Moreover, crisis resilience is not limited to private-sector commercial brands; reputation management has become central to organizational success in sectors such as healthcare, where trust, image, and perceived reliability directly influence stakeholder evaluations (13). These developments indicate that brand resilience should be conceptualized as a relational as well as strategic capability, grounded in consumer perceptions that are formed before, during, and after reputational disruption.

Among the potential antecedents of resilience, brand authenticity is especially important because crises often force consumers to reconsider whether a brand's public identity corresponds with its actual conduct. Authenticity concerns the extent to which a brand is perceived as genuine, consistent, sincere, transparent, and faithful to its stated principles. In stable circumstances, authenticity can strengthen differentiation and reinforce symbolic value; under crisis conditions, however, authenticity acquires a more diagnostic function because consumers compare prior brand claims with observed crisis behavior. When organizations respond in ways that appear evasive, opportunistic, or inconsistent with their established identity, consumers may interpret the crisis as evidence that the brand's previous image was strategically constructed rather than genuine. Conversely, brands that communicate transparently, acknowledge responsibility where appropriate, and act consistently with previously expressed commitments may preserve a stronger sense of authenticity even when errors occur. Research on organizational image management emphasizes that credibility depends heavily on the strategic alignment between communication, identity, and stakeholder interpretation (14). Historical narratives also shape contemporary consumer perceptions because consumers interpret brands through accumulated stories, cultural meanings, and prior experiences rather than isolated transactions (15). Similarly, national and organizational identity research suggests that coherent identity structures influence how stakeholders recognize, interpret, and evaluate brands (16). In commercial settings, brand image has been repeatedly linked to customer buying behavior, reinforcing the importance of coherent and favorable brand meanings in consumer decision-making (17). These perspectives imply that authenticity may act as a stabilizing reputational resource when consumers confront conflicting or negative information.

Authenticity may be particularly valuable because it provides a foundation for consumer trust. Trust reflects confidence that a brand is dependable, honest, competent, and willing to act in a manner that does not intentionally exploit consumers. During reputational crises, trust becomes vulnerable because negative information increases uncertainty regarding whether previous expectations remain justified. Consumers may ask whether the brand concealed information, violated promises, neglected responsibilities, or prioritized short-term interests over stakeholder welfare. Ethical considerations are particularly relevant in this process. Consumer perceptions of ethical supply chains, for example, can influence brand loyalty because judgments regarding responsibility and fairness affect broader assessments of brand character (18). In financial and service contexts, consumer preference may likewise be shaped by perceptions of whether institutions genuinely support environmental and social causes (19).

Such findings suggest that trust is not generated solely through functional performance but also through perceived congruence between organizational conduct and socially meaningful commitments. When authenticity signals that the brand's values are credible rather than performative, consumers may be more willing to maintain trust even after reputational disruption. Conversely, perceived inconsistency between claims and behavior can weaken confidence rapidly because consumers may reinterpret earlier communications as manipulative. This dynamic is particularly consequential in digital environments, where consumers can compare statements, circulate historical evidence, and challenge corporate narratives collectively.

A second relational mechanism linking authenticity with resilience is emotional attachment. Emotional attachment refers to the strength of the affective bond connecting consumers to a brand and encompasses feelings of closeness, affection, personal relevance, and emotional significance. Whereas trust is primarily associated with confidence and willingness to rely on the brand, attachment captures the extent to which the brand has become psychologically meaningful to the consumer. Digital environments may intensify such bonds by facilitating frequent interaction, participation in online communities, personalized communication, and symbolic self-expression. Research has shown that online brand experience can enhance relationship quality and contribute to highly supportive behaviors such as brand evangelism (20). Online brand attachment is also associated with purchase intention, while online brand trust can condition the strength of these effects (21). Social-media branding strategies further demonstrate how repeated digital interaction can integrate brands into consumers' identity-related and lifestyle practices (22). Influencer marketing has added another relational layer by connecting brand meanings to perceived interpersonal credibility and socially embedded communication (23). These relational processes suggest that emotionally attached consumers may be less likely to sever a brand relationship immediately when a reputational crisis occurs because the brand carries value extending beyond a single transaction. However, attachment cannot be assumed to provide unconditional protection. Severe ethical violations may transform attachment into disappointment or betrayal, meaning that the resilience-enhancing function of attachment may depend partly on whether consumers continue to perceive the brand as authentic and trustworthy.

The importance of consumer relationships becomes especially visible in online communities, where crises are interpreted collectively rather than individually. Digital communities can amplify criticism, but they can also provide relational resources for brands facing reputational threats. Consumer engagement in online brand communities has been shown to influence responses to product-harm crises, demonstrating that digitally mediated relationships can shape crisis evaluations and behavioral intentions (24). More recent research conceptualizes online brand-related communities during crises as environments in which stakeholders face both relational and informational challenges, highlighting the complexity of maintaining support when communities are confronted with adverse events (25). This collective dimension is particularly important because consumers may observe not only what a brand does but also how other consumers interpret its behavior. Under such circumstances, trust and attachment can be reinforced or undermined through social validation. The circulation of false or misleading information adds further complexity. Fake news in marketing can distort brand perceptions, accelerate negative judgments, and make it difficult for consumers to distinguish verified organizational failures from manipulated or inaccurate claims (26). In this environment, authenticity may offer a form of reputational continuity by providing consumers with an established interpretive framework through which they evaluate unexpected information. A brand with a consistent history of credible behavior may receive more interpretive latitude during uncertain crises than a brand whose prior identity is already viewed as inconsistent.

Crisis communication therefore represents a crucial interface between authenticity, trust, attachment, and resilience. Brands cannot prevent all reputational threats, but their communication strategies influence whether crises are interpreted as isolated failures, systemic violations, or evidence of deeper identity inconsistency. Effective responses typically require timeliness, transparency, empathy, responsibility, and consistency across communication channels. Pandemic-era research demonstrated that communication strategies could influence brand-specific outcomes and that pre-existing brand attitudes may condition consumer reactions (27). Studies of organizational communication during COVID-19 likewise highlighted how brands used socially oriented communication and relationship practices to maintain stakeholder connection during extraordinary disruption (28). Marketing strategy research further emphasizes that digital communication should be integrated with broader brand positioning rather than treated as an isolated promotional function (29). In crisis contexts, this integration is particularly important because consumers evaluate not only the content of apologies or corrective statements but also whether those communications are compatible with their prior understanding of the brand. Consequently, a crisis response that is technically competent but perceived as inauthentic may fail to restore trust, whereas a response aligned with established values may strengthen perceptions of resilience.

