

**Leveraging cause-related marketing for revenue growth: A millennial
consumer study in the South African prestige beauty sector**

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science,
University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is extensively used by prestige beauty brands to attract socially conscious consumers, however, its authentic effects on consumer trust and loyalty are still ambiguous. This study investigated how the transparency of a CRM message, that is whether it clearly states a donation or uses implicit symbolic cues, affects consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust. It further examined whether these perceptions impact consumer behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty among millennial consumers in South Africa's prestige beauty sector. The analysis was based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework: message format as stimulus, authenticity and trust as organism, and consumer behavioural outcomes as response.

A quantitative survey involving 250 millennial consumers in South Africa's prestige beauty sector was conducted, and the data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling. The findings indicated that message format alone does not exert a substantial direct influence ($\beta = 0.038$) on outcomes. Its influence is entirely mediated by authenticity and trust (Total effect = 0.722). A clear CRM message improves perceived authenticity and trust, consequently resulting in increased loyalty, repurchase intent, and positive word-of-mouth.

This study confirms the S-O-R framework and emphasises that campaigns must cultivate genuine authenticity and trust to transform CRM into enduring consumer behavioural outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Cause-related marketing, perceived authenticity and trust, millennials, consumer behaviour, purchase intention

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AVE:	Average Variance Extracted
CAGR:	Compounded Annual Growth Rate
CFA:	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI:	Comparative Fit Index
CRM:	Cause-Related Marketing
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
EFA:	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GIBS:	Gordon Institute of Business Science
FMCG:	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
H1:	Hypothesis 1
H2:	Hypothesis 2
H3:	Hypothesis 3
H4:	Hypothesis 4
KMO:	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
PCA:	Principal Component Analysis
RMSEA:	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM:	Structural Equation Modelling
S-O-R:	Stimulus-Organism-Response
SPSS:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRMR:	Standardised Root Mean Square Residual
US\$:	United States Dollar
WOW:	Word-of-Mouth

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

Prestige beauty brands in South Africa are increasingly using Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) campaigns to highlight philanthropic initiatives and partnerships with social causes. These campaigns seek to engage millennial consumers, who are socially aware and critical of insincere corporate responsibility claims. Executives are, however, left wondering whether such cause-related narratives genuinely influence purchase behaviour and boost revenue. Despite the increasing adoption of CRM within the South African prestige beauty industry, there is a lack of scholarly evidence regarding the extent to which these activities yield measurable behavioural and financial outcomes. Current research predominantly emphasises Western markets, resulting in a deficiency in comprehending the influence of social consciousness, authenticity and trust on CRM efficacy in emerging markets.

As disposable income contracts and ethical consumerism rise, the disparity between cause-related marketing and revenue growth is becoming increasingly apparent. Although CRM can enhance brand differentiation and cultivate stronger consumer connections, it risks being viewed as superficial if not executed with credibility. Theoretically, this raises the question of how external stimuli, such as cause-related messaging, induce internal consumer reactions like perceived authenticity and trust, and how these reactions eventually affect behavioural outcomes.

This study investigated how CRM strategies convert philanthropic initiatives into revenue-generating actions. It also investigated if cause-related initiatives influence millennial purchase intentions and loyalty, and whether they significantly contribute to revenue growth rather than being merely symbolic endeavours.

To understand the timeliness and significance of this research problem, it is important to situate it within the broader context of the prestige beauty sector and the changing market dynamics that influence it.

1.1 Background of the study

The prestige beauty sector has emerged as one of the most dynamic industries in the global consumer goods market, marked by swift innovation, robust brand equity, and profound emotional ties with consumers. Globally, the personal grooming and beauty products market has rebounded significantly, reaching US\$ 593 billion in 2024 with a 7% year-on-year growth, largely driven by the shift towards prestige products (Evrin Ağacı, 2025). Within this, the prestige beauty sector is expanding

more rapidly than the mass market segment, with the United States (US) prestige beauty sector growing from US\$ 31.7 billion to US\$ 33.9 billion in 2024 (Jensen, 2025). Predictions indicate that this upward trend will persist, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6% projected over 2024-2029.

The beauty market in Africa and the Middle East grew by 27% in 2024, almost four times the rate in Western Europe. By 2028, the market is expected to reach US\$ 69.5 billion at a CAGR of 8.5% over 2023-2028 (Nielsen IQ, 2025; Technavio, 2024). This acceleration signifies the region's expanding middle class, heightened urbanisation, and rising demand for premium products that denote status and self-expression. Similar patterns are observable in South Africa which serves as the continent's prestige hub. Revenue growth in this segment has been driven by evolving consumer preferences, urbanisation, and an increasing middle-class demographic, accounting for over 15% of annual cosmetics revenue growth (GlobeNewswire, 2024). Revenue in the prestige beauty industry in South Africa is expected to grow at a CAGR of 6.85% from 2025 to 2030 (Mordor Intelligence, n.d.). This growth indicates both commercial viability and the need to comprehend how marketing strategies, such as cause-related marketing, can increase and maintain engagement and brand loyalty in this changing environment.

Comprehending these growth dynamics underscores the significance of the consumer demographics fuelling demand, especially millennials, whose preferences and beliefs are reshaping the concepts of prestige and purpose in the beauty industry.

Millennials are the main drivers of this growth. As one of the largest consumer demographics, millennials exhibit purchase behaviours that significantly diverge from those of older cohorts. Research indicates that their purchasing decisions encompass not just product quality but are also congruent with ethical, social, and cultural values (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024). In South Africa, millennials have a pronounced awareness of health, the environment, and social issues, resulting in increased expectations for brands to convey authenticity and purpose (Madinga et al., 2025; Nkuna et al., 2023). For prestige beauty brands, the influence of this generation is critical, since millennials view 'prestige' not merely as a benchmark of efficacy but also as a type of symbolic capital associated with lifestyle and values (Zaborek & Mabrouk, 2025). Heightened consumer expectations have

driven brands to incorporate purpose into their communication strategies. This has prominently materialised in the prestige beauty sector via cause-related marketing.

In response to these millennial expectations, CRM has emerged as a strategic approach. In contrast to broader corporate social responsibility or sustainability initiatives, cause-related marketing directly associates brand activities with social or environmental causes in consumer-facing communication (Bhatti et al., 2022; Kotler & Lee, 2005; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). CRM campaigns usually take one of two formats: explicit messaging, wherein the brand specifies the contribution, for instance, a percentage of sales proceeds allocated to a cause, and implicit messaging where the association is communicated symbolically, such as through logos or visual cues. While explicit messaging reduces ambiguity and is often associated with heightened consumer trust (Kim et al., 2023; Schamp et al., 2023), implicit cues can also be effective by enabling consumers to connect with the cause without being sidetracked by numeric specifics (Usrey et al., 2020). The effectiveness of these approaches, however, remains debated in literature (Ndasi et al., 2021). Although cause-related marketing seemingly aligns with millennial values, its true efficacy remains contested. This uncertainty indicates a more profound theoretical and empirical gap that necessitates more scrutiny.

Despite the global adoption of CRM, there is a lack of empirical research specific to South Africa. The majority of current research on CRM effectiveness is concentrated in developed markets such as the United States and Western Europe, where cultural norms, market maturity, and consumer expectations diverge from those in South Africa (Bhatti et al., 2022). In the context of the South African prestige beauty sector, socio-economic differences and cultural diversity significantly shape the millennials' perceptions and reactions to brand messaging (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024). This gap is a barrier for managers striving to formulate effective CRM campaigns that resonate with local contexts.

Authenticity and trust are crucial, which further exacerbates this challenge. Millennials are wary of "purpose-washing", a practice in which brands assert dedication to causes without exhibiting transparency or authenticity (Antonio et al., 2022). Credible initiatives have demonstrated the capacity to enhance brand equity and advocacy (Khan & Fatma, 2023), while misaligned or superficial efforts may provoke consumer backlash and adverse word-of-mouth (WOW) (Nnindini & Dankwah, 2024; Nygaard & Silkoset, 2022). In prestige beauty where symbolic

value, desire, aspiration, and trust are fundamental to brand identity, the legitimacy of CRM communication is particularly vital.

This study was situated at the convergence of CRM communication strategies, millennial consumer behaviour, and the prestige beauty sector in South Africa. Utilising the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), this study examined how explicit versus implicit CRM messages act as stimuli that shape millennial perceptions of authenticity and trust (organism), which in turn impacts consumer behavioural outcomes (response). By focusing on South African millennials, this study provided region-specific insights into the formulation of CRM strategies aimed at cultivating trust, enhancing consumer-brand relationships, and promoting sustainable revenue growth in the prestige beauty sector.

These conceptual and contextual factors converge into the research problem underpinning this study: determining whether CRM campaigns in the South African prestige beauty sector effectively result in positive millennial consumer behavioural outcomes.

1.2 Research problem

The core research problem is that it remains uncertain whether cause-related marketing campaigns in the South African prestige beauty sector effectively result in positive millennial consumer behavioural outcomes and yield measurable financial results. Although CRM has swiftly gained prominence as a strategy to engage socially conscious millennial consumers, its actual efficacy remains ambiguous. The primary issue is in the disparity between the symbolic significance of these campaigns and their tangible impact on millennial consumers' purchase intent and revenue outcomes. Aligning with social or environmental causes can elevate a brand's image and resonate with the millennials' beliefs; yet it remains unclear whether these initiatives effectively influence purchasing behaviour or yield quantifiable financial outcomes in this setting.

Furthermore, the format of CRM communication, whether explicit or implicit messaging, introduces further complexity. Explicit messaging wherein brands clearly specify contributions, typically minimises ambiguity and fosters trust (Kim et al., 2023), yet it risks appearing transactional (McManus et al., 2024). In contrast, implicit cues including symbolic logos or pictures, can elicit emotional engagement and subtle connections, however, they are susceptible to being disregarded or

misconstrued (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022; Lee & Chung, 2018). This challenge was research-worthy due to the predominance of CRM studies on explicit and implicit effectiveness being rooted in Western contexts, hence neglecting the culturally nuanced South African millennial market (Bhatti et al., 2022).

Moreover, the South African millennials exhibit social consciousness and growing scepticism towards “purpose-washing”. Consequently, authenticity becomes a vital determinant of success. Believable brand purpose enhances trust and advocacy but perceived “woke-washing” can severely damage these connections (Walter et al., 2024).

Compounding this complexity, previous research presents conflicting findings, some evidence indicates that CRM, both explicit and implicit, can positively affect the millennials’ purchase intentions via emotional engagement or a “warm-glow” effect (Chaabouni et al., 2020; Jilv et al., 2025). Other studies emphasise that these effects may be short-lived, context-dependent, or potentially counterproductive (Chang et al., 2021; Schamp et al., 2024). For instance, as highlighted by Sodero (2022), cause-linked promotions might induce short-term sales increases but not long-term loyalty, while in prestige sectors, poorly planned campaigns can make products less appealing (Dugan et al., 2021).

Consequently, the discord between CRM’s symbolic appeal and its unpredictable real-world outcomes, exacerbated by the ambiguity of explicit and implicit message formats and heightened millennial scepticism, highlights a significant gap in the literature. This study aimed to investigate the efficacy of explicit versus implicit CRM campaigns in South Africa’s prestige beauty sector in authentically transforming millennials’ beliefs into purchasing behaviour and sustainable revenue, rather than merely serving as symbolic gestures. The S-O-R framework served as the analytical lens for examining the CRM message formats, aimed at constructing a conceptual framework to understand how millennials convert perceptions of authenticity and trust into purchase intentions and sustained revenue outcomes. Figure 1.1 depicts the study’s conceptual framework.

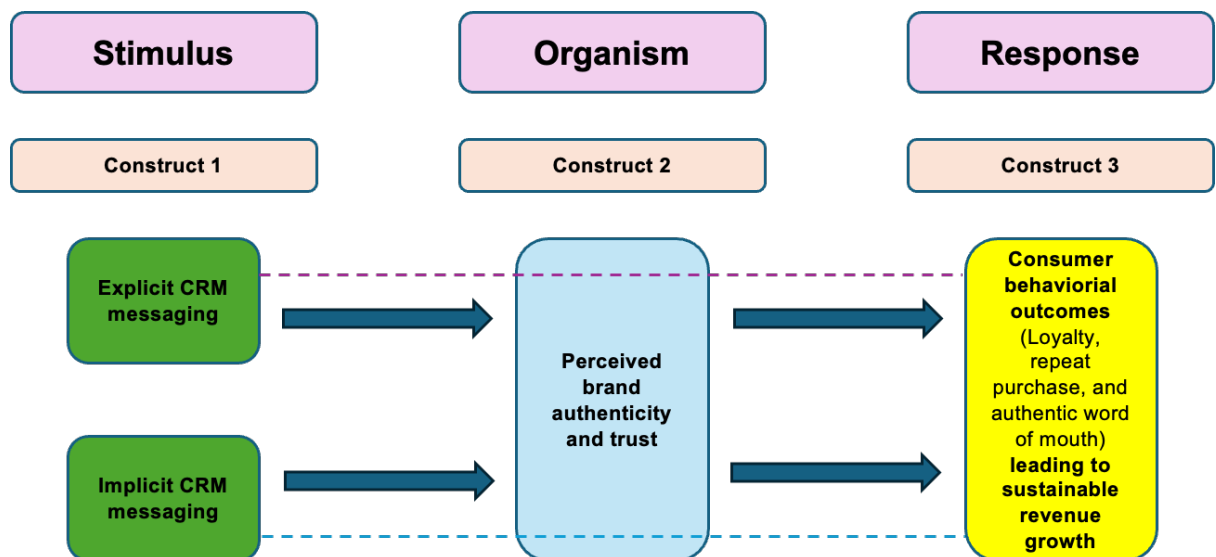


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework for the study

Source: Researcher's own, based on S-O-R model by Mehrabian & Russell, 1974

In order to address this problem and clarify the underlying relationships, the study established a clear purpose and set of objectives guiding the empirical examination.

1.3 Research purpose

The purpose of this study was to critically analyse the strategic use of cause-related marketing to foster sustainable revenue growth in the South African prestige beauty sector, specifically targeting millennial consumers. While the background emphasised the sector's rapid growth and the rising significance of millennial values, the research problem highlighted the ambiguity surrounding whether CRM initiatives, specifically explicit and implicit formats, transcend mere symbolic appeal to influence trust, perceived authenticity, purchase intention, and financial outcomes.

Accordingly, the research aimed to answer the following question: *To what degree do explicit and implicit CRM messages affect millennials' views of authenticity and trust, and how do these perceptions influence consumer behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchases, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth, thereby contributing to indicators of sustainable revenue growth?*

In pursuit of this purpose, the study was centred around three interconnected objectives:

1. To assess the impact of explicit compared to implicit CRM messages on millennial perceptions of authenticity and brand trust.

2. To examine the extent to which perceptions of authenticity and trust stemming from CRM campaigns influence millennial consumer behavioural outcomes (repeat purchase, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth).
3. To determine whether CRM message format directly affects consumer behavioural outcomes independent of authenticity and trust.
4. To evaluate the mediating role of authenticity and trust in the relationship between CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes.

Collectively, these objectives operationalised the research purpose by advancing from the communication format of CRM (explicit versus implicit) to its psychological and behavioural effects (authenticity, trust, and purchase intention), and ultimately to its financial ramifications (revenue growth). In this way, the study established a consistent connection between CRM communication strategies, millennial engagement, and the long-term sustainability of prestige beauty brands in South Africa.

Having outlined the objectives of the study, it was equally imperative to explain the significance of these insights, both for business decision-making and academic comprehension.

1.4 Significance of research for business and theory

Practical significance:

This study is pertinent for business as the South African prestige beauty sector is experiencing robust growth, with millennial consumers increasingly becoming pivotal in driving demand; however, the brands that misalign CRM initiatives with consumer expectations jeopardise investments in campaigns that appear appealing yet fail to yield financial returns. By differentiating between explicit and implicit cause-related marketing messages, this study provides managers with clear guidance on which format is likely to enhance perceptions of authenticity and trust among millennials, subsequently leading to increased purchase intention and actual revenue outcomes. In practice, this implies that prestige beauty brands can optimise marketing budgets by concentrating efforts on campaign strategies that yield quantifiable returns instead of mere symbolic gains. For instance, research indicates that digital brand experiences influence brand authenticity and loyalty within luxury contexts, suggesting that emotionally engaging or visually oriented campaigns (often implicit) could be particularly profitable (Lin, 2023). Moreover, research on influencer

marketing revealed that disclosure and credibility substantially influenced purchase intentions, indicating that the brands that avoided purpose-washing and upheld transparency outperformed those that did not (Sesar et al., 2022).

Theoretical significance:

While CRM has been extensively studied in developed countries and in general consumer goods, there is limited theoretical exploration regarding the impact of an explicit or implicit CRM message format on authenticity, trust, purchase intention, and ultimately revenue in emerging markets, specifically within South Africa's prestige beauty sector. Current literature indicates that authenticity is pivotal to the online brand interactions of young South African consumers (Dunn & Falkof, 2021), while the trust and credibility of social media influencers significantly impact purchase intentions (Singh et al., 2024). Nevertheless, limited research has concurrently examined explicit versus implicit CRM messaging in terms of their distinct impacts on perceptions of authenticity and trust, particularly among millennial beauty consumers in South Africa. Furthermore, although a study by Lupindo et al. (2024) has highlighted the importance of values alignment, it does not address message format or revenue outcomes. Finally, while evidence indicates that authentic brand purpose enhances credibility and "woke-washing" diminishes trust (Walter et al., 2024), the theoretical literature has inadequately explained how authenticity and trust mediate the relationship between CRM communication formats and consumer behaviour in culturally-diverse, millennial-driven markets. This study addressed this gap by employing the stimulus-organism-response framework to connect the CRM message format (explicit versus implicit) as stimuli, perceptions of trust and authenticity as organismic states, and purchase intention and revenue growth as consumer responses within the South African prestige beauty sector.

The study's potential contribution needed to be viewed within well-defined parameters. The scope and boundaries that influenced the research design are described in the section that follows.

1.5 Research scope

This study focused exclusively on the prestige beauty sector in South Africa which is recognised as the continent's hub for prestige and aspirational brands (GlobeNewswire, 2024; Mordor Intelligence, n.d.). The study focused on millennial consumers (born between 1981 and 1996) who constitute the largest and most

socially aware cohort of prestige beauty consumers (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024). Other generational cohorts, such as Gen-Z and Baby Boomers, were not included to maintain analytical clarity and ensure that the study focused on the group that was most aligned with cause-related expectations.

The scope was limited to cause-related marketing campaigns and their two primary communication formats: explicit and implicit messaging. Explicit messaging denotes clear and measurable contributions (e.g. percentage of sales donated), whereas implicit messaging encompasses symbolic connotations communicated through visuals or logos (Kim et al., 2023; Usrey et al., 2020). Broader corporate social responsibility efforts that were not tied to marketing communication aimed at consumers were excluded, as were sustainability or charitable initiatives that were not part of the brand campaigns.

The study geographically concentrated on South Africa, acknowledging that socio-economic inequalities, cultural heterogeneity, and consumer scepticism towards purpose-washing shape millennial responses distinctively compared to Western contexts (Antonio et al., 2022; Bhatti et al., 2022). While global CRM trends were examined, the empirical focus was confined to this national context to solve a distinct theoretical and practical gap.

Finally, the study focused on consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions, namely, authenticity, trust, and purchase intention as a result of CRM campaigns. Direct financial measurements, including sales and profitability, were recognised conceptually but not quantified, as the focus was on consumer-level responses within the S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Wider concepts such as long-term loyalty or intergenerational effects were outside the scope. The scope choices guaranteed that the research objectives, which focus on CRM message formats, resultant perceptions, and behavioural outcomes among South African millennials can be tackled within a feasible and pertinent context.

In summary, Chapter 1 has established the study's practical and theoretical context, identified the primary research problem, outlined its purpose, objectives, significance, and scope. The next chapter reviews recent scholarly literature that supports this study. The pertinent theories, scholarly discourse, and the research gaps that influenced the formulation of the hypotheses are presented sequentially.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a solid theoretical foundation for the study, and it also places its main constructs: CRM message framing, perceived brand authenticity and trust, as well as purchase intention within the body of the current academic literature. This chapter highlights the knowledge gaps and clarifies how these constructs connect to one another by critically analysing previous findings and theories, especially in the context of South Africa's prestige beauty sector. The review follows a golden thread that ties these constructs together. It investigates how various CRM messaging strategies may affect consumers' perceptions about authenticity and trustworthiness of brands, and how the perceptions affect millennial consumers' propensity to purchase prestige beauty products. In keeping with this purpose, the chapter is structured thematically, beginning with an overview of the industry as a whole, then it extends to more narrowly focused constructs, and finally the chapter concludes with the conceptual framework that guided the study. This process ensured coherence among the literature, the study's theoretical lens, and its research aims, while pinpointing areas of consensus or divergence among scholarly viewpoints and highlighting significant research gaps. Figure 2.1 depicts the study's conceptual framework for the literature review.

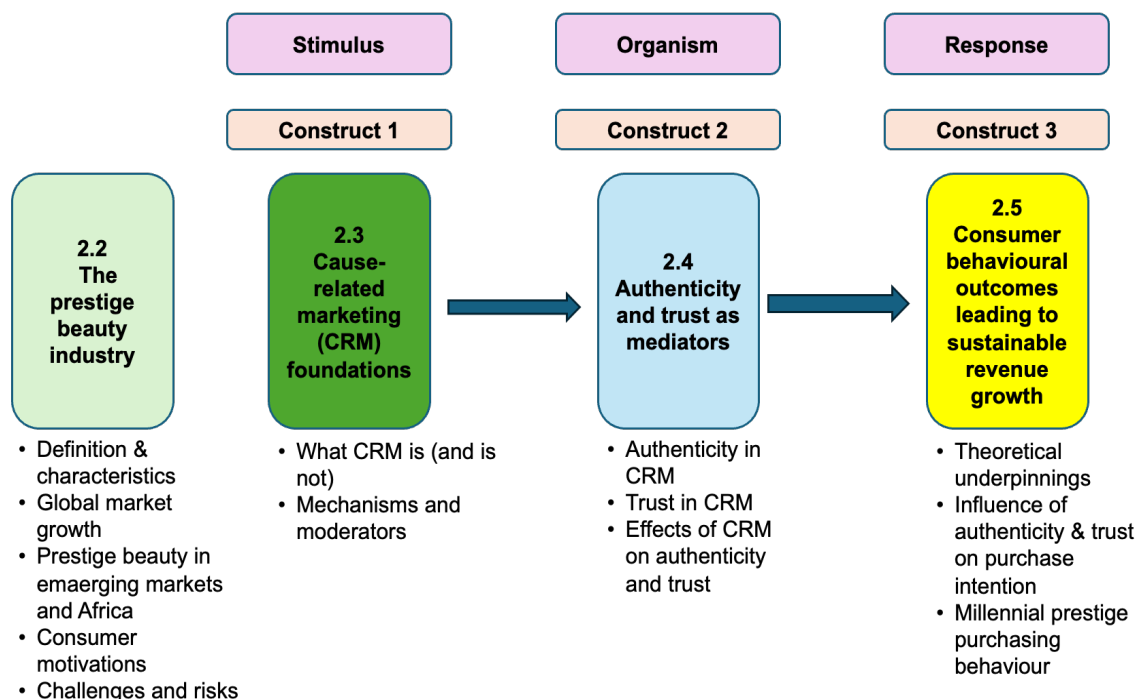


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework for the literature review

Source: Researcher's own, based on S-O-R model by Mehrabian & Russell, 1974

2.2 The prestige beauty industry

2.2.1 Definition and characteristics

Prestige beauty is characterised by exclusivity, legacy, and symbolic capital, placing it above the mass and masstige categories. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) framework for prestige-seeking consumers identifies conspicuousness, uniqueness, hedonism, and self-identity as prestige beauty's motivating factors. Mansoor and Paul (2022) add that prestige beauty is progressively defined by experiential and symbolic aspects, rather than solely by product functionality. Similarly, Kumar et al. (2021) contend that prestige consumption is inherently associated with brand satisfaction, which arises from emotional engagement, symbolic status, and enjoyable experiences rather than objective product performance.

Taken together, the literature indicates that prestige beauty cannot be simplified to price or efficacy, as it is a multifaceted construct based on both symbolic and functional value.

Global studies emphasise status and luxury indicators, while South African research highlights complex consumer motivations influenced by socio-economic limitations. Aspirational consumers engage with prestige beauty for upward social signalling, although their purchasing behaviour is limited by price, often leading to selective consumption or engagement with masstige alternatives (Appiah-Nimo et al., 2024; Saruchera & Mthombeni, 2023). This divergence highlights the necessity to explore the local construction of prestige, especially when cause-related marketing is incorporated as an extra symbolic dimension.

2.2.2 Global market growth

Prestige beauty, which encompasses luxury cosmetics, skincare, fragrance, and haircare is recognised in contemporary literature as one of the most resilient segments in the global beauty industry, frequently surpassing mass and masstige in both growth and profit margins. Weaver et al. (2024) state that global beauty industry retail sales attained US\$ 446 billion in 2023, reflecting an approximate 10% increase compared to 2022, with fragrance and skincare segments at the forefront. Prestige beauty products are increasingly sought after for their image, narrative, and sensory value rather than just functionality, especially among younger, affluent consumers. Weaver et al. (2024) also forecast robust regional CAGR growth of approximately 6% by 2028, particularly in Asia, Latin America, and parts of Middle East/Africa,

where premiumisation is intensifying. Figure 2.2 depicts the 2023 – 2028 global beauty market retail sales by region.

Forecast beauty market retail sales, by region, \$ billion

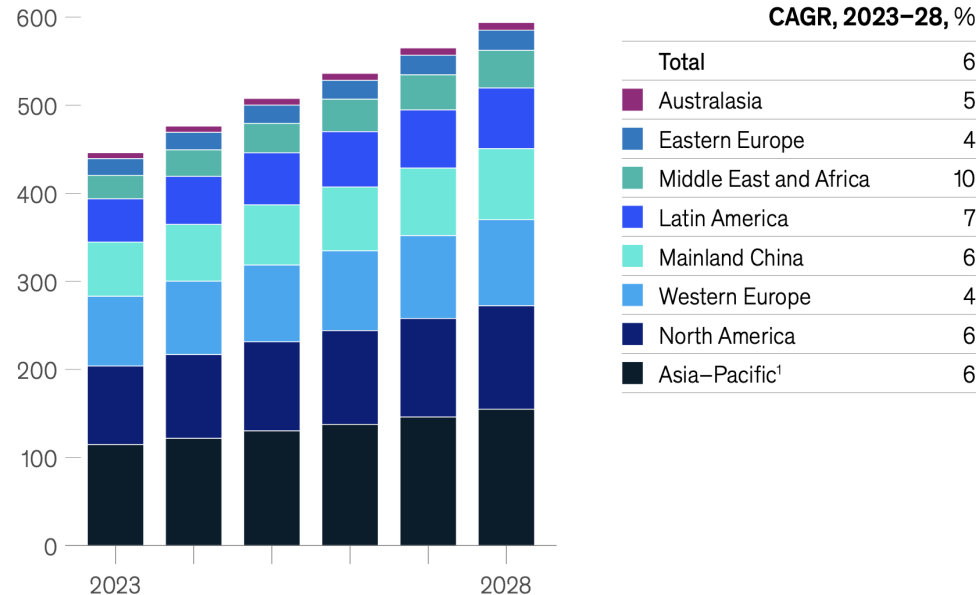


Figure 2.2: Global beauty market retail sales by region projections

Source: McKinsey & Company, 2024

Scholarly research substantiates this trend, in both developed and emerging markets. Prestige beauty’s appeal transcends conventional status; the significance of symbolic value, self-identity, and ethical/social value is increasingly paramount. For instance, Lupindo (2024) investigated millennials’ perceptions of organic personal care in South Africa and determined that health awareness, environmental concern, and brand transparency significantly influence favourable attitudes. On the other hand, Kang et al. (2022) indicate that for millennials in emerging markets, brand identity, and perceived quality remain significant, although there is a growing need for value alignment.

2.2.3 Prestige beauty in emerging markets and Africa

In emerging markets, rising incomes, urbanisation, and aspirational consumerism propel significant growth, with Africa’s beauty market anticipated to reach US\$ 8.18 billion by 2028 (Technavio, 2024). According to Euromonitor International (2025), South Africa is the continent’s prestige hub, with wealthy consumers driving consistent demand and aspirational millennials occasionally indulging in prestige consumption (D’Auria et al., 2024).

The literature indicates both potential and fragility. On one hand, South Africa reflects global prestige dynamics, with its growth rooted in aspirational consumption. On the other hand, the significant disparity results in a highly segmented prestige market, distinguishing between heritage consumers with enduring purchasing power and aspirational consumers susceptible to income fluctuations. This dual-market structure illustrates the reasons for varied CRM strategies with regard to effectiveness across consumer segments, revealing a gap that existing literature has not thoroughly covered.

2.2.4 Consumer motivations for prestige beauty

Consumer motivations in prestige beauty encompass not just functional efficacy but also symbolic, social, and emotional factors. There is still value in the classic luxury theory as a foundation. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) explain why consumers pay more for brands that convey social status and personal meaning (status signalling, uniqueness, quality, hedonism, and self-expression). Expanding on this, research demonstrates that the consumers' attitudes and intentions towards prestige brands are influenced by perceptions of the brand's social and emotional value, which frequently outweigh or even surpass the brand's functional value (Akarsu et al., 2025).

The affective and sensory experience is particularly prominent in beauty because its application is closely related to the body and everyday routines. Empirical studies on prestige beauty and experiential marketing demonstrate that hedonic cues, status value, and curated brand experiences such as multisensory touchpoints, artistry-driven consultations, and immersive retail environments substantially enhance attitudes towards prestige beauty brands and subsequent consumer intentions (Dhillon et al., 2022). Rodríguez et al. (2025) also underscore the significance of sensory gratification and pleasure in beauty usage, asserting that prestige beauty is frequently experienced through texture, scent, rituals, and visual presentation, rather than solely assessed by efficacy claims. Supporting evidence associates self-esteem and self-concept with the intention to purchase prestige makeup, suggesting that the symbolic development of self is a consistent process for value creation in the prestige beauty sector (Mobil et al., 2019).

In South Africa, engagement and market structure refine these global influences. Stiehler and Jordaan (2019) in their national profiling study of female skincare and colour cosmetics consumers indicate that increased product involvement correlates

with heightened preferences for premium options, an increased spend, and a greater dependence on brand cues during evaluation, implying that prestige cues function as decision heuristics among engaged segments. Simultaneously, sustainability and values-driven meanings are gaining prominence among younger demographics. A recent South African study indicates that attitudes, as well as perceived ethical and socio-altruistic values are significant determinants of intentions to purchase green beauty products, emphasising the growing intersection of moral and identity-related motives with prestige consumption (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025). Global literature on luxury and ethics exhibits ambivalence, and some studies indicate that sustainability has historically been a secondary concern in luxury, while recent research reveals segments that pursue ethical alignment without compromising symbolic and experiential benefits, suggesting heterogeneity among segments and contextual influences that brands must address (Vanhamme et al., 2023).

The demand for prestige beauty can be viewed as a co-production of three interconnected dimensions. Firstly, it is rooted in symbolic capital where consumers utilise prestige beauty to; indicate social position, assert individuality, and establish identity alignment. Secondly, it is propelled by emotional and sensory experiences, wherein the enjoyment of usage, habitual practices, and artisanal attributes of products foster emotional connections. Lastly, it is influenced by credence-based meanings, especially authenticity and ethicality, which have become increasingly significant to millennials who rigorously evaluate brand integrity and purpose. Evidence from South Africa refines this global perspective. Consumer engagement levels amplify sensitivity to brand cues and premium product attributes, whereas pro-social value orientations markedly affect purchase intentions in beauty categories. Collectively, these findings emphasise that prestige brands must integrate authenticity, sustainability, and value-driven narratives into their positioning strategies to remain competitive with younger, socially aware consumers.

2.2.5 Challenges and risks

Studies indicate that macroeconomic shocks and category dynamics pose challenges for the beauty sector, including the prestige segment. Globally, supply chain constraints have exerted a quantifiable inflationary impact throughout Africa, elevating headline and tradables inflation since the 2000s and during the COVID period, thereby resulting in increased retail prices for imported or import-dependent categories such as prestige beauty products (Andriantomanga et al., 2023). In South

Africa, the volatility of the Rand's exchange rate affects core inflation, constraining affordability for discretionary categories (Miyajima, 2020). Alongside macroeconomic costs, category boundaries are becoming hazier, and masstige strategies purposefully combine mass accessibility and prestige cues, increasing competitive pressure on exclusivity (Paul, 2015). On the demand side, the consumers of beauty products, particularly younger generations, exhibit more scrutiny of sustainability and cause claims. In the context of beauty products, green-claim scepticism lowers purchase intentions (Kifaya, 2024).

In South Africa, these risks are exacerbated by structural factors. Firstly, a pronounced and enduring inequality profile, characterised by one of the highest Gini coefficients globally (Hundenborn et al., 2019), limits the steady base of prestige buyers, heightening price sensitivity and the occurrence of selective or infrequent purchasing. Secondly, the dependence on imports subjects prestige beauty to fluctuations in exchange rates and landed cost shocks. An empirical study by Miyajima (2020) indicates that exchange rate volatility, despite being of limited average magnitude, still elevates core inflation, which is significant in premium categories with inelastic costs. Thirdly, masstige alternatives provide symbolic and sensory value at reduced price points, complicating conventional prestige's ability to compete solely on exclusivity (Paul, 2015). Lastly, younger South African consumers have a keen interest in sustainable and ethical beauty products, alongside a discernible sensitivity to trustworthiness and pricing. Research indicates that attitude and perceived price are substantial indicators of women's willingness to purchase green cosmetics, whereas broader Africa and cross-national research associate green scepticism with lower inclinations to buy organic beauty products (Dlamini & Mahowa, 2024). Complementary South African research highlights the importance of authenticity and values alignment for this market by reporting antecedents of green beauty purchasing intentions based on ethical convictions and social-value orientations (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025).

The global consensus indicates that inflationary pressures and supply chain disruptions have increased costs, while brand proliferation and masstige have affected exclusivity. South African literature indicates that currency instability and inequality exacerbate affordability challenges, necessitating that prestige cannot depend on legacy and scarcity alone; as value-for-money indicators and credible authenticity are essential to maintain demand. Research from South Africa and

associated cosmetics studies indicate that cause-related marketing initiatives can be beneficial when they bolster trust and align with consumers' ethical standards. However, they may provoke a backlash if the claims appear ambiguous or superficial, particularly among younger, sustainability-conscious consumers who are already sceptical of green marketing claims.

In summary, price pressure, indistinct tiers, and credibility assessments establish a constrained pathway where prestige prevails by demonstrated quality and performance, transparent purpose, as well as explicit value justification for the premium.

2.3 Cause-Related Marketing foundations

2.3.1 *What CRM is (and is not)*

Cause-Related Marketing is a strategic alignment in which a company commits to donating to a social cause based on consumer behaviour, and it is typically linked to a purchase, for example "R20 per product sold". The traditional definition frames CRM as an alliance of marketing strategy with corporate philanthropy aimed at achieving mutual benefit for both the organisation and the cause (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). Unlike corporate philanthropy, CRM is related to transactions unlike sponsorship. The cause partner is generally a charity, and the primary objectives are both social impact and market success. In contrast to broad Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), CRM serves as a targeted promotional or strategic tool rather than an all-encompassing responsibility framework (Barone et al., 2000; Hoeffler & Keller, 2002).

The field has transitioned from perceiving CRM as a short-term marketing tactic to acknowledging it as a brand-enhancing tool inside corporate societal marketing, capable of fortifying brand associations and equity when implemented with precision and alignment (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). Average impacts are now quantifiable by meta-analytic evidence: a somewhat positive impact on attitudes and a smaller but significant impact on behaviours, with significant context-specific variation (Schamp et al., 2023). This heterogeneity warns against uniform designs and emphasises the importance of moderators such as, transparency, and framing.