The interconnected nature of authenticity, trust, and attachment suggests that brand resilience is likely to emerge through multiple simultaneous pathways rather than through a single direct mechanism. Authenticity may have a direct effect on resilience because consumers who perceive a brand as genuine may judge reputational setbacks as more recoverable. At the same time, authenticity may strengthen resilience indirectly by preserving trust and sustaining emotional attachment. Such a model is theoretically valuable because it distinguishes between cognitive-relational and affective-relational mechanisms. Trust captures the consumer's assessment that the brand remains dependable and ethically credible, while attachment captures the emotional significance of the ongoing relationship. These mechanisms are likely to be especially relevant in digital markets, where crisis narratives evolve quickly and consumers must make decisions under conditions of incomplete, contested, or emotionally charged information. Digital brand management therefore requires a broader understanding of resilience that incorporates not only communication tactics but also the underlying quality of the consumer–brand relationship before and during crisis events.

Despite growing attention to crisis communication, online reputation management, brand scandals, digital communities, and customer relationship quality, the literature remains comparatively fragmented with respect to the simultaneous roles of authenticity, trust, and emotional attachment in explaining brand resilience. Existing studies have often focused separately on communication strategies, image restoration, online engagement, purchase intention, or post-crisis behavior. Research on crisis management has clarified the importance of rapid and context-sensitive responses (5), while studies of online reputation have emphasized the need to protect brand image in highly participatory digital environments (6, 7). Other work has demonstrated the significance of online experiences and relational quality for favorable consumer outcomes (20, 21). Yet fewer studies have integrated these domains into a single explanatory framework in which perceived brand authenticity functions as an antecedent, consumer trust and emotional attachment operate as relational mechanisms, and brand resilience constitutes the central post-crisis outcome. Such integration is important because crisis recovery is unlikely to depend solely on what a firm communicates after damage has occurred. Instead, recovery may depend substantially on relational capital accumulated before the crisis and on whether consumers interpret post-crisis conduct as consistent with an authentic brand identity.

This question is particularly relevant in emerging digital markets, where platform use, social commerce, online reviews, and social-media communication increasingly shape consumer–brand relationships while institutional and cultural conditions may influence how trust and authenticity are interpreted. Research on consumer behavior across digital and sectoral contexts indicates that branding outcomes are shaped by the interaction of communication, social meaning, ethical evaluation, identity, and digital experience rather than by functional performance alone (2, 16, 19). As brands operate in environments characterized by rapid information diffusion and reputational volatility, understanding the relational mechanisms that support resilience becomes both theoretically and managerially important. A more integrated model can clarify whether authenticity is valuable principally because it directly strengthens resilience or because it builds trust and attachment that subsequently protect the brand when adverse events occur. Distinguishing these pathways can also help managers prioritize long-term relationship development rather than relying exclusively on reactive crisis communication once reputational damage has already emerged.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to examine the direct and indirect effects of brand authenticity on brand resilience during reputational crises in digital markets, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of consumer trust and emotional attachment among consumers in Tehran.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory research design to investigate the relationships among brand authenticity, consumer trust, emotional attachment, and brand resilience in the context of reputational crises in digital markets. The study was conducted in Tehran, Iran, in 2026. The target population consisted of adult consumers who regularly interacted with brands through digital channels, including brand websites, mobile applications, online marketplaces, and social media platforms, and who had previously encountered negative information, public criticism, controversy, service failure, data-related concerns, or other reputational challenges involving a brand they used or followed. Because the conceptual model focused specifically on consumer reactions during reputational crises, eligibility was restricted to individuals who could recall at least one situation during the preceding 12 months in which a familiar brand had been subjected to substantial negative publicity or criticism in an online environment. Participants were also required to be at least 18 years of age, reside in Tehran, use digital platforms for brand-related activities at least several times per week, and have sufficient familiarity with the focal brand to evaluate its authenticity, trustworthiness, emotional relevance, and ability to recover from reputational adversity.

A multistage convenience and purposive sampling approach was adopted because a complete sampling frame of digitally active consumers exposed to brand crises was unavailable. Recruitment was conducted through consumer-oriented social media communities, online shopping groups, university-affiliated digital networks, professional networking platforms, and online communities focusing on technology, retail, banking, transportation, food delivery, telecommunications, and other digitally mediated services. At the beginning of the electronic questionnaire, respondents were provided with a screening question asking whether they had encountered a significant reputational problem involving a brand they had used or followed during the previous year. Examples were provided only to clarify the concept and included widely circulated customer complaints, controversial corporate actions, privacy or data-security concerns, misleading advertising allegations, service disruptions, executive misconduct, product-quality controversies, and intense negative discussion on social media. Respondents who answered affirmatively were asked to identify one brand that they knew sufficiently well and to

answer all subsequent questions with that brand in mind. This procedure was intended to establish a consistent referent for the measurement of all study constructs and to reduce ambiguity arising from participants considering different brands across questionnaire sections.

A total of 468 individuals initially accessed the survey. After screening for eligibility and reviewing response quality, 42 questionnaires were excluded because of substantial missing data, failure to satisfy the crisis-exposure criterion, patterned responding, or unrealistically short completion times. An additional 14 cases were removed after data-quality assessment because they showed extensive multivariate outlier characteristics or inconsistent responses across attention-check items. The final analytical sample therefore consisted of **412 consumers from Tehran**. This sample size was considered adequate for structural equation modeling because it exceeded commonly recommended minimum sample sizes for models containing multiple latent constructs and provided a favorable ratio between the number of observations and the number of estimated parameters. It also provided sufficient statistical power for detecting moderate direct and indirect relationships among the principal variables. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before completing the questionnaire, all respondents received information concerning the purpose of the study, confidentiality of their responses, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to discontinue participation at any stage without consequence. No directly identifying personal information was collected, and the data were analyzed only in aggregated form.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire consisting of demographic questions, screening items, questions concerning the focal brand and the nature of the reputational crisis, and standardized measures of brand authenticity, consumer trust, emotional attachment, and brand resilience. Unless otherwise specified, all substantive items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire was designed so that higher scores consistently represented stronger levels of the relevant construct. The demographic section assessed age, gender, educational level, employment status, frequency of online purchasing, frequency of social media use, length of relationship with the focal brand, and the primary digital channel through which respondents interacted with that brand. Additional contextual questions assessed the approximate recency of the reputational crisis, the principal source through which the participant became aware of it, and the perceived severity of the incident. These variables were collected to characterize the study sample and provide contextual information for sensitivity analyses but were not treated as primary latent variables in the hypothesized structural model.

Brand authenticity was assessed using items adapted from established multidimensional conceptualizations of consumer-perceived brand authenticity. The measurement reflected the extent to which consumers perceived the focal brand as genuine, consistent with its stated values, faithful to its identity, transparent in its conduct, and sincere in its interactions with customers, particularly during or following a reputationally threatening event. The scale covered perceptions of continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolic authenticity. Respondents evaluated statements concerning whether the brand appeared to remain true to its core principles, communicated honestly, acted consistently with previously expressed values, and behaved in a manner that appeared genuine rather than strategically manufactured. Because reputational crises may create discrepancies between prior brand claims and observed conduct, particular attention was given to items capturing perceived coherence between the brand's established identity and its crisis response. Higher aggregate scores indicated stronger perceptions of brand authenticity.

Consumer trust was measured as consumers' willingness to rely on the focal brand and their confidence that the brand would behave in a dependable, honest, and consumer-oriented manner despite reputational uncertainty. The items assessed both reliability-based and integrity-based dimensions of trust, including confidence in the brand's promises, perceptions of honesty, expectations that the brand would correct problems appropriately, and beliefs that it would not intentionally exploit consumers. Respondents were asked to evaluate the focal brand based on their overall experience as well as its behavior during the reputational crisis. This approach was appropriate because trust during a crisis represents not only accumulated confidence arising from previous interactions but also consumers' reassessment of whether the brand remains dependable after adverse information becomes available. Higher scores represented stronger consumer trust.

Emotional attachment was assessed through items capturing the strength of the affective bond between the consumer and the focal brand. The measure reflected feelings of affection, emotional connection, personal relevance, and a sense that the brand was meaningful to the respondent. Items were adapted to the consumer-brand context and were worded to evaluate the degree to which participants felt emotionally connected to, affectionate toward, and psychologically close to the focal brand. Emotional attachment was treated as conceptually distinct from behavioral loyalty because consumers may continue purchasing for functional reasons without experiencing a meaningful emotional bond. Conversely, strongly attached consumers may retain favorable feelings toward a brand even when temporary circumstances restrict purchasing behavior. In the context of the present study, emotional attachment was theorized as a relational resource that could help sustain the consumer-brand relationship when negative reputational information challenged otherwise favorable evaluations.

Brand resilience was operationalized as the perceived capacity of the focal brand to withstand reputational disruption, recover consumer confidence, restore its market position, and maintain viable relationships with consumers following a crisis. The measurement items assessed whether respondents believed the brand could recover from negative publicity, adapt effectively to reputational challenges, restore its credibility, preserve consumer support, and emerge from the crisis without enduring damage to its core market position. Because the study examined brand resilience from the consumer perspective, the construct represented **consumer-perceived brand resilience** rather than objective financial recovery or firm-level operational resilience. This distinction was important because the proposed theoretical model concerned psychological and relational mechanisms through which authenticity, trust, and attachment influence consumers' perceptions of a brand's capacity to recover. The scale therefore emphasized perceived recovery capability, reputational adaptability, persistence of brand-consumer relationships, and restoration of confidence.

The questionnaire was subjected to a multi-stage content and face-validity procedure before full-scale data collection. An initial version was reviewed by a panel of seven specialists with academic or professional expertise in digital marketing, consumer behavior, brand management, and marketing research. The experts evaluated the relevance, conceptual clarity, linguistic appropriateness, and correspondence of each item with its intended construct. Minor modifications were made to remove ambiguous wording and to ensure that the items were meaningful within digital-market and reputational-crisis contexts. The revised questionnaire was then pilot-tested with 32 consumers who met the principal inclusion criteria but were not included in the final study sample. Participants in the pilot phase were asked to comment on item clarity, completion difficulty, and the interpretation of key terms such as brand authenticity, reputational crisis, and brand recovery. The pilot results indicated satisfactory comprehensibility and internal consistency, and only minor linguistic refinements were required before

final administration. For scales originally available in English, a translation and back-translation procedure was used to prepare the Persian questionnaire. The initial translations were reviewed for conceptual rather than merely literal equivalence, and an independent bilingual reviewer back-translated the items into English. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus before pilot testing.

Several procedural measures were incorporated to reduce common method bias because predictor and outcome variables were collected from the same respondents. Participants were assured that there were no correct or incorrect answers, anonymity was emphasized, scale sections were separated by brief instructions, and the questionnaire avoided unnecessarily evaluative or leading language. The order of selected items was also varied within construct blocks where this did not interfere with scale interpretation. Attention-check items were included to identify inattentive responding. In addition to these procedural controls, common method variance was subsequently evaluated statistically during data analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM SPSS AMOS. The analysis proceeded through preliminary data screening, descriptive analysis, evaluation of the measurement model, assessment of reliability and validity, and structural equation modeling of the hypothesized relationships. Initially, the dataset was examined for duplicate submissions, missing observations, response-pattern anomalies, outliers, and implausibly short completion times. Cases with extensive missing information were removed before analysis. For the remaining observations, the extent and pattern of missing data were examined to determine whether they were likely to bias parameter estimation. Univariate distributions were evaluated using skewness and kurtosis statistics, histograms, and standardized scores, whereas multivariate outliers were assessed using Mahalanobis distance. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize participant characteristics and the principal study variables.

The psychometric properties of the measurement model were evaluated before testing structural relationships. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with coefficients of .70 or higher regarded as evidence of acceptable reliability. Convergent validity was examined through standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted. Standardized loadings of approximately .70 or higher were preferred, although theoretically justified items with moderately lower loadings could be retained when overall construct reliability and validity remained satisfactory. An average variance extracted value of .50 or greater was considered indicative of adequate convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated by examining the distinction among latent constructs through interconstruct correlations and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations, with values below .85 interpreted as providing strong evidence that the constructs were empirically distinguishable. Multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors, with values below 5.00 considered acceptable.

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to test whether the observed indicators adequately represented the hypothesized four-factor measurement structure consisting of brand authenticity, consumer trust, emotional attachment, and brand resilience. Model adequacy was evaluated using multiple goodness-of-fit indices rather than relying on a single statistic. The chi-square statistic and the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio were examined together with the comparative fit index, Tucker-Lewis index, root mean square error of approximation, and standardized root mean square residual. A chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio below 3.00, comparative fit index and Tucker-Lewis index values of approximately .90 or higher, and root mean square error of approximation and standardized root mean square residual values below .08 were considered indicative of acceptable model fit. Where

theoretically defensible, modification indices were examined to identify localized areas of model misfit; however, model modifications were not introduced solely to improve statistical fit without substantive justification.

After establishing an acceptable measurement model, structural equation modeling was used to examine the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships among the latent variables. Brand authenticity was modeled as a principal antecedent of consumer trust, emotional attachment, and perceived brand resilience. Consumer trust and emotional attachment were examined as relational mechanisms through which perceived authenticity could contribute to stronger brand resilience during reputational crises. Direct paths from consumer trust and emotional attachment to brand resilience were estimated, together with the direct path from brand authenticity to brand resilience. This specification made it possible to determine whether authenticity contributed to resilience independently and whether part of its effect operated indirectly through consumers' trust and emotional connection with the focal brand. Standardized path coefficients, standard errors, critical ratios, and probability values were reported for the estimated structural relationships.

Indirect effects were evaluated using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Mediation was considered statistically supported when the 95% bootstrap confidence interval for an indirect effect did not include zero. Both specific indirect effects and the total indirect effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience through consumer trust and emotional attachment were assessed. This procedure was preferred to reliance on assumptions of normality for indirect-effect distributions. The relative magnitude of direct and indirect pathways was also examined to determine whether the relationships were consistent with complementary partial mediation, indirect-only mediation, or the absence of meaningful mediation. Demographic and brand-relationship variables that demonstrated theoretically meaningful associations with the principal constructs were examined as potential control variables in supplementary models to determine whether the central relationships remained robust after accounting for individual and contextual differences.