CRM should be regarded as a contingent strategy, as its potential lies in harmonising a credible cause with clear, understandable donation conditions, implemented in manners that enhance brand significance rather than detract from it. It is not only

charity or image washing, but a systematic trade that can provide shared value when consumers comprehend and support the connection.

2.3.2 How CRM works: Mechanisms and moderators

CRM affects outcomes via three fundamental pathways:

- **Signalling:** CRM publicly conveys a brand's values and altruistic intentions when the signal is credible and the motivation attributions are value-driven rather than egoistic. Research substantiates that perceived altruism and company image mediate these effects (Lopes et al., 2024).
- **Emotion:** CRM can evoke warm-glow, empathy, and moral elevation, which influence intentions beyond mere economic considerations. Contemporary evaluations and studies demonstrate strong emotional pathways to persuasion in cause-related marketing and donation advertising (Hui & Wenan, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).
- **Choice architecture:** Outcomes are contingent upon the framing (including salient, tangible, and easily processed elements), the specification of the contribution amount, and the presentation of any pricing trade-offs. Lee and Chu (2023) demonstrate that the manner of donation presentation is significant. Partitioned frames which split contributions into specific allocations, enhance perceived authenticity and elevate the propensity to donate relative to lump sum frames, especially among individuals with a pronounced need for cognition or prevention orientation. In support of this, McManus et al. (2024) point out that the message's voice also affects how consumers react. CRM campaigns that give consumers, not the brand credit are less likely to cause scepticism or to be interpreted as boastful, which increases consumer engagement. These findings emphasise that CRM efficacy depends not just on the content provided but also on the transparency and sincerity of its communication, with both quantitative clarity and narrative context influencing trust and behavioural outcomes.

The pathways function under moderators that ascertain when CRM is beneficial, detrimental, or negligible to the brand.

Although these pathways describe how CRM might influence consumer responses in theory, contextual circumstances determine how effective they are in practice. Fit, donation framing, price dynamics, and cause proximity are just a few of the

moderators that have been shown in research to either support or undermine CRM outcomes. A more critical perspective of CRM's contingencies can be drawn by examining these moderators.

- **Fit and attribution:** A strong alignment between brand and cause regularly yields more positive responses, as consumers perceive authenticity and shared values (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Rifon et al., 2004). In contrast, a low fit frequently elicits mistrust and perceptions of opportunism (Nan & Heo, 2007).

Recent evidence suggests that fit effects are not definitive but are rather influenced by the company's reputation. Zhang et al. (2020) illustrate that when company reputation is diminished, even well-aligned CRM initiatives may be counterproductive, as consumers perceive them as deliberate image restoration attempts rather than genuine prosocial engagement. Conversely, companies with a robust reputation are more likely to gain from a high fit, as credibility enhances the perception of authenticity. This indicates that brand-cause alignment alone is inadequate; as the reputational context significantly influences consumer responses, either positively or sceptically.

- **Donation framing and size:** Consumers seldom engage in meticulous calculations of donation amounts; rather, they depend on quick, heuristic judgements. These judgements are influenced not solely by the magnitude of the contribution but also by the manner in which the message is framed, that is, whether the brand conveys its commitment *explicitly* (with precise unambiguous language) or *implicitly* (via symbols, general statements and imagery). Research indicates that ambiguous assertions like "a portion of profits" or "X% of sales" often confuse audiences and undermine credibility, whereas explicit statements that specify outcomes (for example, "this purchase funds one mammogram") are more comprehensible and compelling. Pracejus et al. (2003) illustrate that specificity improves both understanding and purchase intention, since consumers can easily envision the concrete effects of their contributions. This illustrates that CRM message framing can directly influence consumer behaviour by affecting individuals' assessment of value and emotional gratification associated with a purchase. A message that effectively conveys the concrete impact of a transaction

enhances consumers' perception of personal contribution, hence elevating their propensity to purchase and endorse the brand.

The impact of donation magnitude remains asymmetric. Foundational research demonstrated that substantial donations improve evaluations when no explicit price premium is indicated yet may diminish selection when premium is salient (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). Recent studies substantiate this dynamic. A comprehensive meta-analysis indicates that consumers exhibit more favourable responses when donations are presented as explicit, clear amounts, whereas their reactions diminish when donations are framed as a percentage of a price, especially when the trade-off is highlighted (Schamp et al., 2023). Experimental studies similarly indicate that partitioned or outcome-based framing, which means breaking down donations into specific uses or highlighting tangible outcomes reduces perceptions of sacrifice and maintains positive responses, even for larger donation amounts (Lee & Chu, 2023).

Parallel evidence in ethical consumerism underscores the notion that when a price premium for socially responsible alternatives is substantial and apparent, consumers are likely to divert their choices unless there is a strong faith in the certification or cause (Amasino et al., 2025). Field research on digital giving indicates that substantial proposed amounts elevate the average donation per contributor while simultaneously reducing participation, highlighting the trade-off between magnitude and uptake unless recontextualised to outcomes (Savchuk, 2024). When taken as a whole, this body of research indicates that the impact of large donation amounts is more dependent on the clarity of the results and whether or not price trade-offs are highlighted.

- **Price interplay and warm-glow:** The CRM results depend on how consumers balance the warm-glow utility of altruism with the opportunity cost of monetary value (price or discount). The warm-glow effect consistently enhances the willingness to pay for products associated with prosocial claims; nevertheless, its influence is context-dependent and not infinite. According to Iweala et al. (2022), the warm-glow enhances willingness to pay for ethically framed products mainly when budgets permit or when the ethical claims are believable and easily comprehensible; otherwise, the effects diminish. Field

experiments and meta-analysis indicate that donation-linked offers can enhance sales; however, their efficacy is contingent upon the pricing context. Moderate discounts can augment the donation appeal, that is maintaining prosocial significance while alleviating the economic trade-off, whereas substantial discounts diminish signal and obscure the cause's meaning (Andrews et al., 2014; Schamp et al., 2024). The effects of donation magnitude remain relevant. Bigger declared donations enhance willingness to pay only until consumers perceive a price premium above this threshold, willingness to pay may decline, particularly among consumers with low prosocial predisposition (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). At category level, a study found favourable average impacts on attitudes and lesser effects on behaviour, emphasising price and promotion framing as significant mediators (Schamp et al., 2023). A pricing study from a CSR perspective indicates that CSR elevates price fairness expectations. If brands raise prices without explicit rationale, perceived unfairness might negate warm-glow effects and adversely affect consumer choice (Sipilä et al., 2022). Complementary data beyond beauty reflects the same principle. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for prosocial impact when the warm-glow utility is prominent and credible in comparison to the monetary sacrifice (for example, emission-reduction add-ons), but not when the exchange appears unfavourable (Wendt et al., 2024).

The warm-glow effect generates leeway for CRM, although price serves as the guiding factor. Thus, effectively constructed CRM messages not only elucidate the transaction but also enhance the emotional benefits of involvement. This alignment of cognitive comprehension and emotional gratification fortifies purchase intention and promotes ongoing engagement, highlighting how message framing can directly influence consumer behavioural outcomes. Donation campaigns are most effective when; the economic sacrifice is justifiable, the donation is tangible, and fairness is evident. Substantial or unclear premiums diminish perceived value and limit options; and transparent price-impact framing reinstates equilibrium.

- **Cause proximity, audience, and salience:** The effects of cause-related marketing depend on the perceived proximity of the cause, the characteristics of the audience, and the clarity of the donation presentation. Proximity

influences consumer reactions. Local or socially relevant causes appear more credible, yet distant or global causes may be effective when accompanied with abstract, value-oriented framing (Kim & Kim, 2021; Saeed et al., 2024). Audience characteristics also influence responses. Interdependent and identity-driven consumers exhibit more receptiveness to donation-based offers, whereas independent or price-sensitive consumers prefer discounts or hybrid frames (Winterich & Barone, 2011; Yucel-Aybat & Hsieh, 2021). The salience of the donation signal is essential, as recent meta-analysis demonstrates that visible, straightforward, and tangible donation information significantly enhances both attitudes and behaviours (Lee & Chu, 2023; Schamp et al., 2023). When combined, CRM works best when audience-specific framing is combined with local relevance and authenticity, as well as when the donation cues are simple to see and process. This is particularly true in South Africa, where consumers balance concerns about value for money with a desire for authenticity and social impact (Terblanche et al., 2023).

The literature indicates that CRM outcomes are contingent rather than universal. Positive outcomes are most dependable when, the brand-cause association is genuine and the objectives seem value-oriented, when donation details are explicit and tangible, when pricing is transparent and free from concealed surcharges, and when the cause is relevant and aligns with audience identities. In contrast, ambiguous framing, tokenistic contributions related to the purchase price, and scepticism regarding self-serving intentions consistently diminish effectiveness. Field studies and meta-analysis validate that while CRM typically yields beneficial outcomes, its efficacy is significantly contingent upon context, influenced by alignment, framing, fairness, and audience pertinence. Collectively, these findings indicate that CRM should not be regarded as a universally effective tool, but rather as one whose efficacy is contingent upon contextual alignment. Authenticity and trust are essential, as perceptions of real intent can influence whether consumers regard a campaign as legitimate or opportunistic.

2.4 Authenticity and trust as a mediator

Authenticity and trust together form a unified mediation construct that influences how consumers perceive and react to cause-related marketing initiatives. Despite their differing definitions, authenticity, which denotes perceived genuineness, and trust,

which indicates confidence in the brand's intentions, are frequently considered in empirical research as conceptually and statistically interconnected. Authenticity constitutes the cognitive and emotional basis for trust, and together they elucidate the impact of CRM message format on consumer attitudes and behaviours (Lerro et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2024).

This study conceptualised authenticity-trust as a unified mediating construct, encapsulating the comprehensive sense of brand sincerity and credibility that transforms CRM efforts into favourable consumer behavioural outcomes, including repeat purchases, loyalty, and advocacy.

2.4.1 Authenticity in CRM

Authenticity is widely recognised as a critical determinant influencing consumer reactions to CRM. CRM is inherently transaction based, as donations are contingent upon consumer purchases; thus, consumers assess both the cause and the motivations for associating social good to sales. In this context, authenticity denotes the degree to which initiatives are perceived as genuine, value-oriented, and aligned with brand identity, rather than as opportunistic strategies (Bhatti et al., 2022; Koushik et al., 2025).

Research highlights that brand-cause alignment is a significant indicator of authenticity. When the cause logically or symbolically aligns with the brand's products or target demographic, consumers are more inclined to perceive authenticity. For instance, when the beauty brands collaborating with women's health initiatives exhibit demographic and symbolic alignment, which consumers perceive as genuine (Lopes et al., 2024; Piao et al., 2023). On the other hand, weak or forced pairings frequently cause consumers to become sceptical and perceive opportunism (Terblanche et al., 2023; Xue, 2023).

Clarity and transparency of the message are other essential factors. Campaigns employing ambiguous phrases like "a portion of proceeds will be donated" often compromise authenticity by concealing the magnitude and effect of the contribution. In contrast, precise framing such as stating that "R100 funds 3 vaccines" is more compelling as it offers verifiable specifics and reduces scepticism (Chaabouni et al., 2020; Lee & Chu, 2023). Research indicates that explicit donation quantifiers enhance effectiveness, whereas ambiguity might undermine both authenticity and

consumer trust (Chaabouni et al., 2020; Fennell et al., 2020; Lee & Chu, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Research demonstrates that the size of a donation has a significant but context-dependent impact on how consumers assess the legitimacy of a CRM campaign. In digital cause-related advertising, a higher donation amount serves as a major indicator of the offer's integrity, honesty, and authenticity (Ndasi & Akcay, 2020). Ndasi and Akcay (2020) further assert that a substantial contribution might elicit a "warm-glow" effect, which is the moral gratification experienced by consumers from assisting others, which typically intensifies with increased donations. However, consumers may perceive opportunism and undermine authenticity if they believe that a generous donation is embedded in higher product prices (Chaabouni et al., 2020). Thus, fair and transparent value exchange takes centre stage. Chaabouni et al. (2020) urge marketers to employ clear, transparent, and moderate donation claims to prevent suspicions on opportunism or concealed mark-ups. In summary, substantial donations enhance perceived authenticity only when consumers do not detect an inequitable price exchange. Equitable pricing and transparency regarding the donation process are crucial for maintaining credibility in CRM initiatives.

These studies collectively demonstrate that authenticity serves as the cognitive basis of trust. Consumers who view a CRM campaign as authentic are inclined to trust the brand's intentions.

2.4.2 Trust in CRM

Trust has become a crucial factor in assessing the effectiveness of cause-related marketing campaigns. Preliminary research indicated that consumers who distrust a company's intentions are reluctant to engage in CRM initiatives (Webb & Mohr, 1998). Essentially, if consumers perceive a CRM campaign as motivated by self-serving or disingenuous "cause washing", they are likely to withdraw support. Recent research supports this, pointing out that consumers are more likely to buy a brand when they think it supports a cause for the right reasons, that is when it is authentic or has altruistic motivations (Silva et al., 2020). Therefore, fostering consumer trust by authentically matching the brand's intentions with the cause is essential.

A primary factor influencing trust in CRM is the alignment between the brand and the cause. Silva et al. (2020) illustrate that a strong alignment between brand and cause can enhance consumer trust in a campaign. When the cause fits authentically with

the brand's products or values, consumers perceive the partnership as sincere rather than exploitative. Silva et al. (2020) discovered that brand-cause alignment not only boosted trust but also directly elevated purchase intentions in an online environment, while trust itself improved consumer's perceived value of the product; although it did not directly lead to increased purchase intentions in that study. This implies that trust may have a more subtle, indirect function, for instance, by enhancing the perceived value or merit of the CRM campaign, which can then enhance engagement. Other research similarly highlights the interconnection between perceived value and trust. Value perceptions driven by causes can enhance brand engagement, particularly for emotive brands (Pereira et al., 2024), with trust likely serving as a foundational element of these perceptions. Practically, campaign design decisions that enhance transparency relevance can increase both value and trust. For instance, according to Silva et al. (2020), consumers tend to see the campaign as more tangible and reliable when an absolute donation amount is stated explicitly (e.g., "R10 per product" rather than "a portion of profits"). Providing precise and comprehensive donation information conveys integrity and commitment, thereby enhancing trust in the brand's commitment. Montecchi et al. (2024) note that enhanced brand transparency markedly elevates consumer trust, which in turn promotes favourable word-of-mouth and purchase intention. Taken together, a well-aligned cause and transparent communication regarding the campaign's mechanics function as significant trust indicators in CRM.

In addition to structural alignment and transparency, the perceived authenticity of a brand's social engagement is essential for establishing trust. Walter et al. (2024) provide empirical evidence indicating that a brand that genuinely embodies its socio-political stance enhances its credibility and trustworthiness, while insincere posturing, referred to as woke-washing, erodes brand credibility. Consumers place greater trust upon brands that adopt genuine positions on causes, particularly if they are personally invested in the cause or are doubtful of corporate social rhetoric (Walter et al., 2024). In fact, consumers who are very cause-driven or prone to scepticism are even more likely to support a genuine CRM campaign and be harsher towards those viewed as inauthentic (Walter et al., 2024). This underscores that trust depends on the consumers' perception of the brand's intent, a campaign perceived as really mission-driven will enhance trust, whereas one regarded as a mere marketing tactic may incite scepticism and erode trust. The literature continuously emphasises motive attributions as a crucial factor; consumers actively assess the

reasons behind the company's campaign (Silva et al., 2020). Stötzer and Kaltenbrunner (2024) in their systematic review of CRM partnerships, emphasise that transparency regarding corporate motives, that is explicitly acknowledging both business benefits and the intended social impact is crucial for credibility, as it mitigates consumer scepticism regarding the authenticity of campaigns versus self-interest. Conversely, any discrepancy between a brand's articulated values and its actions could promote consumer scepticism. Thus, authenticity and consistency in campaigns are essential for establishing and maintaining trust in CRM.

A current line of research investigates communication tactics that affect trust within the CRM framework. One issue is that brands may appear boastful when they publicise their charitable contributions, which can incite consumer backlash. To address this, McManus et al. (2024) demonstrate that reframing the messaging to emphasise the consumer's role instead of the brand's generosity can enhance trust. In their research, when a brand credited its consumer for the success of a donation rather than praising itself, consumers regarded the brand as less self-serving. This minor adjustment diminished the perception of arrogance and correlated with enhanced trust, subsequently resulting in elevated future donation intentions (McManus et al., 2024). Notably, this positive sequence was particularly evident for brands perceived as possessing high integrity, indicating that baseline reputation is also significant (McManus et al., 2024). These findings highlight that tone and framing in CRM messages significantly impact outcomes. A modest, consumer-centric tone cultivates trust, whereas excessive self-promotion can erode it. Likewise, brand anthropomorphism, that is, attributing human characteristics or voice to a brand has been shown to influence trust. Patrizi et al. (2024) indicate that when consumers view a brand as more anthropomorphic, it positively influences brand trust and enhances consumer-brand interaction. A humanised brand appears more relatable and genuine, hence enhancing trust in its motives. This insight could guide brands in personifying themselves in cause campaigns to enhance trust and emotional engagement.

Despite diligent efforts, CRM campaigns may backfire if confidence is compromised and scepticism arises. Social media has intensified these dynamics. Bigné et al. (2023) discovered that exposure to adverse user-generated comments regarding a brand's cause-related post can substantially reduce trust. In their neuroscience study, consumers who exhibited heightened visual attention to negative fractions

such as accusatory or cynical remarks had reduced trust in the brand and, as a result, were less motivated to cause-related content (Bigné et al., 2023). Interestingly, Bigné et al. (2023) observe that when brands actively engage with feedback, such as constructively addressing criticism, it can divert focus from negativity and help maintain trust. This points to a possible coping strategy, and responsiveness as well as communication can mitigate the erosion of confidence caused by public scepticism. More broadly, the emotional context in which CRM messages are received is significant. Negative emotions such as anger or distrust when activated, can overshadow the intended warm-glow of a cause, underscoring the necessity for brands to monitor and control public perception. In line with this, brands must generate equity and proportionality of their CRM offerings. If a campaign is perceived as exploitative, for example, offering a negligible donation in exchange for a substantial purchase price, consumers may believe the brand is unjustly benefiting from a cause, a perception that can erode trust and potentially incite backlash (Schamp et al., 2024). Empirical evidence from retail promotions indicates that CRM can enhance sales and goodwill, but when consumers regard the campaign as equitable and credible; otherwise, the initiative may be counterproductive, fostering scepticism (Schamp et al., 2024). Consequently, a nuanced balance is essential, cause-promotion must deliver tangible advantages to the cause to maintain credibility while simultaneously providing value to the consumer, thereby preserving a sense of fairness that bolsters confidence.