Potential common method variance was assessed through both diagnostic and confirmatory procedures. An exploratory single-factor assessment was first used to determine whether one general factor accounted for a disproportionate amount of covariance among the measured indicators. In addition, the fit of the hypothesized multidimensional measurement model was compared conceptually with a single-factor specification. Evidence that the four-factor model demonstrated substantially better fit than the common-factor alternative was interpreted as reducing concern that the observed relationships were primarily artifacts of common measurement conditions. Statistical significance was evaluated using a two-tailed alpha level of .05. Effect magnitude, standardized coefficients, confidence intervals, reliability and validity estimates, and overall model fit were considered jointly when interpreting the findings rather than relying exclusively on statistical significance.

Findings and Results

A total of 412 valid responses were included in the final analysis. Of the respondents, 214 were men (51.9%) and 198 were women (48.1%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 58 years, with a mean age of 33.74 years ($SD = 8.61$). The largest age group consisted of respondents aged 26–35 years ($n = 157$, 38.1%), followed by those aged 36–45 years ($n = 104$, 25.2%), participants aged 18–25 years ($n = 91$, 22.1%), and those aged 46 years or older ($n = 60$, 14.6%). Regarding educational attainment, 63 respondents (15.3%) held a high-school diploma or lower qualification, 124 (30.1%) held an associate or bachelor's degree, 171 (41.5%) held a master's degree, and 54 (13.1%) held a doctoral or professional degree. In terms of employment status, 166 respondents (40.3%) were

employed in the private sector, 83 (20.1%) were employed in governmental or public-sector organizations, 61 (14.8%) were self-employed, 58 (14.1%) were students, and 44 (10.7%) reported other employment circumstances. The sample was characterized by substantial engagement with digital markets. A total of 176 participants (42.7%) reported making online purchases several times per month, 101 (24.5%) reported purchasing online at least once per week, 92 (22.3%) reported purchasing approximately once per month, and 43 (10.4%) reported less frequent online purchasing. Regarding social media use, 285 respondents (69.2%) reported daily use exceeding two hours, indicating a high level of exposure to digital brand communications and electronic word-of-mouth. Participants had maintained a relationship with the focal brand for an average of 3.84 years ($SD = 2.67$). Social media was the most frequently reported source through which participants first became aware of the reputational crisis (43.4%), followed by online news websites (21.8%), customer reviews and online forums (15.5%), direct personal experience (11.7%), and other digital sources (7.5%). With respect to perceived crisis severity, 84 respondents (20.4%) characterized the crisis as relatively moderate, 211 (51.2%) as serious, and 117 (28.4%) as very serious. These characteristics indicated that the final sample consisted predominantly of digitally active consumers who had sufficient familiarity with both the selected brands and the corresponding reputational crises to provide meaningful assessments of brand authenticity, consumer trust, emotional attachment, and perceived brand resilience.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Convergent Validity of the Study Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand authenticity	3.54	0.72	-0.31	-0.18	.912	.929	.648
Consumer trust	3.39	0.78	-0.22	-0.36	.904	.924	.669
Emotional attachment	3.27	0.81	-0.14	-0.47	.889	.916	.686
Brand resilience	3.46	0.75	-0.28	-0.25	.918	.934	.702

The descriptive results presented in Table 1 showed that participants generally reported moderate-to-high evaluations across all four constructs. Brand authenticity had the highest mean among the antecedent constructs ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.72$), indicating that respondents tended to perceive the focal brands as reasonably consistent, genuine, transparent, and aligned with their stated values despite experiencing reputational challenges. Brand resilience also demonstrated a comparatively high mean ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.75$), suggesting that a substantial proportion of respondents believed that the brands under evaluation possessed the capacity to recover credibility and maintain customer relationships following reputational disruption. Consumer trust showed a mean of 3.39 ($SD = 0.78$), whereas emotional attachment had the lowest, although still above the scale midpoint, mean score ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.81$). The comparatively lower emotional attachment score suggested that affective bonds with brands were somewhat less pronounced than cognitive evaluations of authenticity and trustworthiness. The distributions of all study variables were approximately normal, with skewness ranging from -0.31 to -0.14 and kurtosis ranging from -0.47 to -0.18. These values were well within commonly accepted thresholds for univariate normality and therefore did not indicate substantial distributional problems. Reliability estimates were consistently high. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .889 for emotional attachment to .918 for brand resilience, exceeding the recommended .70 criterion in all cases. Composite reliability values ranged from .916 to .934, further confirming satisfactory internal consistency. Average variance extracted values ranged from .648 to .702, all exceeding the .50 threshold and indicating that each latent construct accounted for more than half of the variance in its indicators. Accordingly, the results supported adequate reliability and convergent validity for all measurement scales prior to evaluation of the structural relationships.

Table 2. Correlations and Discriminant Validity Among the Latent Constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Brand authenticity	.805			
2. Consumer trust	.642	.818		
3. Emotional attachment	.518	.566	.828	
4. Brand resilience	.616	.681	.594	.838
HTMT: Brand authenticity–Consumer trust	.714			
HTMT: Brand authenticity–Emotional attachment	.583			
HTMT: Brand authenticity–Brand resilience	.687			
HTMT: Consumer trust–Emotional attachment	.631			
HTMT: Consumer trust–Brand resilience	.759			
HTMT: Emotional attachment–Brand resilience	.663			

As shown in Table 2, all four constructs were positively and significantly related to one another, providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relational structure. Brand authenticity was strongly associated with consumer trust ($r = .642$, $p < .001$) and moderately associated with emotional attachment ($r = .518$, $p < .001$) and brand resilience ($r = .616$, $p < .001$). These associations suggested that consumers who perceived a brand as more genuine, transparent, and behaviorally consistent were more likely to maintain trust in the brand, feel emotionally connected to it, and perceive it as capable of recovering from reputational adversity. Consumer trust had the strongest zero-order relationship with brand resilience ($r = .681$, $p < .001$), indicating that confidence in a brand's honesty, dependability, and willingness to correct problems was particularly closely related to perceptions of its ability to withstand and recover from a crisis. Emotional attachment was also positively related to brand resilience ($r = .594$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that consumers who maintained stronger affective bonds with the focal brand were more inclined to view it as resilient. The square roots of AVE, shown on the diagonal, ranged from .805 to .838 and were greater than the corresponding interconstruct correlations, thereby supporting discriminant validity under the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Moreover, all heterotrait-monotrait ratios were below the conservative threshold of .85, ranging from .583 for the relationship between brand authenticity and emotional attachment to .759 for the relationship between consumer trust and brand resilience. These results demonstrated that although the constructs were meaningfully associated, they remained empirically distinct. Variance inflation factors for the predictor constructs ranged from 1.54 to 2.13, substantially below the threshold of 5.00, indicating that multicollinearity did not threaten the estimation of the structural model. Collectively, these findings supported proceeding to confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Overall Model Fit

Model Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Criterion	Interpretation
χ^2	421.68	—	—
df	181	—	—
χ^2/df	2.33	< 3.00	Acceptable
CFI	.956	$\geq .90$	Excellent
TLI	.948	$\geq .90$	Excellent
IFI	.956	$\geq .90$	Excellent
NFI	.927	$\geq .90$	Acceptable
RMSEA	.057	$< .08$	Excellent
90% CI for RMSEA	.050–.064	—	—
SRMR	.046	$< .08$	Excellent

The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the proposed four-factor measurement model provided a satisfactory representation of the observed data. The chi-square statistic was significant, $\chi^2(181) = 421.68$, $p < .001$,

as is frequently observed with moderately large samples; therefore, model evaluation was based primarily on the relative chi-square and incremental and residual fit indices. The chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio was 2.33, remaining below the recommended upper limit of 3.00 and indicating acceptable fit. The comparative fit index was .956, the Tucker-Lewis index was .948, and the incremental fit index was .956, all exceeding .90 and approaching or exceeding the more stringent .95 benchmark. The normed fit index was .927, likewise demonstrating satisfactory fit. The root mean square error of approximation was .057, with a 90% confidence interval of .050 to .064, indicating a relatively small degree of approximation error. The standardized root mean square residual was .046, which was considerably lower than the .08 criterion. Standardized factor loadings across all retained indicators ranged from .71 to .89 and were statistically significant at $p < .001$. No indicator exhibited a standardized loading below .70 after measurement refinement. The findings therefore confirmed that brand authenticity, consumer trust, emotional attachment, and brand resilience were represented as four related but distinguishable latent constructs. In addition, comparison with a single-factor model demonstrated markedly inferior fit for the latter specification, $\chi^2/df = 7.84$, CFI = .681, TLI = .642, RMSEA = .129, and SRMR = .118. The substantially better fit of the hypothesized four-factor model reduced concern that covariance among the measures was predominantly attributable to a single common method factor. Overall, the measurement-model findings provided sufficient psychometric support for estimation and interpretation of the hypothesized structural relationships.

Table 4. Structural Model Results for Direct Effects

Hypothesized Path	Standardized β	SE	Critical Ratio	p	Result
Brand authenticity $\rightarrow$ Consumer trust	.638	.052	10.94	< .001	Supported
Brand authenticity $\rightarrow$ Emotional attachment	.512	.058	8.47	< .001	Supported
Brand authenticity $\rightarrow$ Brand resilience	.218	.061	3.72	< .001	Supported
Consumer trust $\rightarrow$ Brand resilience	.414	.060	6.81	< .001	Supported
Emotional attachment $\rightarrow$ Brand resilience	.263	.051	4.92	< .001	Supported

Model explanatory power: R^2 for consumer trust = .407; R^2 for emotional attachment = .262; R^2 for brand resilience = .612.

The structural model results presented in Table 4 provided support for all hypothesized direct relationships. Brand authenticity had a strong positive effect on consumer trust ($\beta = .638$, $SE = .052$, $CR = 10.94$, $p < .001$), indicating that consumers who perceived the focal brand as more genuine, credible, transparent, and consistent with its values were substantially more likely to continue trusting it despite reputational adversity. Brand authenticity also positively predicted emotional attachment ($\beta = .512$, $SE = .058$, $CR = 8.47$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that perceived authenticity was associated not only with cognitive confidence but also with stronger affective bonds between consumers and brands. Together, these results indicated that authenticity functioned as an important relational foundation during reputational crises. Brand authenticity also retained a statistically significant direct effect on brand resilience after the two relational mediators were included in the model ($\beta = .218$, $SE = .061$, $CR = 3.72$, $p < .001$). Thus, consumers' perceptions of authenticity contributed directly to perceptions of a brand's ability to recover and remain viable, independently of the indirect pathways through trust and emotional attachment.

Consumer trust exerted the strongest direct effect on brand resilience among the two mediating constructs ($\beta = .414$, $SE = .060$, $CR = 6.81$, $p < .001$). This finding showed that consumers' confidence in the honesty, reliability, and corrective intentions of a brand was a particularly important determinant of whether the brand was perceived as capable of recovering from reputational damage. Emotional attachment also had a significant positive effect on brand resilience ($\beta = .263$, $SE = .051$, $CR = 4.92$, $p < .001$), suggesting that emotionally bonded consumers were more willing to maintain favorable perceptions and support the brand's recovery despite the presence of negative

reputational information. The model accounted for 40.7% of the variance in consumer trust and 26.2% of the variance in emotional attachment. More importantly, the combined effects of brand authenticity, consumer trust, and emotional attachment explained 61.2% of the variance in brand resilience. This level of explained variance indicated substantial explanatory power and suggested that relational and authenticity-based resources collectively represented important determinants of perceived resilience in digital-market reputational crises. Examination of the standardized residuals and modification indices did not identify any major localized model misspecification, and the structural model retained satisfactory overall fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.41$, CFI = .951, TLI = .943, RMSEA = .059, and SRMR = .049.

Table 5. Bootstrapped Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects of Brand Authenticity on Brand Resilience

Effect	Standardized Effect	Boot SE	95% Bootstrap CI	p	Interpretation
Brand authenticity → Consumer trust → Brand resilience	.264	.037	[.198, .342]	< .001	Significant indirect effect
Brand authenticity → Emotional attachment → Brand resilience	.135	.031	[.081, .203]	< .001	Significant indirect effect
Total indirect effect	.399	.046	[.316, .497]	< .001	Significant
Direct effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience	.218	.058	[.107, .332]	< .001	Significant
Total effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience	.617	.049	[.521, .710]	< .001	Significant

The mediation analysis presented in Table 5 was performed using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples and demonstrated that consumer trust and emotional attachment both significantly mediated the association between brand authenticity and brand resilience. The specific indirect effect operating through consumer trust was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .264$, Boot SE = .037, 95% CI [.198, .342], $p < .001$). Because the bootstrap confidence interval did not contain zero, the indirect pathway was considered statistically reliable. This finding indicated that a substantial portion of the resilience-enhancing effect of authenticity occurred because authentic brands were more likely to preserve or restore consumer trust during periods of reputational uncertainty. The indirect effect through emotional attachment was also statistically significant ($\beta = .135$, Boot SE = .031, 95% CI [.081, .203], $p < .001$), demonstrating that perceived authenticity additionally strengthened resilience by reinforcing consumers' affective bonds with the brand. The trust-mediated pathway was nearly twice as large as the attachment-mediated pathway, suggesting that trust represented the more powerful intervening mechanism in the context of reputational crises.