In synthesising these findings, it is evident that consumer trust is fundamental to successful CRM campaigns. Trust functions both as a result, earned through effective CRM practices and as a catalyst for other favourable outcomes such as engagement, sharing, loyalty, and purchase intentions. When trust is established, consumers exhibit greater receptivity of CRM messages and are more inclined to respond, either by purchasing a product associated with a cause or endorsing the brand's social initiatives. For example, trust in the brand's authenticity can enhance the emotional elevation (pride and joy) experienced by a consumer engaging in the campaign, fostering a positive cycle of goodwill. Nevertheless, the literature indicates that trust is delicate and dependent on various factors: the perceived alignment and authenticity of the cause relationship, the clarity and transparency of communications, the brand's overall reputation and consistency, and the reactions of external audiences. Cultural expectations and individual consumer differences such as moral identity or personal cause involvement moderate these effects.

Consumers who are deeply committed to a cause or who possess strong prosocial values may critically evaluate CRM initiatives, making it more challenging to establish trust, yet once established, it is significantly more impactful.

In summary, establishing and preserving trust must be prioritised in CRM strategy. Brands must meticulously select cause partners, communicate transparently and modestly regarding initiatives, and consistently embody principles across all aspects of operations (Walter et al., 2024). Through clear and consistent alignment of corporate operations with social values, brands may increase consumer trust and transform cause marketing from a doubtful “maybe” into a legitimate value-adding proposition. Ultimately, trust is what elevates a cause-related marketing campaign from a simple promotional strategy to a significant, reciprocal relationship among consumers, brands, and the social causes they support.

2.4.3 Effects of message framing on authenticity and trust

The framing of cause-related marketing messages significantly influences consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s authenticity and trustworthiness. The clarity, specificity, and tone of a message influence consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s motives as either authentic or opportunistic.

Empirical research indicates that clarity and transparency in CRM message framing enhance authenticity by providing concrete, verifiable facts regarding the cause (Terblanche et al., 2023). When marketers outline donation amounts or indicate precise beneficiaries, consumers regard the campaign as more authentic and less self-promotional. In contrast, vague or general statements, such as “a portion of proceeds will be donated” generate confusion and diminish credibility. Similarly, McManus et al. (2024) demonstrate that CRM messages highlighting the consumer’s contribution, rather than focusing on brand generosity, enhance perceived trust and reduce scepticism. This distinction emphasises that message design is not solely a creative choice but a strategic factor influencing perceived authenticity and integrity.

Therefore, message framing serves as a stimulus that shapes consumers’ internal assessments of authenticity and trust, representing the organism element in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, which subsequently mediates consumer behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchases, loyalty, and advocacy.

2.4.4 Integrating authenticity and trust

When combined, authenticity and trust function together rather than individually; authenticity fosters trust, and trust enhances perceptions of authenticity, therefore creating a cohesive mediation mechanism between CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes. This integrated authenticity-trust pathway embodies the fundamental perceptual mechanism by which consumers assess the credibility, fairness, and engagement potential of a CRM campaign.

2.5 Consumer behavioural outcomes leading to sustainable revenue growth

2.5.1 Bridging theoretical foundations to contemporary CRM in prestige beauty

The S-O-R framework offered a valuable structure for analysing CRM in the prestige beauty sector. Initially developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in environmental psychology and subsequently modified for consumer behaviour by Donovan and Rossiter (1982), the framework explains the manner in which marketing stimuli, including campaign messages and cause cues, affect internal states such as emotions, perceptions, and trust, which subsequently influence responses such as purchase, advocacy or avoidance, and loyalty. This progression highlights the necessity of comprehending CRM campaigns in prestige beauty, which often focus on emotionally impactful causes, not solely in terms of visibility but also regarding how consumers assimilate these messages. In contrast to fast-moving consumer goods which often involve transactional interactions, prestige beauty depends on relational depth and symbolic significance, rendering the organism stage which is characterised by trust, authenticity and emotional connection (Petravičiūtė et al., 2021).

However, the S-O-R framework alone may depict consumer behaviour as a linear sequence of stimuli and responses. Relational theories emphasise a more dynamic process. Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory posits that trust is not merely a momentary psychological condition but rather it is the foundation of lasting brand relationships, directly impacting commitment and long-term loyalty. Oliver (1999) also highlights loyalty as a dynamic construct that progresses from cognitive assessments to affective attachment, resulting in cognitive and behavioural loyalty, thereby corroborating the notion that trust, and satisfaction are cumulative rather

than episodic. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) empirically substantiate this sequence, demonstrating that trust fosters loyalty, which then enhances revenue-growth outcomes such as repeat purchases and positive WOW. These findings enhance the S-O-R framework by transitioning the emphasis from instant reactions to lasting relational outcomes, a transition particularly pertinent in sectors such as prestige beauty, where loyalty is developed over years of brand interaction.

In synthesising these viewpoints, a gap arises. Early S-O-R models prioritised surroundings and stimuli in influencing consumer responses, whereas relationship marketing theories highlight trust as a mechanism that transforms assessments into loyalty. The application of these frameworks to CRM in prestige beauty indicates that stimuli such as cause-related marketing, are beneficial just when they cultivate trust and relational worth. In the absence of this, the organismic stage remains superficial, constraining the probability of loyalty and advocacy. This bridge illustrates the necessity of contemporary research on CRM and trust, that it must be grounded on foundational theories while addressing unique consumer psychology of prestige beauty, where symbolic consumption, generational values and perceptions of authenticity converge to ascertain whether CRM initiatives foster not merely responses but enduring brand relationships.

2.5.2 S-O-R applications and mechanisms: Authenticity and trust driving intent

The S-O-R framework application in CRM illustrates that authenticity and trust serve as essential mechanisms influencing consumer intentions. Xue (2023) demonstrates that perceived authenticity influences the consumers' interpretation of CRM as either true allyship or performative rhetoric, therefore affecting brands' perceptions, purchase intentions, and willingness to share. This aligns with Jeong et al. (2022) empirical S-O-R framework in e-commerce, which illustrates the connection between marketing stimuli and behavioural responses, affirming the organism stage (trust and authenticity), as pivotal to shaping results. More specifically, Osorio et al. (2023) point out that human brand authenticity results in increased product value and more positive word-of-mouth, indicating that the authenticity-intention pathway encompasses relational as well as transactional benefits. Considering these insights, Södergren (2021) and Li et al. (2024) agree that authenticity is a multifaceted concept that predicts loyalty and trust and is based on sincerity, consistency, and credibility. Though general reviews emphasise the symbolic role of authenticity, focused studies

on CRM, such as those by Terblanche et al. (2023) demonstrate that campaign design elements like donation clarity and brand-cause compatibility are the triggers that initially raise authenticity perceptions. Ünalmiş et al. (2024) extend this to digital channels by showing that influencer-generated content increases perceived authenticity, which in turn promotes trust and engagement. Li et al. (2024) corroborate this conclusion on influencer scale and word-of-mouth. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that although authenticity is still the key element, the routes of intention differ depending on the context, ranging from social media mediation to symbolic brand cues and CRM campaign structural elements. However, there are still gaps in the integration of these mechanisms into a single S-O-R framework that is specific to the prestige beauty sector.

2.5.3 Authenticity/trust to consumer behavioural outcomes

Meta-analyses offer robust evidence for the S-O-R framework, wherein cause-stimuli influence perceptions of authenticity and trust prior to eliciting behavioural responses such as loyalty, repeat purchase, and WOW. Vieira et al. (2023) illustrate that corporate social responsibility affects loyalty and word-of-mouth primarily via consumer-brand identification; however, this relationship may be over exaggerated in the context of CRM due to CSR campaigns typically reflecting broader corporate commitments, whereas CRM initiatives are campaign-specific and transactional in nature. Peng et al. (2024) affirm the persistent beneficial downstream effects of CSR on loyalty and purchase intentions; however, their cross-industry aggregation obscures the symbolic significance of loyalty in the prestige beauty sector, where brand attachment is linked to identity expression. Coelho do Vale et al. (2025) expand the findings by associating CSR with repeat purchase behaviour, nonetheless, they remain limited to CSR contexts, leaving unanswered whether cause-related campaigns yield similar behavioural depth. This highlights a structural gap; as CSR research substantiates the S-O-R framework but inadequately examines CRM-specific mechanisms.

Digital pathways complicate this topic by illustrating the fragility of trust in online environments. Liadeli et al. (2023) demonstrate that brand-owned social media markedly enhance consumer engagement and repeat purchases, highlighting how digital stimuli elevate word-of-mouth beyond interpersonal channels. However, these impacts are significantly contingent upon perceived credibility, a condition substantiated by Xie and Liu (2022) who demonstrate that trust in e-WOW platforms

predicts behavioural intentions and information sharing. This emphasises that the organism stage of trust is not optional, but it is a necessity for digital responses. South African data underscores this vulnerability, while Bingwa et al. (2024) indicate that e-satisfaction and e-trust are pivotal in cultivating e-loyalty among millennials in online retail, illustrating how trust underpins digital behaviour in local markets. Tahir et al. (2024) further systematise the satisfactory-loyalty link; however, their generalised model neglects the increased significance of authenticity in prestige beauty, where consumers often purchase narratives and symbolic cues in addition to the product itself. For South African millennials who predominantly utilise digital platforms to engage prestige brands, a lack of trust can jeopardise the S-O-R chain, potentially preventing behavioural outcomes from occurring.

CRM-focused initiatives provide the clearest direct connection to the research questions. Pereira et al. (2024) indicate that cause-related marketing enhances brand engagement, which leads to increased loyalty and WOW. Yet, their findings do not assess whether such engagement endures beyond the campaign period or if sceptical millennials withdraw once authenticity indicators weaken. Evidence from South Africa further clarifies this matter as Terblanche et al. (2023) illustrate that the efficacy of CRM is contingent upon campaign architecture, wherein prosocial messaging, clarity of donations, and size significantly affect attitudes and purchase intentions by enhancing perceived authenticity. This reinforces the S-O-R framework's focus on stimulus design while emphasising that inadequately implemented CRM campaigns may be perceived as opportunistic. When examined in conjunction with international studies, these findings indicate that although authenticity-driven trust consistently predicts loyalty, repeat purchase, and WOW, the underlying mechanisms may vary across CSR and CRM, as well as developed and emerging markets. In South Africa's prestige beauty sector where millennials exhibit both significant scepticism and great digital engagement, the stakes are elevated. Indicators of authenticity and trust may influence whether campaigns foster lasting loyalty or result in temporary transactional responses.

2.5.4 Millennials' prestige purchasing behaviour

Millennials are a crucial consumer demographic in the prestige beauty sector, characterised by values-oriented purchasing behaviour that aligns with conventional luxury cues. Studies in South Africa indicate that although environmental awareness and health consciousness foster positive attitudes towards organic beauty products,

these attitudes only lead to purchase intentions when accompanied by perceptions of quality and accessibility (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024). This dynamic aligns with the S-O-R model where ethical or prosocial claims and campaign signals serve as stimuli which the millennials assess internally through attitudes and authenticity evaluations (the organism stage) prior to generating a response in the form of purchase intention.

Evidence further indicates that CRM can increase brand support when confidence in the campaign and environmental or social concern are elevated. Nonetheless, ingrained brand loyalty a characteristic hallmark of prestige beauty, limits switching, demonstrating that reactions in this cohort are influenced not just by external stimuli but also by the internalised significance of loyalty (Lerro et al., 2019). Concurrent research on consumer-based brand equity substantiates this as quality, hedonic value, and behavioural loyalty are the most significant predictors of repeat purchases among South African millennials (Appiah-Nimo et al., 2024). In S-O-R terminology, quality and loyalty constitute fundamental organismic states that influence whether CRM stimuli result in behavioural outcomes.

Digital influence further explains which millennials represent the optimal demographic. Social media influencers serve as a powerful catalyst by converting abstract notions of prestige and prosocial cues into relatable narratives that millennials interpret through trust and identification, leading to tangible results such as purchase intent and advocacy (Singh et al., 2024). This completes the S-O-R chain and differentiates millennials from previous generations who exhibit responsiveness to digital stimuli, and from Gen Z whose prestige consumption continues to evolve. The literature collectively indicates that millennials not only engage profoundly with the stimuli generated by prestige brands but also translate these into quantifiable organismic states and responses, rendering them a justified cohort for analysing prestige beauty purchasing behaviour through a S-O-R lens.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, by investigating how cause-related marketing can affect consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust, and how these perceptions in turn drive millennial purchase intentions within the prestige beauty sector in South Africa, the literature review addressed the research problem. The nature and motivators of prestige beauty consumption, the theoretical and contextual underpinnings of CRM, the mediating function of authenticity and trust, and the behavioural results of loyalty,

repeat purchase, and word-of-mouth were the four interconnected areas that were thoroughly examined to achieve this.

The literature consistently emphasises the significance of authenticity and trust as the fundamental mechanisms within the S-O-R model. The consumption of prestige beauty products is influenced not only by functionality but also by symbolic, emotional, ethical, and prosocial factors that enhance the importance of authenticity and legitimacy in marketing stimuli. When transparently developed and linked with brand identity, CRM serves as a compelling catalyst that enhances authenticity and trust at the organism stage, ultimately elevating purchase intention and fortifying brand-consumer relationships. Conversely, campaigns viewed as opportunistic or unclear erode trust and diminish consumer engagement, especially in digital and millennial contexts characterised by heightened scepticism.

The review additionally identified the research gaps. A significant portion of the current evidence is derived from CSR rather than CRM and from mature markets rather than emerging ones. In South Africa, structural disparities, economic constraints, and increased scepticism regarding green or prosocial assertions render authenticity and trust paramount in influencing consumer responses. Although meta-analyses validate the overall beneficial effects of CRM, there is still limited comprehension of how explicit and implicit CRM messaging interacts with millennial values, digital influence, and cues of prestige consumption to influence behavioural outcomes.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the research framework, connecting the review of the research hypotheses addressed in the next chapter. Authenticity and trust are conceptualised as a unified mediating construct, in accordance with Lerro et al. (2019), Silva et al. (2020), and Walter et al. (2024).

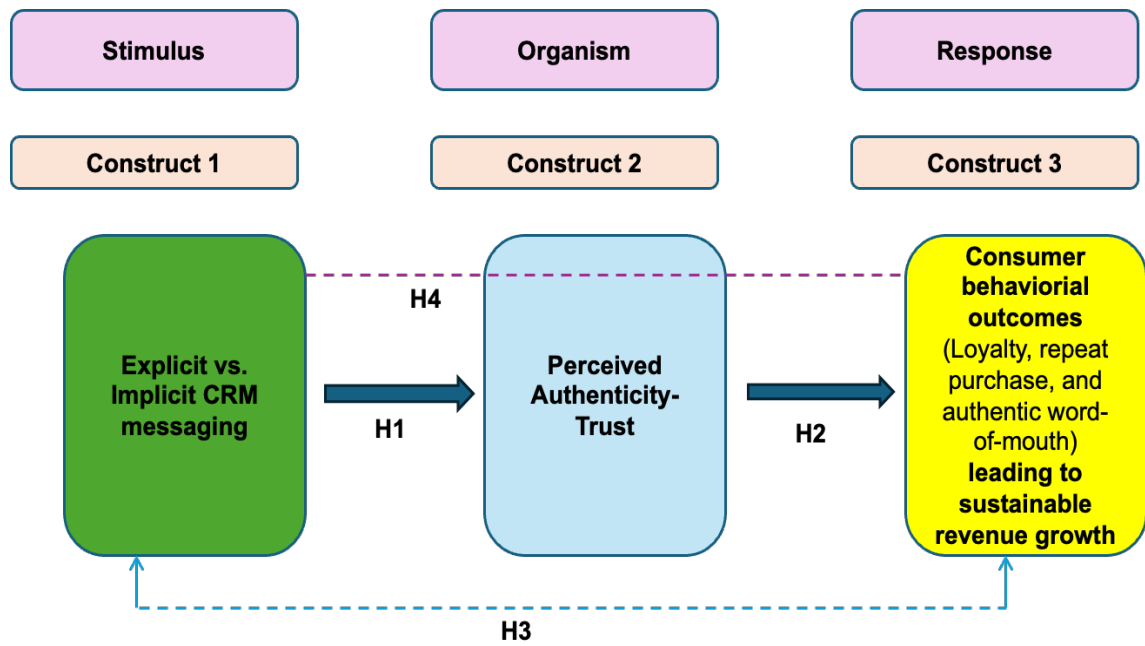


Figure 2.3: S-O-R research model

Source: Researcher's own, based on S-O-R model by Mehrabian & Russell, 1974

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Chapter 2's literature review highlighted three interconnected arguments in CRM within the prestige beauty sector. Firstly, the efficacy of explicit compared to implicit message framing, secondly, the mediating role of authenticity and trust, and lastly, the potential for direct message effects on consumer behaviour. These discussions form the foundation for the study's hypotheses.

Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate the impact of explicit versus implicit CRM message framing on consumer perception (authenticity and trust), and, in turn, consumer behavioural outcomes within the prestige beauty sector.

H1: Explicit CRM messages result in higher perceptions of brand authenticity and trust compared to implicit CRM messages.

Research constantly underscores the importance of message framing in influencing authenticity and trust. Explicit donation indicators such as “R50 per product sold”, increase clarity and transparency, which diminishes scepticism and enhances credibility (Chaabouni et al., 2020; Lee & Chu, 2023; Schamp et al., 2023). In contrast, value expressions like “a portion of proceeds will be donated” undermine authenticity by concealing the extent and significance of the contribution (Nguyen et al., 2023). Implicit signals such as logos or symbolic visuals may induce emotional engagement and subtle associations (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022; Usrey et al., 2020), but they run the risk of being overlooked and misconstrued. In markets like South Africa, where millennials are especially vigilant against superficial purpose-washing, the clarity of the message is crucial. The research substantiated the expectation that explicit and implicit CRM framing will elicit markedly distinct perceptions of authenticity and trust.

This study conceptualised authenticity and trust as a single construct that reflects consumers' overall view of brand sincerity and integrity. This approach corresponds with previous studies on cause-related marketing and brand purpose, wherein authenticity and trust collectively establish relational credibility (Silva et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2024), and trust is shown to originate directly from perceived authenticity (Lerro et al., 2019).

H2: Perceived authenticity and trust significantly influence millennial consumer behavioural outcomes (repeat purchase, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth).

Authenticity and trust have continuously been recognised as fundamental factors connecting CRM stimuli to consumer responses. Strong brand-cause alignment and transparent communication foster consumer perceptions of authenticity, thereby enhancing credibility and reinforcing connections (Bhatti et al., 2022; Lopes et al., 2024; Piao et al., 2023). In turn, trust is a driving force behind advocacy, loyalty, and purchase intentions in addition to being the outcome of successful CRM initiatives (Silva et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2024; Walter et al., 2024). This approach is supported by the classic marketing theory; as Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) show that loyalty is fostered by trust, and that loyalty results in repeat purchases, as well as positive word-of-mouth. According to Petravičiūtė et al. (2021), authenticity and trust are especially important in prestige beauty, where the relational depth and symbolic capital are essential to brand value. Initiatives that are seen as opportunistic, on the other hand, erode trust and evoke unfavourable reactions (Nygaard & Silkoset, 2022; Nnindini & Dankwah, 2024). As a result, it seems likely that millennial consumer loyalty, willingness to advocate prestige brands, and repeat purchases would all be greatly increased by greater perceived authenticity and trust.

H3: CRM message format (explicit vs. implicit) has a significant direct effect on consumer behavioural outcomes, independent of authenticity-trust as a mediating construct.

While authenticity and trust serve as recognised mediators, research indicates that a message format may also directly impact behaviour. Explicit donation assertions can elicit a warm-glow effect, encouraging purchases even in the absence of thorough cognitive assessment (Chaabouni et al., 2020). Likewise, emotionally impactful implicit campaigns may elicit prompt sharing or purchase behaviour, especially in digital contexts (Jilv et al., 2025). Nonetheless, these direct effects are often weak. Studies indicate that cause-related promotions can stimulate short-term sales growth but do not foster long-term consumer loyalty (Sodero, 2022; Chang et al., 2021). In prestige contexts, CRM can decrease desirability when campaigns compromise hedonic value, for instance a one-for-one contribution promotion decreases purchasing desire in luxury goods (Dugan et al., 2021). These findings suggest that although authenticity and trust are paramount, the structure of the message may independently influence consumer behaviour. Testing H3 enabled the study of both mediated and unmediated effects of explicit and implicit initiatives on millennial consumer behavioural outcomes.

H4: Authenticity and trust mediate the relationship between CRM messaging and consumer behavioural outcomes.

This study conceptualised authenticity and trust as a unified mediating construct that reflects the consumers' belief in the genuineness and integrity of cause-related marketing campaigns. Within the S-O-R framework, authenticity and trust serve a crucial mediating role between CRM message formats and consumer behavioural outcomes in the prestige beauty sector. Transparent campaigns that align with brand purpose and convey equitable value exchange boost perceptions of authenticity and trust, thereby driving loyalty and purchase intentions (Bhatti et al., 2022; Lee & Chu, 2023; Silva et al., 2020). In contrast, unclear or opportunistic messages undermine this perception, especially among South African millennials who are wary of purpose-washing (Terblanche et al., 2023; Walter et al., 2024). Thus, authenticity and trust serve as a mediator in the relationship between a CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes.

The next chapter outlines the research design and methodology utilised to test these hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and design applied to the hypotheses stated in Chapter 3. A quantitative approach was applied to analyse the consumer perceptions and behavioural outcomes within the context of cause-related marketing in the South African prestige beauty sector. This approach facilitated the collection of quantifiable data appropriate to be statistically analysed to test the hypotheses derived from the literature review in Chapter 2.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire based on validated measurement scales and constructs identified in the review. The survey was circulated to a cohort of millennial consumers, facilitating the collection of responses on a large scale. The dataset was prepared, coded, and analysed using statistical methods appropriate for examining variable correlations and verifying reliability and validity.

Concerns of reliability, validity, and bias were considered during the research design, sampling, and data processing stages. Strategies including the use of known scales, pilot testing, and statistical validations were implemented to alleviate these risks within the limitations of time and resources accessible to the researcher. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were upheld throughout the study. This chapter concludes with an examination of the study's limitations.

4.2 Choice of research methodology and design

To gain concrete understanding of the impact of cause-related marketing on millennials in the South African beauty sector, this study used a quantitative research design. Quantitative research designs are especially suitable for studies aimed at testing hypotheses and determining correlations between variables in a systematic and replicable way (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). As highlighted in Chapter 2, the millennials in South Africa exhibit distinct behavioural characteristics, including increased value-consciousness, a preference for brands that resonate with their ethical and social values, and a pronounced sensitivity to authenticity in marketing communications (Lerro et al., 2019; Pereira et al., 2024). These attributes rendered them a strategically significant cohort for examining the impact of CRM messaging on perceptions of trust, authenticity, and subsequent behavioural outcomes.

This study was based on a positivist research philosophy, which posits that social phenomena can be examined objectively and that correlations between variables can be explained through observable, quantitative data. Positivism is closely associated with quantitative approaches, endorsing the utilisation of structured instruments, statistical analysis, and hypothesis-driven research to yield generalisable results (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Consistent with this position, consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions were the key constructs in CRM and consumer engagement research and were operationalised as quantifiable variables rather than regarded solely as subjective experiences (Vieira et al., 2023). This alignment reflects previous empirical applications of the stimulus-organism-response framework in marketing, wherein external stimuli are analysed through measurable mediators such as authenticity and trust, ultimately predicting behavioural outcomes such as purchase intention and loyalty (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). By positioning the research within this philosophical framework, coherence was achieved among research hypotheses, and analytical techniques, thereby ensuring that the study could yield findings that were both reliable and reproducible in accordance with previous CRM and consumer behaviour scholars (Peng et al., 2024; Terblanche et al., 2023).

The research design employed a deductive approach, with hypotheses based on the theoretical foundations examined in Chapter 2. This aligned with the recommendations of Saunders and Lewis (2018), who assert that a deductive approach is appropriate for studies in which theory influences the formulation of hypotheses that can be systematically tested. The study utilised the S-O-R framework as its foundation. The CRM message format (explicit versus implicit) served as the stimuli, perceptions of authenticity and trust constituted the organism stage, and behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchase, loyalty, and word-of-mouth exemplified the response. Previous studies have effectively utilised the S-O-R framework in digital commerce and CSR contexts (Kim et al., 2023; Vieira et al., 2023), although its application in the prestige beauty sector in South Africa remains mostly unexplored. This gap warranted the implementation of a systematic quantitative design to quantitatively examine relationships, rather than depending exclusively on descriptive or interpretive narratives.

The study employed a cross-sectional time horizon, indicating that data was gathered at a single point in time rather than over an extended period. A cross-

sectional design was most suitable for examining hypothesised correlations between variables, considering practical limitations of time and resources (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Moreover, cross-sectional surveys are acknowledged as a cost-effective and prevalent method in empirical research, facilitating the efficient analysis of relationships within a specified sample (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2024; Maier et al., 2023). A longitudinal design may have demonstrated the evolution of consumer attitudes over time; however, it was not within the parameters of this study. The cross-sectional approach, however, offered a comprehensive overview of millennial consumer perceptions of CRM in the prestige beauty industry.

The purpose of this design was influenced by practical considerations. A comprehensive survey approach facilitated extensive outreach to millennial consumers, a demographic that is digitally interconnected and familiar with online interaction. Structured questionnaires facilitated uniformity in responses, ensuring reliability and enabling the examination of patterns with a substantial dataset. Saunders and Lewis (2018) assert that survey methods are especially advantageous for gathering uniform data that can be measured and analysed statistically. Drawing from established measurement scales from CRM and consumer behaviour literature (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022; Schamp et al., 2023), the study modified items to align with the cultural and economic context of South Africa, whereas consumers frequently navigate the tension between aspirations of prestige goods and financial prudence informed by their economic circumstance. This adaption guaranteed that methodological rigour was preserved while the design aligned with the behavioural economics reality of the studied cohort.

The study recognised the scepticism and trust deficits identified in previous chapters, which in turn motivated the study design further. Studies indicate that South African millennials are swift to scrutinise corporate intentions, especially when brands seem to leverage social causes for profit (Antonio et al., 2022; Terblanche et al., 2023). This scepticism, grounded on historical corporate conduct and the socio-economic factors influencing daily life, established a compelling justification to integrate both explicit and implicit message conditions. The random assignment of participants to different conditions facilitated rigorous comparisons, allowing for the determination of whether clarity or subtlety in CRM messaging was more effective in fostering trust and influencing behavioural outcomes.

A qualitative design was contemplated but subsequently discarded. Although qualitative approaches are adept at examining lived experiences and producing detailed descriptions, they would not have enabled this study to test hypotheses with statistical accuracy or generalise results to a broader population. Saunders and Lewis (2018) assert that quantitative designs are more suitable for investigating relationships between variables and making conclusions about a target population. This study needed both profound insights and quantifiable evidence of causal links among CRM message formats, authenticity and trust, as well as behavioural outcomes. A quantitative survey design was the most justifiable and methodologically sound option, ensuring that the research hypotheses articulated in Chapter 3 were addressed in a manner that was both theoretically substantiated and practically relevant.

4.3 Population

The study's target population consisted of millennial consumers (born between 1981 and 1996) living in regions in South Africa, who engage with prestige beauty products. This cohort was chosen due to the millennials being recognised as a significant generation in the prestige beauty sector, blending aspirations for luxury consumption with social consciousness (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025). Their distinct demographic profile, marked by significant digital involvement, value-consciousness, and increased awareness of social issues, renders them as a particularly relevant cohort for analysing the relationship between CRM initiatives and consumer perceptions.

The accessible population comprised of millennial consumers living in urban South Africa who had either acquired prestige beauty products in the past six months or continued to engage with the category despite not having made a recent purchase. The six-month criterion was implemented to guarantee that the participants' perspectives were shaped by recent product experience, thus increasing recall accuracy and response reliability. Simultaneously, consumers who indicated they had not made any purchases in the last six months were not disqualified. The decision was based on the acknowledgement that prestige beauty consumption frequently exhibits non-linear patterns as some consumers make bulk buys that prolongs usage over several months (Ma & Kwon, 2021), while others receive prestige beauty products as gifts. Both groups maintain active engagement with the

sector, and their viewpoints enhance a more comprehensive understanding of millennial engagements with prestige beauty brands.

By defining the accessible population in this manner, the study acknowledged the heterogeneity of millennial consumption patterns in South Africa and ensured that the sample was adequately inclusive to derive significant insights into the impact of CRM campaigns on perceptions and engagement. This population alignment further substantiated the argument articulated in Chapter 1, which identified millennials as a pivotal cohort for comprehending the dynamics of the prestige beauty sector in South Africa.

4.4 Unit of analysis

The study's unit of analysis was the individual millennial consumer of prestige beauty products. This level of analysis matched with the study's objectives and hypotheses, which examined the impact of cause-related marketing campaigns on attitudes and behaviours. The stimulus-organism-response framework, which informed the research design, necessitated individual-level analysis, as it underscored consumer centricity and investigated how external stimuli were internally processed and converted into behavioural outcomes.

Central to the study were the concepts of authenticity and trust, which had a perceptual and cognitive basis. This construct could only be effectively articulated by individuals who perceived and assessed brand communications in personal and unique manners. By focusing on individual consumers instead of households or groups, the study made sure that constructs were measured correctly and that useful information was gathered about how CRM strategies affect how consumers react.

4.5 Sampling method and size

This study employed a purposive non-probability sampling method. In line with Saunders and Lewis (2018) as well as Andrade (2020), purposive sampling was suitable since it facilitated the intentional selection of participants who matched the study's criteria and objectives. The study specifically targeted South African millennials, aligning with the prestige beauty consumer group under investigation.

In the beginning, there were two requirements for inclusion: 1) Respondents had to fall within the millennial generational cohort, and 2) They had to have purchased a prestige beauty product in the last six months. The six-month criterion was designed to guarantee that participants possessed recent and pertinent consumption

experience, thus enhancing recall and reliability. Nevertheless, responses from millennials who reported not having made a purchase within the six-month were included in the final dataset. This decision exemplified the characteristics of prestige beauty consumption, which frequently involves bulk buying that prolongs usage over multiple months or products received as gifts. Preserving these responses enhanced the dataset's representativeness while aligning with the study's objectives.

The target sample size was established at 250. This figure surpassed the minimum methodological requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Hair et al. (2021) assert that a four-predictor model necessitates a minimum of 129 cases based on the ten-times rule, whereas Kock (2024) advises at least 200 cases for multi-group comparisons to mitigate the risk of Type II error. The final dataset consisted of 250 valid responses following the elimination of invalid entries, which met both criteria and preserved statistical power.

The respondents were evenly divided between the two questionnaire conditions, with 125 participants exposed to the explicit CRM message and 125 to the implicit variant. The even distribution enhanced the comparability of the two groups and reinforced the study's objective of testing variations in consumer perceptions across message formats.

Table 4.1: Sample size and adequacy

Requirement	Minimum cases needed	Source	Actual achieved
Ten-times rule (Four-predictor model)	129	Hair et al. (2022)	250
Multi-group comparisons threshold	200	Kock (2024)	250
Target sample size	250	Research design	250
Final cleaned dataset (equal split by group)	-	Actual fieldwork outcome	Explicit = 125 Implicit = 125

In summary, the purposive sampling technique, along with the attained sample size and equitable group distribution, established a solid foundation for the statistical analysis conducted. The methodology maintained rigour while addressing the distinct consumption behaviours of prestige beauty products in South Africa.

4.6 Measurement instrument and data collection tool

The study utilised a structured, self-administered questionnaire as a primary measurement instrument. A survey design was selected due to its prevalent use in

quantitative research for capturing consumer perceptions, behavioural intentions, and self-reported behaviours in a standardised format, facilitating comparability among respondents and supporting statistical analysis (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2024; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The questionnaire was created and administered via Microsoft forms, offering a secure and mobile-compatible platform. Microsoft forms facilitated, the incorporation of stimulus images, the application of branching logic, and the automated export of responses to Excel, thereby streamlining the data administration and analysis preparation.

Three main constructs were measured:

- **Construct 1: CRM messaging:** Evaluated by seven items, reflecting judgements of explicit versus implicit cause-related marketing message formats. Items were derived from previous CRM communication research (Badenes-Rocha et al., 2022; Schamp et al., 2023).
- **Construct 2: Message integrity via perceived authenticity and trust:** Assessed using six items, modified from recognised measures in authenticity and consumer-brand trust studies (Osorio et al., 2023).
- **Construct 3: Consumer behavioural outcomes:** Evaluated using six items that represent intentions such as loyalty, word-of-mouth, and repeat purchase, derived from CSR and CRM outcome studies (Peng et al., 2024; Vieira et al., 2023).

All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to Strongly agree (7). The seven-point scale was chosen as it enabled respondents to articulate nuanced distinctions in their attitudes, therefore improving variance and strengthening the reliability of statistical analysis (Joshi et al., 2015).

In addition to these constructs, the questionnaire included:

- **Purchase habit questions:** To contextualise consumer behaviour, the participants were asked to disclose their purchasing patterns for prestige beauty products. This encompassed frequency, average spend, purchase channels, and the media platforms that influenced their purchase decisions. The collection of this data established a behavioural baseline that facilitated the understanding of attitudinal variables and connected cause-related marketing perceptions to actual consumer behaviour.

- **Manipulation check:** Given that the stimulus images had no brand names, a control question was used to assess whether respondents linked the message to the prestige beauty category. The participants were asked if they recognised the prestige beauty brand that created the message. This aimed to ascertain whether the respondents perceived the stimuli as linked with prestige rather than mass-market or unrelated, hence enhancing internal validity.
- **Demographic questions:** Age in years, gender, highest qualification, monthly income after-tax in South African rand, and province of residence. The questions were designed to profile respondents and examine potential demographic influences, while still keeping focus on millennials.

A hard stop screening question was positioned at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that only individuals identifying as millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) could proceed. Respondents not belonging to this generational cohort were automatically exited from the survey, thereby preventing ineligible participation and enhancing the dataset's validity.

Two versions of the questionnaire were developed to evaluate the impact of the message format. Each version featured a stimulus image of prestige beauty brands, accompanied by either an explicit donation (Appendix 1) and the cause it supports or by an implicit symbolic cue (Appendix 2).

This design enabled the questionnaire to gather consumer perceptions, purchasing behaviour, demographic context, and the extent to which the stimuli were processed as was intended, while limiting participation to the millennial cohort.

4.7 Data gathering process and collection method

The data for this study was collected via a structured online questionnaire circulated across various digital platforms, namely, email, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram. These platforms were chosen for their accessibility and extensive reach across the millennial cohort examined in the study.

A staggered distribution approach was implemented to mitigate the risk of duplicate responses. In the first phase, the implicit version of the questionnaire was shared to a select group of personal WhatsApp contacts. The contacts were requested to complete the survey and distribute it across their networks. Upon the collection of adequate responses, the explicit version of the questionnaire was distributed to a

distinct audience. This involved sharing the link on the MBA 2024/25 class WhatsApp group and thereafter extending it to professional contacts through LinkedIn. The LinkedIn post was subsequently amplified as individuals reposted it within their professional networks.

In addition to WhatsApp and LinkedIn, the survey link was sent selectively using email and Instagram direct messages, enhancing coverage and improving the likelihood of obtaining a diverse range of respondents from the targeted generational cohort.

This systematic and channel-diverse approach guaranteed controlled exposure to each survey format while optimising outreach across various social and professional networks. The choice to utilise an online questionnaire was founded on the digital proficiency of the millennials. Millennials, as digital natives, are familiar with online platforms in their everyday routines, rendering a digital questionnaire as a logical and accessible means of participation (Zhang & Abd Rahman, 2022). The use of digital platforms enhanced participation chances, diminished access barriers, and synchronised the data collection method with the communication preferences of this cohort.