The combined indirect effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience through the two mediators was $\beta = .399$ (Boot SE = .046, 95% CI [.316, .497], $p < .001$), whereas the direct effect remained statistically significant after the mediators were introduced ($\beta = .218$, 95% CI [.107, .332], $p < .001$). The total effect of authenticity on resilience was substantial ($\beta = .617$, Boot SE = .049, 95% CI [.521, .710], $p < .001$). Because both the direct and indirect effects were significant and operated in the same positive direction, the pattern was consistent with complementary partial mediation. Thus, perceived brand authenticity contributed to brand resilience both independently and through strengthened consumer trust and emotional attachment. Approximately 64.7% of the total effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience was transmitted through the two mediating mechanisms, while the remaining 35.3% represented the residual direct effect. This pattern emphasized that authenticity should not be understood merely as a direct reputational asset; rather, its principal contribution to resilience appeared to operate through relational

processes that preserve confidence and affective commitment when consumers encounter adverse information about a brand. Additional sensitivity analyses incorporating age, gender, education, duration of the consumer-brand relationship, frequency of online purchasing, and perceived crisis severity as control variables produced no substantive changes in the magnitude or statistical significance of the principal structural relationships, supporting the robustness of the hypothesized model.

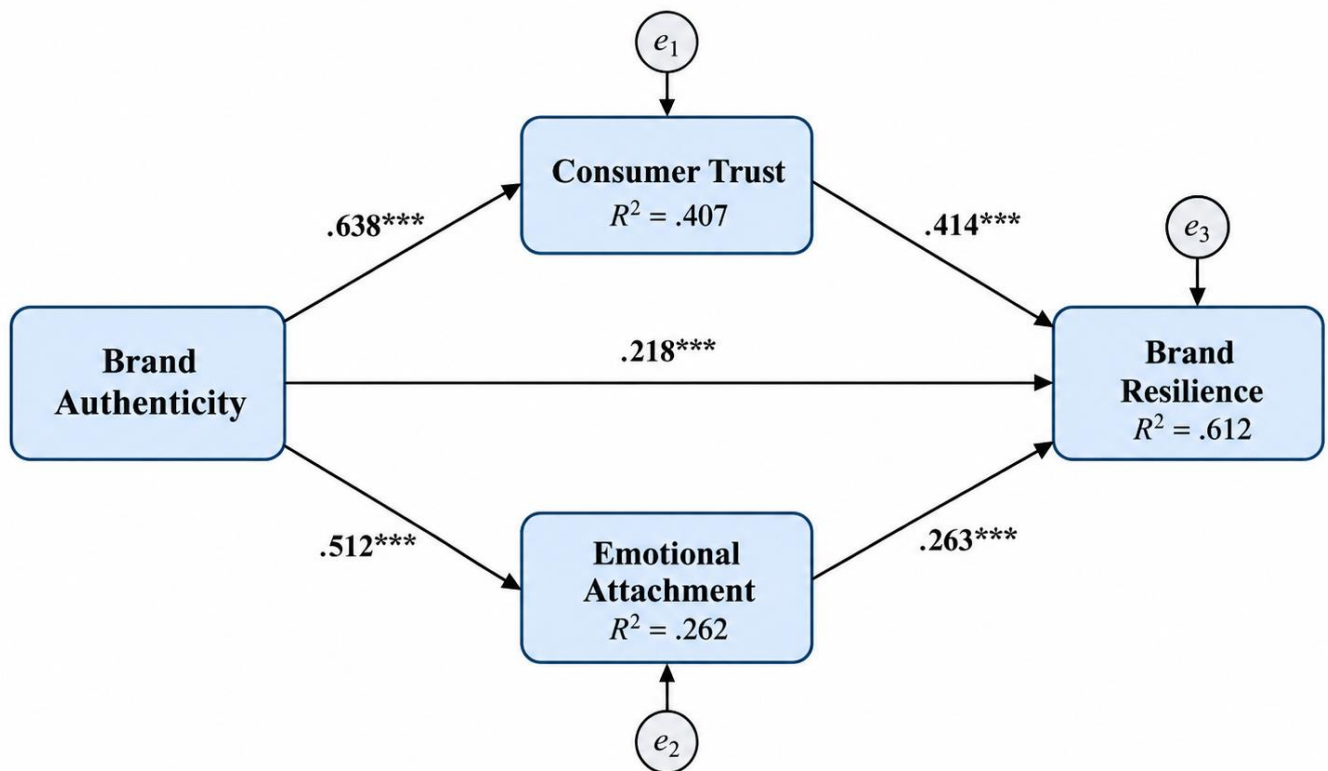


Figure 1. Structural Model of the Relationships Among Brand Authenticity, Consumer Trust, Emotional Attachment, and Brand Resilience During Reputational Crises

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the role of brand authenticity in strengthening brand resilience during reputational crises in digital markets and tested consumer trust and emotional attachment as mediating mechanisms. The findings demonstrated that brand authenticity had significant positive effects on consumer trust, emotional attachment, and brand resilience, while both consumer trust and emotional attachment significantly predicted brand resilience. The mediation analysis further showed that authenticity influenced resilience indirectly through both relational mechanisms, with consumer trust representing the stronger mediator. Collectively, brand authenticity, consumer trust, and emotional attachment explained 61.2% of the variance in perceived brand resilience, indicating that relational and identity-based resources constitute important mechanisms through which brands can withstand and recover from reputational disruption. The findings therefore support an integrated view of brand resilience in which recovery is not determined solely by post-crisis communication or corrective action but is also shaped by the quality of the consumer–brand relationship and the degree to which consumers perceive the brand as genuine, dependable, and emotionally meaningful.

The strongest antecedent relationship identified in the model was the positive effect of brand authenticity on consumer trust, with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = .638$. This result indicates that consumers who perceived brands as sincere, credible, transparent, and behaviorally consistent were substantially more likely to continue trusting them in the presence of reputational adversity. Such a relationship is theoretically plausible because reputational crises generate uncertainty regarding whether an organization's prior claims, commitments, and symbolic identity remain credible. When consumers perceive consistency between a brand's stated values and its behavior, authenticity functions as a signal that reduces uncertainty and preserves confidence. This finding corresponds with research emphasizing that organizational reputation is strongly influenced by the consistency and credibility of communication in digital environments (6). It is also consistent with the argument that crisis management in networked markets requires brands to demonstrate transparency and identity coherence rather than relying solely on tactical image repair (5). Crisis communication failures, particularly when messages vary across communication channels, can undermine confidence because consumers interpret inconsistency as evidence that an organization is avoiding responsibility or attempting to manipulate perceptions (8). The present findings extend these perspectives by demonstrating quantitatively that perceived authenticity is closely associated with the preservation of consumer trust during reputational disruption.

The positive relationship between authenticity and trust can also be understood through consumers' increasing attention to ethical and socially responsible organizational conduct. Contemporary consumers often evaluate whether corporate claims are reflected in observable behavior, particularly when brands make commitments regarding social responsibility, sustainability, privacy, employee treatment, or ethical sourcing. Evidence that ethical supply-chain perceptions influence consumer loyalty indicates that consumers incorporate assessments of organizational integrity into their broader evaluations of brands (18). Similarly, institutional preferences may be shaped by perceptions that organizations authentically support environmental and social causes rather than merely employing such issues for promotional purposes (19). In reputational crises, these ethical assessments may become even more salient because consumers scrutinize whether the crisis represents an isolated failure or a deeper contradiction between the brand's stated identity and actual practices. Thus, authenticity can protect trust by signaling continuity between the brand's pre-crisis identity and its crisis-period conduct.