4.8 Data analysis process

The analysis of the collected data adhered to a systematic quantitative approach that guaranteed methodological rigour and conformity with the study's objectives. All inferential analyses were performed at a 95% significance level ($p < 0.05$), the established criterion in social science research for identifying statistically significant relationships (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2018). The study examined the impact of various case-related marketing formats on perceived authenticity and trust, and the behavioural outcomes among South African millennials with the data analysis progressing from initial cleaning to sophisticated statistical testing. This systematic procedure aimed to yield dependable and replicable insights, aligned with a positivist perspective in which constructs are transformed into quantifiable variables (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Step 1: Data preparation and cleaning

The initial phase involved the preparation of the dataset for analysis. A total of 360 responses were exported from Microsoft forms to Microsoft excel, comprising of 186

responses from the explicit condition and 174 from the implicit condition. At this point, the following steps were implemented to clean the data:

- **Deleted columns and entries:** Numerous non-essential columns produced by Microsoft forms were eliminated during the data cleansing phase, as they did not enhance the analysis. The “Name” and “Email” fields were empty, as the survey was structured to maintain anonymity and refrain from collecting personal identifiers. Likewise, the “Last modified time” column was generated automatically by the platform but lacked any pertinent information. The columns were therefore removed to preserve a clean dataset and to guarantee that only pertinent variables were maintained for analysis.

A total of 110 (*Explicit* = 61 and *Implicit* = 49) responses were deleted from the dataset. Exclusions were based on explicitly specified criteria to guarantee that the final sample conformed to the study’s parameters and upheld data integrity. A total of 20 respondents (*Explicit* = 15 and *Implicit* = 5) did not pass the standard deviation test, which indicated straight-lined responses (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Of the total 79 (*Explicit* = 38 and *Implicit* = 41) respondents were deleted for failing to meet the millennial age criterion (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), while an additional ten (*Explicit* = 8 and *Implicit* = 2) respondents were removed because, after initially qualifying, the age they indicated they were turning in the current year fell outside the millennial range (Hair et al., 2021). Furthermore, one respondent (*Explicit* = 0 and *Implicit* = 1) was excluded for presenting implausible and contradictory data across various variables, for example, reporting to be 31 years old with an Honours degree while reporting a monthly salary below R10 000, and indicating “30 minutes” in a monetary spend question (Meade & Craig, 2012). These exclusions produced a refined dataset that accurately reflected the target population and guaranteed validity of subsequent statistical analyses.

- **Duplicate check:** Since the survey was structured to ensure anonymity and did not record personal identifiers such as names, email addresses or phone numbers to strengthen the ethical protection of respondents, no duplicate responses were identified through direct identifiers.
- **New column addition:** During the data preparation process, several supplementary columns were added to enhance data management and quality assurance. A “Time to complete” column was added to document the

duration each respondent took to complete the survey, offering insight into engagement levels and facilitating the identification of abnormally brief completion times. A total of 19 speedsters, defined as respondents who finished in under three minutes, were identified (*Explicit* = 9 and *Implicit* = 10). Out of them, 12 were preserved (*Explicit* = 5 and *Implicit* = 7) as they met the standard deviation criterion, while the other cases were removed (Curran, 2016; Meade & Craig, 2012). A “Condition” column was added to differentiate between respondents who completed the explicit survey and those who completed the implicit one, thus ensuring the accurate classification of responses. To ensure the uniqueness of each case between the two versions, a “Unique ID” column was created by combining the original response ID with the condition.

- **Variable renaming and data structuring:** Survey questions were originally phrased as complete sentences, which were excessively lengthy to use in statistical software like Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). To maintain consistency and enable efficient analysis and navigation in SPSS, some survey questions were renamed with succinct variable names that accurately represented underlying content (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Table 4.2 illustrates the mapping between the original survey questions and the coded variable names utilised in the analysis. This step generated a standardised dataset that enabled both descriptive analysis and inferential testing. These variables did not represent constructs, but rather the demographic and behavioural data utilised in profiling, screening, and contextual controls.

Table 4.2: Variable naming convention change

Survey question	New variable name
What is your age in years?	Age
What is your gender?	Gender
What is your highest qualification?	Highest qualification
What is your monthly personal after-tax income (ZAR)?	Income
Where do you live most of the year?	Province
Where do you usually buy prestige beauty products?	Purchase channel
Which platform most influences your prestige beauty product purchases?	Influence platform
Roughly how much did you spend on prestige beauty products last month in ZAR?	Monthly spend
How many times have you bought prestige beauty products in the last six months?	Purchase frequency
Have you bought a prestige beauty product (e.g., Lancôme, Estée Lauder, Dior, Clarins, Chanel, Clinique, Tom Ford, L'oreal) in the last six months?	Recent purchase
Were you born between 1996 and 1981 (aged 29 – 44 in 2025)?	Qualifying
Did you recognise which prestige beauty brand created the message?	Brand recognition

- Data cleaning adjustments:** One respondent filled in “30s” in response to the age question (“What is your age in years”). To guarantee consistency among responses, this unclear entry was recorded to a definitive value of 32. This determination was influenced by the existence of another respondent with a similar demographic profile (diploma qualification, month income of R10 000 - R19 999, and a pharmacy purchase channel) who indicated their age as 32. Recoding based on this profile match maintained the comparability of responses while preventing unnecessary data loss, thus adhering to guidelines for coding and standardising survey data (Pallant, 2020; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This was a single case and did not materially affect results.

Following the application of the above data preparation and cleaning techniques, the usable sample was 250 respondents, balanced between explicit (n = 125) and implicit (n = 125).

Table 4.3: Data cleaning summary

Step	Number removed	Reamining sample	Notes
Initial responses	0	360	Raw questionnaire exports
Failed SD test	20	340	Failed attention check
Non-millennials	79	261	Ouside desired age range
Non-millennials (Age this year)	10	251	Age this year not a millennial
Implausible / Contradictory data	1	250	Removed to protect vlidity
Final dataset	0	250	Explicit (n = 125) and Implicit (n = 125)

Step 2: Coding variables

Upon completion of the cleaning process, all variables were coded to facilitate quick data entry and statistical analysis in SPSS. Coding facilitated the conversion of

category replies into numerical values, allowing for descriptive analysis and inferential testing (Pallant, 2020; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The coding was as follows:

- **Condition:** Explicit message = 1; Implicit message = 0
- **Construct related items:** These were derived from established scales in the questionnaire and coded on a seven-point Likert scale, with '1' representing strongly disagree and '7' representing strongly agree. This coding maintained response variance and enabled the computation of means, reliability testing, and factor analysis.
- **Demographic variables:** Concise labels and numeric codes were allocated to variables such as gender, qualification, income and province. For instance, gender was coded as Male = 0, Female = 1, Prefer not to say = 2, Non-binary = 3; qualification as Less than high school or Matric = 1, Highschool or Matric = 2, Diploma = 3, Bachelors = 4, Honours = 5, Masters or Above = 6; income as => R75 000 = 1, R50 000 - R74 999 = 2, R35 000 - R49 999 = 3, <R10 000 = 4, R10 000 - R19 999 = 5, R20 000 - R34 999 = 6, Prefer not say = 7; and province as Gauteng = 1, North West = 2, Western Cape = 3, Mpumalanga = 4, Kwa-Zulu Natal = 5, Limpopo = 6, Eastern Cape = 7, Northern Cape = 8, Free State = 9.
- **Shopping behaviour variables:** These offered clarity on where they shop, average expenditure, purchase frequency, and the media channels that influence their choices. Purchase channel was coded as Brand boutique (Free Standing Stores) = 1, Department store (e.g. Edgars, Woolworths) = 2, Pharmacy (e.g. Clicks, Dischem) = 3, Specialist retailer (e.g. ARC, Skins) = 4, Online (brand or retailer website, Takealot, Superbalist) = 5, Other = 6; monthly spend as R0 - R500 = 1, R501 - R1 500 = 2, R1 501 - R3 000 = 3, R3 001 - R6 000 = 4, R6 001 - R12 000 = 5, R12 001 - R25 000 = 6, purchase frequency as None = 0, 3 - 4 = 1, 1 - 2 = 2, 5 - 6 = 3, >6 = 4; and influence platform as Instagram = 1, TikTok = 2, Magazines = 3, In-store beauty advisor = 4, Television & Billboards = 5, In-app platforms = 6, Other = 7.
- **Brand engagement variables:** Recent purchase and brand recognition were coded as binary variables, with No = 0, Yes = 1.

4.9 Quality controls

Validity

Content validity

Ensuring content and face validity was the first step to establish measurement instrument quality. As shown in Appendix 3 that the questionnaire was presented to two research specialists and to seven marketing professionals for assessment, however, only two marketing professionals provided feedback. Their feedback focused on enhancing the clarity of wording, ensuring alignment with the foundational constructs, and mitigating any redundancy among questions. Minor adjustments were implemented to improve the accuracy and pertinence of the instrument before being sent out for pilot testing. As Pérez-Rivas et al. (2023) note, that expert evaluation ensures the completeness and relevance of items.

Pilot testing

The researcher conducted a pilot study of the questionnaire with 20 respondents from the target population. The average duration for completion was approximately six minutes. The pilot emphasised clarity, coherence, and mobile accessibility. Two modifications were made. Firstly, the researcher set all items to mandatory to prevent respondents from skipping questions. Secondly, to minimise scrolling and mitigate context loss, the researcher incorporated the stimulus images at the beginning of each construct for easy reference during responses.

Table 4.4: Pilot feedback changes log

Theme	Pilot feedback	Action implemented	Rationale
Missing data	"Make sure the form is mandatory to complete all the options"	Forced responses across all questions	Prevents missing data
Ease of reference	"Include the image in each construct for easy reference"	Placed the image the the beginning of each construct	Maintains context and improves response quality
Pilot metrics	n = 20; average time ~ 6 minutes	Recorded and reported	Shows instrument length and feasibility

These enhancements bolstered the instrument's face and content validity, guaranteeing that the final survey was both straightforward and contextually suitable. This multi-phase approach aligns with best practices, wherein expert input and pilot testing are acknowledged as useful methods to improve instrument validity (Pérez-Rivas et al., 2023).

Pearson's correlation

As indicated in Appendix 4, the researcher tested the validity of the questions per construct by calculating the item total score by running Pearson's bivariate correlations and all the questions proved to be valid because the significance was less than 0.05 when each question was checked against the item total.

Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) utilising Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted to evaluate construct validity. This approach guaranteed that the observed items grouped together in a manner that represented the foundational theoretical constructs. Assessing that validity prior to reliability adhered to the established guidelines, since it verifies that the instrument accurately measures what it intended before evaluating internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019; Pallant, 2020).

Appendix 5 shows that all the items had correlations greater than 0.30. Furthermore, the overall Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) for all items was above 0.9 placing it inside Kaiser's (1974) "marvellous" range, signifying that the sample was highly suitable for factor analysis. Likewise, Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded a highly significant result ($p = 0.000$ which is less than 0.05), indicating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix, thus validating the appropriateness of factor analysis. High KMO values for each individual construct validated the appropriateness of factor analysis as well for all subscales (Construct 1 = 0.920, Construct 2 = 0.931, and Construct 3 = 0.913). In practical terms, this indicated that the correlation patterns among items were sufficiently robust to warrant consolidation into common underlying factors.

Table 4.5: KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity

Construct	KMO	Sig.
Construct 1 (Stimulus)	0.920	0.000
Construct 2 (Organism)	0.931	0.000
Construct 3 (Response)	0.913	0.000

There was one component extracted for each of the constructs using the Eigen value 1 criterion. Each of these far exceeded the minimum threshold of 60% often regarded as acceptable in social sciences (Hair et al., 2019). When constructs were examined separately, each produced a distinct one-factor solution:

- **Construct 1:** Eigenvalue = 5.117, explaining 73.097% of variance.
- **Construct 2:** Eigenvalue = 5.019, explaining 83.655% of variance.
- **Construct 3:** Eigenvalue = 4.753, explaining 79.224% of variance.

The rotation component matrix showed that only one component was extracted, therefore the solution could not be rotated.

These high percentages suggested that within each construct, a singular dominant factor accounted for the majority of the variance. In other words, the items developed

to assess each construct showed cohesion and strong alignment with the foundational theoretical dimensions.

Collectively, these results offered robust evidence of construct validity. The high KMO values and significant Bartlett's tests indicated that the dataset was appropriate for factor analysis. The extraction of a singular factor within each construct, characterised by substantial variance explained and robust item loadings, indicated that the measurement instrument was coherent and effectively encapsulated diverse aspects of cause-related marketing perception. Put differently, the results indicated that the respondents uniformly interpreted and responded to the items in alignment with the theoretical framework of CRM messaging, perceived authenticity and trust, and consumer behavioural outcomes.

By establishing factor validity in this manner, the study illustrated that its measures were both statistically and conceptually sound. This established a robust basis for subsequent reliability analysis and hypothesis testing.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To evaluate the measurement model, CFA was performed utilising both Semopy in Python and Lavaan in R. CFA was utilised to assess that observed items sufficiently represented the latent constructs specified in the conceptual framework. In accordance with the guidelines set forth by Hair et al. (2019), several criteria were utilised to assess model fit, reliability, and validity.

Model fit indices

The measurement model exhibited an acceptable to strong fit across multiple indices, therefore circumventing dependence on a singular metric (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2018). Although the Chi-Square test yielded a statistically significant result of $p\text{-value} = 0.000$, such an outcome is typical in CFA with moderate to large sample sizes. Hair et al. (2019) assert that the Chi-Square test is significantly influenced by sample size and should not be used in isolation to assess model fit. Alternative indices were evaluated to offer a more balanced assessment. Specifically, the χ^2/df ratio was 2.59, below the suggested threshold of 3 (Hair et al., 2019). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.957. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.079938) was at the boundary of acceptability (<0.08) (Hair et al., 2019) while the (S)RMR showed a good fit of 0.036, also well below the

cut-off of good of <0.08 as outlined by Hair et al. (2019). Collectively, these results suggested that the model achieved adequate fit.

Table 4.6: Model fit indices

χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	(S)RMR
386.08	149	2.59	0.957	0.079938	0.036

Internal consistency (reliability)

Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each construct to determine the internal consistency of the measurement instrument. The test evaluated the extent to which the items within a construct accurately measure the same underlying concept.

The questionnaire consisted of three constructs aligned to the S-O-R framework: CRM messaging (stimulus), perceived authenticity and trust (organism), and consumer behavioural outcomes (response). Each construct was individually tested in SPSS. Items associated with a construct were categorised, and the reliability analysis produced Cronbach's Alpha values alongside corrected item-total correlations and Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted to assess the scale stability (Appendix 6).

The results are presented in Table 4.7. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of .937 for the CRM messaging, .961 for perceived authenticity and trust, and .947 for consumer behavioural outcomes. All three surpassed the .70 standard for satisfactory reliability (Cheung et al., 2024; Hair et al., 2021; Pallant, 2020), with values exceeding .80 typically regarded as good, while values beyond .90 were deemed excellent (Hair et al., 2021). While very high coefficients exceeding .95 may indicate redundancy (Hair et al., 2021), the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" outcomes demonstrated that, nearly all items, the alpha would decrease if the item was excluded, thereby affirming that each item positively contributed to the scale's internal consistency.

The only exception was on CRM messaging item ("I clearly understood which social cause the brand supports"), which had a somewhat elevated "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" compared to the overall construct alpha of .937. However, its "Corrected Item-Total Correlations" of .561 surpassed the minimal threshold of .30 (Field, 2005), signifying that it maintained a sufficient correlation with the scale. Given the marginal rise and the conceptual significance of the item, it was retained.

Furthermore, all other “Corrected Item-Total Correlations” were satisfactory, ranging from .838 to .908 for perceived authenticity and trust, and from .771 to .930 for consumer behavioural outcomes, thereby confirming that the items aligned effectively with their respective constructs.

Collectively, these findings affirmed that the high Cronbach’s Alpha noted in this study indicated genuine internal consistency rather than redundancy, thereby validating the reliability assessment of the instrument.

Table 4.7: Cronbach’s Alpha by construct

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
CRM messaging (Stimulus)	.937
Perceived authenticity and trust (Organism)	.961
Consumer behavioural outcomes (Response)	.947

4.10 Ethical considerations

Participants were informed about the research purpose and procedures before providing consent. Confidentiality was guaranteed through anonymisation of data. Respondents were allowed to withdraw at any time without any penalties. All information was securely stored in compliance with POPIA regulations in South Africa. Clear agreement about data usage and reporting was established. The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics committee of GIBS prior to starting the data collection.

These ethical considerations ensured that the study respected the participants’ rights while maintaining scientific integrity.

4.11 Limitations and delimitations

4.11.1 Limitations

Although this study provided valuable insights into cause-related marketing in the South African prestige beauty sector, several limitations were considered. Firstly, the study utilised a self-administered online questionnaire, which presented the potential for self-selection bias. The participants who chose to participate may have exhibited greater digital engagement or a stronger inclination towards social causes compared to the general millennial demographic, thereby impacting the results.

Secondly, the cross-sectional design offered a glimpse into the consumer perceptions and behavioural intentions, but it did not facilitate the monitoring of

changes over time. As such, the study was unable to evaluate the long-term impacts of cause-related marketing on consumer loyalty or repeat purchasing behaviour.

Thirdly, the dependence on self-reported data heightened the likelihood of response biases, including social desirability bias, wherein participants may have exaggerated their endorsement of socially responsible brands. Moreover, constraints in memory and recall may have influenced the accuracy of responses. Despite the initial use of a six-month requirement to enhance validity, responses from individuals who did not fulfil this condition were also retained. This expanded the dataset but may have added variability in the accuracy of recalled experiences.

Fourthly, the study did not expressly account for gender representation. The association of prestige beauty consumption with women resulted in an overrepresentation of female viewpoints. Although male participants were included, their responses may not have adequately represented potential gender differences in perceptions of cause-related marketing.