Brand authenticity also exerted a significant positive effect on emotional attachment, $\beta = .512$, indicating that perceptions of genuineness and identity consistency were associated with stronger affective bonds between consumers and brands. This finding suggests that authenticity does not operate solely through rational evaluations of reliability but also contributes to the emotional dimension of consumer–brand relationships. Consumers may develop deeper attachment to brands that they perceive as distinctive, sincere, and meaningful because such brands provide more stable symbolic resources for identity expression and personal affiliation. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that online brand experiences can enhance relationship quality and foster highly supportive behaviors such as brand evangelism (20). Similarly, online brand attachment has been associated with stronger behavioral intentions, particularly when consumers also perceive the brand as trustworthy (21). The present findings reinforce the view that authenticity is an important basis for affective relationship development because consumers are more likely to feel emotionally connected to brands whose identity appears genuine and internally coherent.

The influence of authenticity on emotional attachment may be particularly important in digital environments because consumers encounter brands through repeated, socially embedded interactions rather than through

isolated purchase episodes. Social-media marketing enables brands to become integrated into consumers' everyday communication, identity expression, and community participation (1). Influencer-based communication similarly embeds brand meanings within interpersonal and quasi-interpersonal relationships, increasing the emotional salience of brand narratives (23). Sports and lifestyle branding in social media further illustrate how brand communities and symbolic meanings can generate identity-related engagement beyond utilitarian consumption (22). However, such emotional relationships are likely to remain stable only when consumers perceive the brand's actions as congruent with the identity it communicates. A reputational crisis can therefore function as a test of authenticity, with perceived consistency preserving emotional attachment and perceived hypocrisy weakening it.

The direct effect of brand authenticity on brand resilience was also statistically significant, $\beta = .218$, even after consumer trust and emotional attachment were incorporated into the model. Although smaller than the indirect mechanisms, this result indicates that authenticity independently contributes to consumers' beliefs that a brand can withstand and recover from reputational adversity. A brand perceived as authentic may be granted greater interpretive flexibility during a crisis because consumers can contextualize negative events against a history of consistent behavior and credible identity signals. This result aligns with literature emphasizing the growing importance of proactive online reputation management in environments characterized by rapid criticism and cancel culture (7). It also corresponds with research showing that organizational image management requires sustained identity development rather than temporary crisis-period communication interventions (14). Brands with coherent identity structures may therefore possess a form of reputational reserve that makes adverse events less likely to produce permanent identity damage.

The finding that authenticity directly contributed to resilience also reflects the broader significance of brand image and accumulated brand meaning. Consumers rarely evaluate a reputational event without reference to prior beliefs about the organization. Brand image has been shown to influence purchasing behavior because consumers use established brand perceptions as interpretive shortcuts when evaluating market alternatives (17). Historical narratives similarly shape consumer perceptions because past experiences and socially transmitted stories become incorporated into contemporary judgments (15). Research on identity further indicates that coherent brand representations contribute to stakeholder recognition and evaluation (16). These perspectives help explain why consumers may perceive an authentic brand as more capable of recovery: reputational resilience is partly grounded in accumulated meaning that cannot easily be erased by a single negative episode.

Consumer trust emerged as the strongest direct predictor of brand resilience, $\beta = .414$. This result indicates that consumers' confidence in a brand's honesty, reliability, and willingness to behave responsibly plays a central role in determining whether they believe the brand can recover from reputational damage. Trust becomes especially consequential during crises because consumers must make judgments under uncertainty, often before the factual circumstances have been completely established. In such environments, prior trust can serve as a heuristic that influences how consumers interpret new information. The result is consistent with studies showing that customer experience and relationship quality are central to effective brand-crisis recovery (10). It is also compatible with findings that crisis-related communication affects brand outcomes partly because consumers evaluate the credibility and appropriateness of organizational responses (27). The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that trust is not merely a desirable consequence of effective crisis response but is itself a major relational resource underlying perceived resilience.

Trust may have acquired particular importance in the present digital-market context because consumers are exposed to competing narratives that can make reputational crises difficult to interpret. Social media allows negative claims, counterclaims, commentary, and speculation to circulate rapidly, while misleading information can further distort perceptions. Research on fake news in marketing indicates that inaccurate or strategically manipulated information can affect brand perceptions and complicate consumer decision-making (26). Online platforms likewise shape behavioral judgments by influencing how individuals obtain, organize, and evaluate information (2). Under these conditions, previously established trust may determine whether consumers immediately accept negative claims or remain open to the brand's explanation. This helps explain why trust produced a stronger direct effect on resilience than emotional attachment: during reputational crises, consumers may prioritize judgments regarding credibility and reliability before considering their affective connection with the brand.

Emotional attachment nevertheless demonstrated a significant positive effect on brand resilience, $\beta = .263$. This finding confirms that affective bonds contribute meaningfully to consumers' willingness to view a brand as capable of surviving reputational adversity. Emotionally attached consumers may perceive the brand as personally significant and therefore be less likely to terminate the relationship in response to temporary uncertainty. They may also be more willing to consider corrective explanations, tolerate isolated failures, and continue engaging with brand communities while the crisis is resolved. This interpretation corresponds with evidence showing that strong online brand experiences can generate relationship quality and advocacy behaviors (20). It also aligns with the role of online brand attachment in sustaining purchase intentions (21). Digital communities may reinforce this mechanism because consumers with stronger brand identification participate in collective interpretations of crisis events rather than reacting solely as isolated individuals.

The importance of attachment is further supported by research on online brand communities during crisis situations. Consumer engagement within online brand communities has been shown to influence responses to product-harm crises, indicating that pre-existing engagement can shape consumers' willingness to maintain relationships with affected brands (24). Research on online faith-holder communities similarly demonstrates that strongly supportive brand communities face distinctive informational and relational challenges when crises occur (25). These findings suggest that emotional attachment can provide relational continuity during disruption, but the effect is unlikely to be unconditional. Attachment may protect the brand when consumers interpret the crisis as temporary or reparable, whereas severe violations that directly contradict the consumer's values may transform attachment into disappointment or betrayal. The positive association observed in the present study therefore reflects the resilience-enhancing function of attachment within contexts where consumers continue to perceive the brand relationship as meaningful and potentially recoverable.