Fifthly, The sample was geographically confined to South Africa, therefore constraining the generalisability of the findings to other African contexts. While South Africa offers a significant and varied market, regional disparities in culture, socio-economic situations, and consumer behaviour may render the results non-transferable to other markets without further investigation.

Sixthly, while the researcher's objective was to evaluate CRM's impact on sustainable revenue growth, analysis was done indirectly using behavioural indicators. The study used repeat purchases intent, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth as indicators of future sales; direct sales or profit data were not collected. Consequently, these consumer behavioural outcomes were regarded as indicators of potential revenue increases rather than definitive financial results.

Lastly, the study investigated authenticity and trust, and behavioural outcomes, it overlooked other potential mediating or moderating variables, such as brand familiarity, disposable income, and peer influence, which could also influence consumer responses to cause-related marketing.

4.11.2 Delimitations

This study was delimited in a number of important ways to preserve focus and ensure viability. Firstly, the study solely focused on millennial consumers in South Africa, as this demographic was the principal target of cause-related marketing initiatives in the

prestige beauty sector. Other generational cohorts were excluded, despite their engagement with prestige beauty brands, as the aim was to comprehend the perspectives and behavioural responses of millennials particularly.

Secondly, the study concentrated exclusively on the prestige beauty industry, excluding mass-market and professional beauty categories. This decision was made because prestige beauty possesses distinct characteristics in terms of brand equity, emotional resonance, and responsiveness to cause-related initiatives, rendering it an appropriate setting for analysing consumer engagement and perceived value.

Thirdly, the study regarded cause-related marketing as the exclusive strategic construct and did not encompass wider sustainability or corporate social responsibility domains. This choice was made to prevent conceptual overlap and for more precise examination of how CRM initiatives affect consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust, and purchase intentions.

Fourthly, the study utilised a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This meant that consumer responses were assessed at a singular point, thereby constraining the capacity to identify longitudinal effects such as changes in loyalty or enduring behavioural change.

Finally, the sample aimed to prioritise respondents having prior experience in purchasing prestige beauty products during the last six months, as this timeframe improved recall reliability and ensured that responses represented recent and pertinent consumer responses. However, responses from participants outside this timeframe were included, as their insights enriched the dataset while remaining consistent with the study's overarching objectives.

The results of the data analysis are shown in the next chapter, which is structured in line with the methodological considerations outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of the empirical analysis. The purpose was to analyse the impact of cause-related marketing on consumer perceptions and behavioural outcomes, specifically focusing on millennial consumers in South Africa. The analysis was based on the research design detailed in the methodology chapter, which utilised a quantitative survey approach across two experimental conditions.

The constructs were formulated within the S-O-R framework, which directed both the design of the measurements and arrangement of the results. This study utilised CRM messaging as the stimulus, consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust as the organism, and behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchase, advocacy, and loyalty as the response.

The results are structured into two primary sections. Firstly, descriptive statistics are presented to furnish an overview of the sample profile and the distribution of key constructs. These descriptives provide the framework for interpreting subsequent findings. Secondly, the results are organised by hypothesis, keeping to the sequence established in Chapter 3. Each subsection reiterates the hypothesis, specifies the statistical test conducted, and presents the results in terms of significance, effect size, and the nature of the relationship.

The aim was to present a clear and methodical presentation of the evidence, ensuring that findings are stated objectively prior to a more in-depth interpretation in the discussion chapter.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

5.2.1 Demographic profile

Overview

The final sample consisted of 250 respondents, equally split between explicit (n = 125) and implicit (n = 125) message conditions. Table 5.1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents at both condition and overall levels.

Gender

The sample consisted primarily of females (72%), while males constituted slightly more than a quarter (26%). The percentage of female respondents was notably greater in the explicit condition (77%) compared to the implicit condition (68%), illustrating the prevalent skew towards women in the prestige beauty sector.

Age

The majority of respondents were aged 29 - 35 (45%) and 36 - 40 (39%), with only 16% aged 41 and above. The explicit condition comprised of a greater proportion of younger respondents (29 - 35), while the implicit condition included a higher number of respondents aged 41 and older.

Table 5.1: Demographic profile of respondents (overall and by condition)

Demographic	Category	Implicit condition		Explicit condition		Overall	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	Male	39	31%	26	21%	65	26%
	Female	85	68%	96	77%	181	72%
	Other	1	1%	3	2%	4	2%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Age group	29 to 35	49	39%	64	51%	113	45%
	36 - 40	46	37%	52	42%	98	39%
	41 and above	30	24%	9	7%	39	16%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Education	No tertiary qualification	58	46%	58	46%	116	46%
	Undergraduate	58	46%	56	45%	114	46%
	Postgraduate	9	7%	11	9%	20	8%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Income	Lower band (< R35 000)	45	36%	35	28%	80	32%
	Middle band (R35 000 - R74 999)	50	40%	52	42%	102	41%
	Upper band (>= R75 000)	7	6%	18	14%	25	10%
	Prefer not to say	23	18%	20	16%	43	17%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Province	Gauteng	99	79%	105	84%	204	82%
	Western Cape	7	6%	7	6%	14	6%
	North West	2	2%	7	6%	9	4%
	Kwa-Zulu Natal	5	4%	3	2%	8	3%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%

Education

Nearly half of the respondents indicated the absence of tertiary qualifications (46%), while the same percentage (46%) possessed undergraduate qualifications, and a lesser fraction (8%) reported postgraduate qualifications. Educational attainment was similar between the two conditions.

Income

Income levels were distributed as follows: 32% reported income in the lower band (less than R35 000), 41% in the middle band (R35 000 - R74 999), and 10% in the upper band (R75 000 or more). An additional 17% chose not to reveal their income. The explicit condition had a little greater percentage of respondents in the upper income bracket.

Province

The predominant respondents were located in Gauteng (82%), with lesser percentages from the Western Cape (6%), North West (4%), and Kwa-Zulu Natal

(3%). The remaining provinces jointly constituted 6%. The provincial distribution was largely comparable between the two conditions, although Gauteng was marginally more represented in the explicit group.

5.2.2 Demographic shopping habits

To supplement the demographic profile, shopping patterns were analysed. Table 5.2 outlines the purchase frequency, monthly spend, preferred channels, and key influence platforms, reported at both condition and overall level.

Table 5.2: Respondents shopping habits (overall and by condition)

Shopping habit	Category	Implicit condition		Explicit condition		Overall	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Purchase frequency	<= 2 per month	76	61%	75	60%	151	60%
	3 - 4 per month	27	22%	31	25%	58	23%
	5 - 6 per month	13	10%	10	8%	23	9%
	> 6 per month	9	7%	9	7%	18	7%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Monthly spend	<= R500	28	22%	39	31%	67	27%
	R501 - R1 500	44	35%	32	26%	76	30%
	R1 501 - R6 000	48	38%	49	39%	97	39%
	> R6 000	5	4%	5	4%	10	4%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Preferred purchase channel	Brand boutique store (Free Standing Store)	19	15%	19	15%	38	15%
	Department store (e.g. Edgars, Woolworths)	52	42%	53	42%	105	42%
	Pharmacy (e.g., Clicks, Dischem)	37	30%	39	31%	76	30%
	Specialist retailer (e.g., ARC, Skins)	10	8%	11	9%	21	8%
	Online (brand or retailer website, Takealot, Superbalist)	7	6%	3	2%	10	4%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%
Influence platform	Instagram	35	28%	31	25%	66	26%
	TikTok	34	27%	45	36%	79	32%
	Magazines	2	2%	2	2%	4	2%
	In-store beauty advisor	32	26%	30	24%	62	25%
	Television & Billboards	9	7%	7	6%	16	6%
	In-app platforms	3	2%	2	2%	5	2%
	Other	10	8%	8	6%	18	7%
	Total	125	100%	125	100%	250	100%

Purchase frequency

A total of 60% of the respondents indicated that they purchase prestige beauty products up to twice per month. Approximately 23% made three to four purchases monthly, while fewer than one in five made five or more purchases each month. This indicated that prestige beauty purchases are relatively regular within this population, with a minority of highly frequent purchases.

Monthly spend

Spending patterns emphasised the exclusive character of prestige beauty. Approximately 27% reported spending R500 or less monthly, while 30% spent between R501 and R1 500. The predominant fraction (39%) reported a monthly

spend ranging from R1 501 to R6 000, while a negligible fraction (4%) exceeded R6 000 in spending.

Preferred purchase channel

With 43% of purchases, the department stores continued to be the most popular channel, followed by pharmacies (30%) and brand boutiques (15%). Just 4% of the respondents said they shopped online, whilst 8% of the purchases were made from speciality retailers like ARC and SKINS. This demonstrated the persistent dependence on physical retail spaces in spite of the existence of online substitutes.

Influence platform

Digital and social platforms significantly influenced purchasing behaviour. TikTok (32%) and Instagram (26%) emerged as the most influential platforms, collectively accounting for more than half of the respondents' engagement. In-store beauty advisors retained significance (25%), while traditional media, including television and billboards (6%), and magazines (2%), made a minimal impact.

5.2.3 Construct-level descriptives

Descriptive statistics were generated for all constructs developed within the S-O-R framework, both for the entire sample and individually by condition. Table 5.3 encapsulates the means and standard deviations.

Table 5.3: Construct-level descriptives (overall and by condition)

Construct	Implicit condition		Explicit condition		Overall	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
CRM Messaging (Construct 1)	4.10	1.89	4.57	1.69	4.33	1.80
Message integrity via perceived authenticity and trust (Construct 2)	4.22	1.81	4.55	1.83	4.38	1.83
Consumer behavioural outcomes (Construct 3)	4.57	1.69	4.93	1.77	4.75	1.74

Mean values across all constructs exceeded the scale midpoint of four, signifying moderately positive responses. Message integrity via authenticity and trust ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.83$) and consumer behavioural outcomes ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.74$) exhibited comparatively higher scores than CRM messaging ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.80$). Results at condition level indicated that respondents in the explicit condition generally scored higher across constructs compared to those in the implicit condition, especially with consumer behavioural outcomes ($M = 4.93$ versus 4.57).

The initial patterns indicated possible variations in messaging strategies, which were further analysed in the subsequent hypothesis testing.

5.3 Scale reliability and validity

To ascertain measurement robustness, the reliability and validity of all constructs were evaluated before hypothesis testing. Cronbach's alpha values surpassed the suggested threshold of .70 for all constructs, thereby affirming internal consistency. Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sample adequacy for all constructs was above .90, signifying the appropriateness for factor analysis. Construct validity was verified via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA demonstrated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.59$, CFI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.0799, SRMR = 0.036), signifying that the observable variables reflected their latent constructs. All Average Variance Extracted (AVE) surpassed the 0.50 threshold, confirming convergent validity.

These results collectively affirmed that the measurement model was both reliable and valid.

Table 5.4: Reliability and validity summary

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	KMO	Interpretation
CRM messaging	.937	.685	.920	Reliable & Valid
Authenticity and trust	.961	.805	.931	Reliable & Valid
Consumer behavioural outcomes	.947	.753	.913	Reliable & Valid

5.4 Results: Hypothesis 1

H1: *Explicit CRM messages result in higher perceptions of brand authenticity and trust compared to implicit CRM messages.*

5.4.1 Test applied

An independent sample t-test was performed to compare the mean scores of perceived authenticity and trust between individuals exposed to explicit and implicit CRM message formats, to test this hypothesis. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to verify the variance consistency between the two groups.

5.4.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 5.5: Group descriptive statistics

Condition	n	M	SD	Std. error M
Explicit	125	4.57	1.69	0.15
Implicit	125	4.10	1.89	0.17

The participants exposed to explicit CRM messaging exhibited higher perceptions of brand authenticity and trust ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.69$) relative to those exposed to implicit messaging ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.89$).

5.4.3 Test for equality of variances

Levene's test of equality was significant ($F = 4.15$, $p = .043$), suggesting that the variances between the two groups were uneven. Consequently, the equal variances not assumed criterion was used for the interpretation of t-test results.

Table 5.6: Levene's test for equality of variances

Variable	F	df ₁	df ₂	Sig. (p)
Authenticity and trust	4.15	1	248	.043

5.4.4 Independent samples t-test

An independent samples t-test revealed that perceived authenticity and trust differed based on CRM message format ($t = -2.10$, $p = .037$), with the implicit condition exhibiting lower scores than the explicit condition (Mean difference = -0.48; 95% CI = [-0.92 lower, -0.03 upper]; Implicit $M = 4.10$, Explicit $M = 4.57$).

Table 5.7: Independent samples t-test

Test	t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% CI (Lower, Upper)
Equal variances not assumed	-2.10	244.96	.037	-0.48	(-0.92, -0.03)

5.4.5 Effect size

Cohen's d was computed using the pooled standard deviation ($SD_{pooled} = 1.79$) to assess the extent of the difference. The explicit condition exceeded the implicit condition by 0.47 points on the 7-point scale, resulting in Cohen's $d = 0.26$, resulting in a small effect.

Table 5.8: Effect size of H1

Comparison	Mean difference	SD (pooled)	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Explicit vs. Implicit	0.47	1.79	0.26	Small

5.4.6 Summary of the findings of Hypothesis 1

The results demonstrated that the format of CRM messages significantly affects perceptions of brand authenticity and trust. Respondents exposed to explicit CRM messaging exhibited elevated perceptions of authenticity and trust relative to those

who encountered implicit messages ($p = .037$). The results supported Hypothesis 1, indicating that clarity and directness of messages strengthen perceived authenticity and trust.

5.5 Results: Hypothesis 2

H2: *Perceived authenticity and trust significantly influence millennial consumer behavioural outcomes (repeat purchase, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth).*

This hypothesis examined the extent to which perceived authenticity and trust (Construct 1) significantly impact consumer behavioural outcomes (Construct 2). The analysis comprised of a correlation test to evaluate the strength of link and a regression analysis to investigate predictive influence.

5.5.1 Correlation analysis

Table 5.9 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients between the two constructs. A robust, affirmative, and statistically significant correlation was identified between authenticity and trust as well as consumer behavioural outcomes ($r = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$). This suggested that stronger consumer behavioural outcomes such as positive word-of-mouth, repeat purchases, and loyalty are linked to higher levels of authenticity and trust.

Table 5.9: Correlation matrix

Construct		Authenticity & Trust	Consumer behavioural outcomes
Authenticity & Trust	Pearson Correlation	1	.716**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	250	250
Consumer behavioural outcomes	Pearson Correlation	.716**	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	250	250

5.5.2 Regression analysis

A regression analysis was performed to see if authenticity and trust predicts consumer behavioural outcomes. Table 5.9 encapsulates the output. Initial assessments verified the absence of significant violations of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

The regression model demonstrated statistical significance ($F(2,247) = 137.43$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for about 52.7% of the variance in consumer behavioural

outcomes. This signifies a substantial effect size and corroborates that authenticity and trust meaningfully predicts millennial consumer behaviour patterns.

Table 5.10: Regression: Authenticity-trust to consumer behavioural outcomes

Statistic	Value
R	.726
R square	.527
Adjusted R square	.522
Std. Error of the Estimate	1,1995
F(2,247)	137.43
Sig.	0.000

5.5.3 Coefficients

The standardised coefficient for authenticity and trust ($\beta = 0.501$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated a robust and statistically significant relationship with consumer behavioural outcomes. This indicated that heightened perceptions of authenticity and trust correlate with increased consumer loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth. While both constructs contributed to the model, the greater beta value for Construct 2 underscored the superior predictive significance compared to Construct 1.

Table 5.11: Coefficients for Construct 1 and Construct 2

Predictor	B	Std. error	β	t	Sig.
Construct 1 (CRM messaging)	0.236	0.089	0.245	2.66	0.008
Construct 2 (Authenticity and trust)	0.476	0.088	0.501	5.42	0.000

5.5.4 Summary of the findings of Hypothesis 2

The findings clearly supported H2, demonstrating that millennial consumers' behavioural outcomes are highly influenced by perceived authenticity and trust. The results of the regression ($\beta = 0.501$, $p < 0.001$) and correlation ($r = 0.716$) showed that in the context of prestige beauty, trust and authenticity are powerful predictors of behavioural outcomes including loyalty, repeat purchase, and positive word-of-mouth. The explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.527$) further supported the idea that authenticity and trust are essential for predicting favourable consumer behavioural outcomes. Therefore, H2 was supported.

5.6 Results: Hypothesis 3

H3: CRM message format (explicit vs. implicit) has a significant direct effect on consumer behavioural outcomes, independent of authenticity-trust as a mediating construct.

This hypothesis examined the direct path between a CRM message format (Construct 1) and consumer behavioural outcomes (Construct 3) inside the structural equation model. The aim was to ascertain if a message format independently affects behavioural outcomes when the mediating variable is incorporated into the model.

5.6.1 Direct path analysis / coefficient and simple regression

Table 5.12 depicts the standardised path coefficient derived from the SEM and simple regression about the direct association between CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes.

Table 5.12: Direct path coefficient and simple regression

Approach	Path	Standardised Estimate (β)	R ²
SEM	Construct 1 to Construct 3 (CRM messaging to Consumer behavioural outcomes)	0.038	-
Simple regression	Construct 1 to Construct 3 (CRM messaging to Consumer behavioural outcomes)	0.686	0.470

A preliminary simple regression analysis was performed to evaluate the direct association between a CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes prior to integrating the mediating factors for cross-validation of structural findings. The regression model demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation, suggesting that a message format originally seemed to affect consumer behaviour. This approach failed to consider measurement error or mediating effects of authenticity and trust, both of which are integral to the conceptual model. Thus, SEM was utilised as it facilitated the concurrent examination of many latent variables and mediation pathways, offering a more thorough and dependable depiction of the interactions across constructs.

The standardised estimate ($\beta = 0.038$) suggested a weak and statistically insignificant direct correlation between a CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes when authenticity and trust are incorporated into the model. This indicated that the direct impact of a communication format on behavioural outcomes significantly decreases when the mediating variable is considered.