The mediation findings provide one of the most important contributions of the study. Brand authenticity influenced resilience indirectly through consumer trust, with a standardized indirect effect of $\beta = .264$, and through emotional attachment, with an indirect effect of $\beta = .135$. The total indirect effect was $\beta = .399$, accounting for approximately 64.7% of the total effect of authenticity on resilience. These results demonstrate that the primary contribution of authenticity to brand resilience operates through relational processes rather than through a purely direct pathway. In other words, authenticity strengthens resilience because it helps brands preserve consumers' confidence and emotional connection when negative reputational information emerges. The larger indirect effect through trust suggests that cognitive-relational confidence is more influential than affective attachment during reputational crises. This finding is consistent with crisis-management research emphasizing the importance of credibility, transparency,

and coherent communication in preserving stakeholder support (5, 9). It is also compatible with studies emphasizing reputation management as an ongoing relationship process rather than a short-term communication intervention (6, 13).

The partial mediation pattern is also theoretically meaningful because it indicates that authenticity retains value beyond trust and attachment. Even when these relational mechanisms were accounted for, authenticity continued to predict resilience directly. This means consumers may regard authenticity itself as evidence that a brand possesses the integrity and strategic coherence necessary to recover. At the same time, the much larger combined indirect pathway shows that authenticity becomes most consequential when translated into durable relationships. This interpretation corresponds with the broader literature on crisis communication and socially embedded branding. Brands that sustained stakeholder relationships during the COVID-19 crisis often relied on communication practices emphasizing social connection and relational responsiveness (28). Similarly, broader evidence concerning organizational survival under uncertainty highlights adaptation and stakeholder confidence as central resources (11). Digital security research also underscores that resilience increasingly depends on whether consumers believe organizational systems and practices remain dependable under threat (12). Thus, authenticity appears to function as a foundational reputational resource that gains practical strength when converted into trust and affective attachment.

The explanatory power of the overall model was substantial, with brand authenticity, consumer trust, and emotional attachment accounting for 61.2% of the variance in brand resilience. This result suggests that brand resilience in digital markets is strongly relational rather than exclusively operational. Although technical recovery, financial capacity, product correction, and strategic communication remain important, consumers appear to judge resilience through accumulated perceptions of identity, credibility, and relationship strength. Marketing strategy therefore cannot be separated from reputation management. Firms that use digital channels merely for promotional visibility without cultivating coherent identity and trustworthy relationships may remain highly vulnerable when negative information emerges. Social media provides valuable opportunities for firms to become visible and interact with customers (3), but greater visibility simultaneously increases reputational exposure. Consequently, digital marketing strategy must integrate long-term authenticity and relationship development with crisis preparedness. This interpretation is consistent with strategic marketing research emphasizing the importance of integrated positioning and customer engagement rather than isolated promotional actions (29).

The findings also highlight the importance of distinguishing between resilience and simple reputation repair. Reputation repair may involve restoring favorable perceptions following a specific event, whereas resilience concerns the broader capacity to absorb shocks and maintain relational viability over time. The results suggest that resilient brands possess relational capital accumulated before crises occur. Such capital cannot be created immediately through apologies, promotional campaigns, or short-term image management after damage has already occurred. Instead, resilience develops through sustained authenticity, reliable conduct, meaningful interaction, and emotionally significant customer relationships. This interpretation is consistent with the increasing emphasis on proactive reputation management in digital environments (7) and with evidence that brand-specific crisis outcomes are influenced by pre-existing attitudes and relationships (27). Accordingly, crisis management should be conceptualized as a continuous component of brand strategy rather than as an episodic response activated only after reputational disruption.

A further implication concerns the role of consistency across communication channels. Reputational crises frequently unfold simultaneously across corporate websites, social media, news platforms, consumer forums, and online communities. Inconsistent messaging can therefore undermine authenticity and weaken trust. Evidence from crisis communication research demonstrates that ineffective coordination across traditional and digital channels can intensify negative stakeholder reactions (8). The Cambridge Analytica case similarly illustrates how public evaluations of crisis responses are shaped by the adequacy and credibility of digital communication practices (9). The present findings suggest that cross-channel consistency should be understood not merely as a communication-quality issue but as an antecedent of relational resilience. Consumers who perceive a coherent and authentic organizational response are more likely to retain trust, while those exposed to contradictory messages may interpret inconsistency as evidence of manipulation.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference because all constructs were measured at a single point in time following participants' exposure to reputational crises. Although the proposed relationships were theoretically specified and supported statistically, longitudinal data would be required to establish how authenticity, trust, attachment, and resilience evolve throughout the different stages of a crisis. Second, the study relied on self-reported consumer perceptions, which may be influenced by recall bias, social desirability, and individual differences in interpreting the severity of reputational incidents. Third, participants evaluated different focal brands and different types of crises rather than a single standardized event. This approach increased ecological validity but introduced heterogeneity in crisis characteristics, brand familiarity, and prior relationship strength. Fourth, the participants were consumers residing in Tehran, and therefore the findings should not automatically be generalized to other cultural, geographic, or market settings. Finally, perceived brand resilience was measured from the consumer perspective and should not be equated with objective indicators such as financial recovery, market-share restoration, operational continuity, or long-term corporate survival.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify the temporal and causal relationships among authenticity, trust, emotional attachment, and brand resilience. Longitudinal research could examine consumer responses before a crisis, immediately after negative information emerges, following the organization's response, and during subsequent reputation recovery. Experimental studies could manipulate crisis severity, organizational responsibility, apology strategy, transparency, compensation, and response speed to determine whether the proposed relationships vary across crisis scenarios. Future research should also distinguish among different crisis types, including product failures, privacy violations, executive misconduct, ethical controversies, misinformation, cybersecurity breaches, and service disruptions. Cross-cultural comparisons would be valuable for assessing whether the importance of authenticity and trust differs across institutional and cultural contexts. Additional constructs such as brand identification, perceived betrayal, forgiveness, consumer cynicism, moral outrage, electronic word-of-mouth, community identification, and perceived crisis responsibility could be incorporated into expanded models. Researchers should also combine perceptual measures with objective indicators such as online sentiment trajectories, engagement behavior, purchasing records, market performance, and brand-search activity to provide a multidimensional assessment of resilience.

Managers should treat brand resilience as a capability that must be developed before a reputational crisis occurs rather than as an outcome that can be produced through emergency communication alone. Organizations should establish a consistent brand identity, communicate values that can realistically be enacted, and avoid symbolic

commitments that are not supported by operational practices. During crises, communication should be timely, transparent, factually consistent, and aligned across social media, websites, customer-service channels, and executive statements. Because consumer trust emerged as the strongest relational predictor of resilience, brands should prioritize behaviors that demonstrate honesty, accountability, corrective action, and reliability. At the same time, managers should cultivate emotional attachment through meaningful customer experiences, community participation, personalized interaction, and sustained relationship-building rather than depending exclusively on promotional incentives. Crisis-response teams should monitor online discourse continuously, identify emerging misinformation, and respond with evidence rather than defensiveness. Most importantly, organizations should recognize that consumers evaluate crisis responses against the brand's prior conduct; therefore, the strongest protection against reputational damage is a long-term record of authentic behavior that creates sufficient trust and emotional commitment to sustain the relationship when adversity occurs.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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