5.6.2 Summary of the findings of Hypothesis 3

The SEM findings indicated that the CRM message format exerts an insignificant direct influence on consumer behavioural outcomes ($\beta = 0.038$). This result indicated that the impact of CRM format on consumer behaviour mostly transpired indirectly via authenticity and trust, rather than through a direct one. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

5.7 Results: Hypothesis 4

H4: *Authenticity and trust mediate the relationship between CRM messaging and consumer behavioural outcomes.*

This hypothesis examined whether the influence of a CRM message format on consumer behavioural outcomes functions indirectly via authenticity and trust. The mediation model was examined utilising SEM with maximum-likelihood estimation on a sample of $n = 250$ respondents. A bootstrapping approach with 5 000 resamples and bias-corrected confidence intervals was utilised to assess the significance of the indirect effects, yielding a robust assessment of mediation effects.

5.7.1 Mediation model overview

The mediation framework consisted of three pathways:

- **Path a:** CRM message format to authenticity and trust;
- **Path b:** Authenticity and trust to consumer behavioural outcomes;
- **Path c:** CRM message format to consumer behavioural outcomes (direct path).

The indirect effect was the product of pathways 'a' and 'b' ($a \times b$), whereas the overall effect was the sum of the direct effect plus the indirect effect ($c + a \times b$).

Figure 5.1 depicts the SEM mediation model, whereas Table 5.13 provides the standardised estimates.

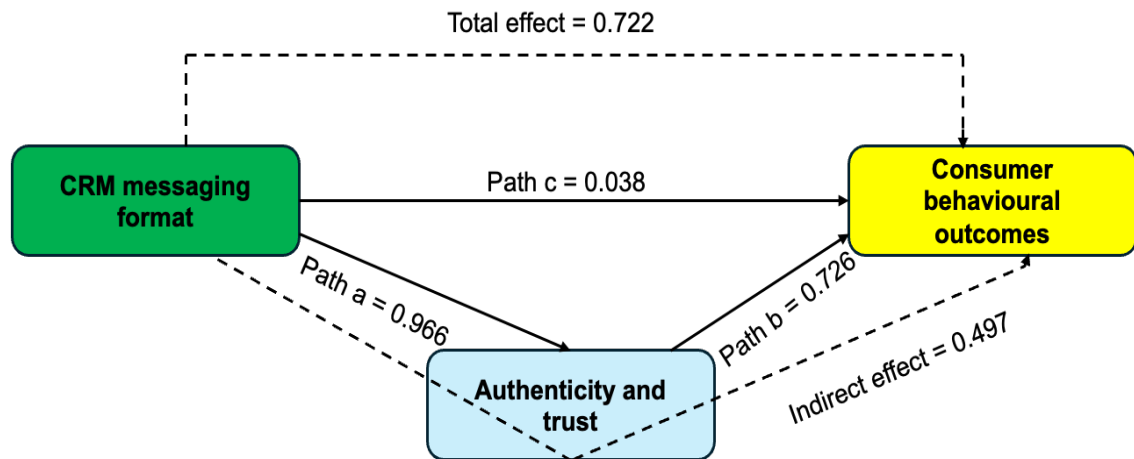


Figure 5.1: SEM mediation model

Source: Researcher's own

Table 5.13: Path coefficients and effects for the mediation model

Path	Description	Standardised Estimate (β)
CRM message format $\rightarrow$ Authenticity and trust (path a)	Impact of CRM message format on authenticity and trust	0.922
Authenticity and trust $\rightarrow$ Consumer behavioural outcomes (path b)	Impact of authenticity and trust on consumer behavioural outcomes	0.726
CRM message format $\rightarrow$ Consumer behavioural outcomes (path c)	Direct impact of CRM message format on consumer behavioural outcomes	0.038
Indirect effect (a x c)	Product of path a and b	0.497
Total effect (c + a x b)	Combined direct and indirect effect	0.722

5.7.2 Interpretation of path coefficients

The SEM output indicated the following:

- The 'a' path ($\beta = 0.966$) was robust and statistically significant, demonstrating that alterations in a CRM message format substantially affect perceptions of authenticity and trust.
- The 'b' path ($\beta = 0.726$) was also robust and statistically robust, indicating that authenticity and trust was a strong indicator of consumer behavioural outcomes.
- The direct relationship path (c) between the CRM message format and behavioural outcomes was weak and statistically insignificant.
- The indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.497$) was significant, indicating that a considerable portion of the association between CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes functions through the mediator.

- The total effect (0.722) indicates that, collectively, a CRM message format, authenticity and trust account for a substantial share of variance in the consumer behavioural outcomes.

5.7.3 Model-level findings

The results indicated a distinct reduction in the direct path upon the incorporation of authenticity and trust into the model. The direct effect diminished from $\beta = 0.686$ (noted in the simple regression for H3) to $\beta = 0.038$ in the mediated SEM. The significant decrease, along with a robust indirect effect ($\beta = 0.497$), offered empirical support for complete mediation.

The model asserted that CRM the message format affects consumer behavioural outcomes mainly through trust and authenticity, rather than through direct means. The importance of the 'a' and 'b' paths, along with the insignificant 'c' path, collectively fulfil the statistical criteria for mediation.

5.7.4 Summary of the findings of Hypothesis 4

The mediation analysis indicated that authenticity and trust served as a key mediator between a CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes. The robust 'a' path ($\beta = 0.966$) and 'b' path ($\beta = 0.726$), with a weak or insignificant 'c' path ($\beta = 0.038$), substantiated that the influence of a CRM message format on consumer behavioural outcomes transpired predominantly through authenticity and trust. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.497$) represented the dominant component of the total effect ($\beta = 0.722$). Therefore, H4 was supported.

5.8 Conclusion

In summary, the results indicated that H1, H2, and H4 were supported, affirming that explicit CRM messages and perceived authenticity-trust significantly impacts favourable consumer behavioural outcomes. H3 was not supported, suggesting that CRM message format did not directly affect consumer behavioural outcomes when authenticity and trust were considered.

Overall, these findings underscore the crucial mediating role of authenticity and trust, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to existing literature, theory, and managerial implications.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the study's findings in relation to current literature, emphasising the responses of South African millennial consumers to CRM initiatives. Whereas descriptive and inferential results were reported in the preceding chapter, this section examines the findings' larger significance by placing them within the S-O-R framework and relating them to prior research and consumer behaviour theory.

The discussion is structured into three sections. Firstly, the descriptive analysis of shopping habits clarifies the approach of millennial consumers in this market towards prestige beauty purchases and the determinants that influence their decisions. Secondly, the construct-level descriptives illuminate consumer views of CRM messaging and its function in fostering perceived authenticity and trust, eventually resulting in favourable consumer behavioural outcomes. Thirdly, the results of the hypotheses testing are examined, facilitating an evaluation of the links posited in the conceptual framework and the implementation of the stimulus-organism-response model. These sections together address the study's research objectives by explaining the influence of cause related marketing formats on millennial consumers' perceptions and behaviours.

6.2 Discussion: Shopping habits of millennial prestige beauty consumers

6.2.1 Frequency of purchase

The findings indicated that the millennials in South Africa are engaged and regular consumers of prestige beauty products, with a notable percentage (60%) purchasing at least twice a month. This aligns with overarching industry trends that identify millennials as a catalyst for growth in both global and regional beauty markets (GlobeNewswire, 2024; NielsenIQ, 2025; Technavio, 2024). Their significance as a consumer base is especially significant in emerging economies, where prestige consumption is aspirational and intricately linked to identity formation (Kang et al., 2022; Saruchera & Mthombeni, 2023).

6.2.2 Retail channel preference

The inclination towards department stores and specialist beauty retailers underscores the persistent significance of physical retail, despite the increasing prominence of online channels. Prior South African studies have similarly recognised the persistent relevance of physical retail spaces in beauty and fashion consumption

(Stiehler & Jordaan, 2019), while other studies highlight the increasing significance of digital platforms as a supplement to in-store experiences (Bingwa et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2024). This contrast illustrates the hybridised consumer journey in South Africa, where trust, product testing, and social validation predominantly transpire in physical stores, while discovery and convenience are progressively realised online.

6.2.3 *Spending patterns and consumer identity*

The spending patterns seen in the sample align with previous research indicating that middle to upper-income millennials in South Africa engage prestige and masstige consumption to convey social status and personal identity (Appiah-Nimo et al., 2024; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). The expenditure balance across the conditions verifies that random assignment of explicit and implicit message groups did not skew consumer profiles, hence strengthening the design's integrity.

6.2.4 *Summary of millennial consumers' shopping habits*

The shopping habits collectively highlight the suitability of prestige beauty as a sector for examining CRM. The millennials in this market are both engaged and socially aware, rendering them a vital demographic for marketing that associates brand purchases with social causes (D'Auria et al., 2024; Mansoor & Paul, 2022).

The sample's features provide a suitable basis for analysing the reception of cause-related marketing messages, as discussed in the subsequent sections.

6.3 Discussion: Construct-level descriptives

The construct-level descriptives indicated that all mean scores exceeded the scale midpoint on a 7-point scale, implying a positive disposition towards CRM initiatives. This aligns with literature highlighting the millennials' responsiveness to purpose-driven campaigns and their propensity to support socially responsible brands (Bhatti et al., 2022; Lerro et al., 2019; Zaborek & Mabrouk, 2025).

6.3.1 *S-O-R framework in action*

The S-O-R model offered a valuable framework for analysing these results. Exposure to CRM messaging (stimulus) influenced internal assessments of authenticity and trust (organism), subsequently fostering positive consumer behavioural outcomes such as, repeat purchases, word-of-mouth, and loyalty (response) (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Jeong et al., 2022; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The superior outcomes in relation to perceptions indicated that, although consumers may not

consistently affirm a campaign's credibility, the existence of a cause association frequently suffices to elicit favourable behavioural tendencies.

6.3.2 Consumer behavioural outcomes as the strongest construct

Consumer behavioural outcomes appeared as the construct with the highest score. This substantiated conceptions of loyalty and advocacy that regard emotive responses as antecedents of repeat purchase and word-of-mouth (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Oliver, 1999). This is consistent with previous CRM studies indicating that campaigns can foster not only short-term purchase intentions but also enduring relational outcomes,, including advocacy and brand equity (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Khan & Fatma, 2023).

6.3.3 Explicit versus implicit messaging

The finding that explicit CRM messaging surpassed implicit messaging in all constructs is especially noteworthy. An international study emphasises the dangers of excessive communication, indicating that implicit signals are more efficacious in mitigating scepticism (Usrey et al., 2020). Conversely, these findings indicate that the clarity and directness fostered enhanced perceptions of authenticity and trust, and behavioural intent.

This divergence can be comprehended by contextual considerations. South African consumers frequently demonstrate suspicion regarding ambiguous or superficial corporate claims, especially in markets characterised by pronounced inequality and societal demands (Dunn & Falkof, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). In these contexts, clearly expressing the connection between the brand and the cause may diminish uncertainty and reassure consumers of the brand's authentic commitment. The focus on transparency in cause-related marketing is particularly significant in this market (Li et al., 2024; Walter et al., 2024).

6.3.4 Summary of construct-level descriptives

Overall, the construct-level descriptives indicated that South African millennials possess positive perceptions of cause-related marketing, since all constructs exceed the scale midpoint. The most significant results were noted for behavioural outcomes such as loyalty, repeat purchase, and word-of-mouth, indicating that CRM can affect not only attitudes but also tangible consumer actions. The S-O-R framework was evident in these findings, as exposure to messaging influenced the perceptions of authenticity and trust, subsequently resulting in supporting behaviours. Importantly,

explicit messaging consistently surpassed implicit messaging across all constructs. This indicated that South African consumers particularly prioritise clarity and transparency, and that explicit communication on brand-cause alliances may be more efficacious than implicit cues. These observations reinforced the assertion that authenticity and transparency are crucial to CRM success, while also emphasising that market context significantly influences consumer reactions to various execution techniques.

Following the establishment of these broad perceptions, the discussion now shifts to hypothesis discussion to investigate specific causal linkages within the conceptual framework.

6.4 Discussion: Hypothesis 1

6.4.1 Interpretation of results

The findings corroborated H1, demonstrating that the format of cause-related marketing messaging substantially affected consumer perceptions of authenticity and trust. This empirical proof matters because it statistically illustrates in the South African millennial market what previous studies have conceptually proposed, that is transparency of cause messaging fosters consumer trust (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Montecchi et al., 2024). The independent samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between explicit and implicit CRM message conditions ($t = -2.10$, $p = 0.037$), with respondents exposed to explicit messaging reporting greater authenticity and trust ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.69$) compared to those exposed to implicit messaging ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.89$). Despite the modest effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.26$), the relationship's direction aligned with both theoretical and empirical expectations: explicit, transparent messaging strengthens perceptions of credibility and sincerity.

The pattern demonstrated that message clarity and transparency, which are characteristics of explicit CRM, serve as trust-building techniques for millennial consumers. Conversely, implicit messaging, although potentially emotive, may be regarded as ambiguous or purpose-washed, particularly in markets where millennials are discerning when it comes to disingenuous brand activism. Thus, the results empirically demonstrated that explicit message framing can enhance authenticity of brand intent and bolster trustworthiness with the South African prestige beauty sector.

6.4.2 Theoretical alignment: S-O-R framework and relationship marketing

This result corroborates with the S-O-R framework that

underpinned the study. Within this framework, the CRM message format functions as the Stimulus (S); perceived authenticity and trust signify the Organism (O); and ensuing consumer behavioural outcomes such as word-of-mouth, repeat purchases and loyalty embody the Response (R).

The notable distinction between explicit and implicit message conditions indicates that explicit messaging serves as a more effective stimulus in provoking positive organismic states. This is consistent with the notion that transparent, cause-specific signals improve perceptions of integrity and emotional alignment (Jeong et al., 2022; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). As such, the empirical results confirm the initial phase of the causal chain in the study's conceptual framework: that message structure significantly influences the internal cognitive-affective organism, which is anticipated to predict subsequent behavioural intentions.

The results are also in line with the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which asserts that trust is a fundamental precursor to enduring consumer connections. In this context, explicit CRM acts as a precursor of benevolence, cultivating trust that maintains engagement. The small effect size observed (Cohen's $d = 0.26$) indicated that although the message format is a statistically significant determinant, authenticity and trust are also affected by larger criteria, such as brand-cause alignment, baseline reputation, and perceived altruism, all of which are detailed in the literature review,

6.4.3 Contextual insights: South African prestige beauty sector

In the South African prestige beauty sector, authenticity and trust are particularly tenuous due to significant consumer scepticism, inequality, and heightened scrutiny of corporate intentions. Millennials, who lead in prestige beauty consumption, expect brands to incorporate social values with authentic intent rather than superficial symbolism (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024). The results support this finding: explicit CRM messaging that directly associates purchase activities with concrete social outcomes is more impactful for this cohort, since it diminishes ambiguity and indicates accountability (Chaabouni et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2023).

In contrast, implicit CRM, which depends on imagery or symbolic cues, may underperform in this context. The finding was that explicit messages enhance perceptions of authenticity and trust a localised preference for transparency, aligning with research that underscores South Africa's demand for ethical clarity and fairness in pricing and cause-related claims (Dlamini & Mahowa, 2024; Terblanche et al., 2023).

Moreover, the modest yet significant effect size corresponded with the hybrid nature of South African millennial consumers who are aspirational yet value-conscious. While they interact with prestige beauty as a form of symbolic capital, they remain acutely aware of inequitable brand practices. The statistical pattern ($p = 0.037$; Cohen's $d = 0.26$) signified a substantial association, reflecting a consumer segment that prioritises authenticity and trust as a standard rather than an anomaly.

6.4.4 Managerial implications

The findings provided explicit direction for prestige beauty marketers in South Africa from a managerial standpoint. Prioritising explicit CRM message framing is essential for establishing or restoring trust with millennial consumers. This involves:

- Quantifying the causal impact, for example “R50 funds one mammogram” rather than employing ambiguous terminology such as “a portion of proceeds”.
- Emphasising the consumer's role in the impact, rather than the brand's altruism, to prevent perceptions of self-promotion (McManus et al., 2024).
- Ensuring clarity in pricing and contribution mechanisms to alleviate doubts over mark-ups or superficial gestures (Chaabouni et al., 2020).

This approach clearly aligns with the business objective outlined in Chapter 1: transforming CRM initiatives from mere symbolic gestures into quantifiable revenue drivers by enhancing the psychological connection of authenticity and trust. This necessitates that campaign spending focuses on explicit communication design and causes visibility rather than vague emotive narratives, especially inside the digital platforms frequented by millennials.

Furthermore, the minimal effect size underscores that the message format alone is inadequate without supplementary factors such as a credible brand-cause alignment (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006), coherence between statements and actions (Walter et al., 2024), and honest disclosure (Montecchi et al., 2024). Consequently, managers

ought to regard explicit messaging as an essential but not exclusive component within a trust-building framework.

6.4.5 Theoretical implications

This research theoretically enhances CRM and the S-O-R theory within the context of the South African prestige beauty sector. Although existing global literature recognises that explicit framing boosts trust (Fennell et al., 2020; Lee & Chu, 2023), limited research has empirically substantiated this in emerging markets characterised by entrenched inequality and cultural cynicism. This study demonstrated that message transparency serves as a vital catalyst for organismic authenticity and trust, especially amidst socio-economic limitations.

Secondly, it refines the S-O-R theory by measuring the relative potency of message clarity as a cognitive-affective stimulus. The modest but significant effect (Cohen's $d = 0.26$) suggests that stimulus strength (message explicitness) correlates with an incremental increase in organismic authenticity and trust, aligning with CRM's cumulative rather than instantaneous impact (Bhatti et al., 2022; Schamp et al., 2023). This indicates the necessity to enhance theoretical models of CRM by incorporating trust-threshold mechanisms, wherein consumers' previous scepticism influences the S-O-R route.

Finally, this study empirically established authenticity and trust as interconnected organismic constructs within the S-O-R framework, advancing CRM research beyond attitudinal metrics to encompass the psychological precursors of purchase intention and loyalty. In doing so, it supports the perspective that authenticity serves not only as a mediator but also as a diagnostic indicator of effective CRM, particularly in value-driven sectors such as prestige beauty (Khan & Fatma, 2023; Lopes et al., 2024).

6.4.6 Summary of the discussion of Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 asserted that explicit cause-related message framing significantly improves perceived authenticity and trust among South African millennials in the prestige beauty sector. The findings confirmed that clarity in CRM communication serves as a crucial catalyst within the S-O-R framework, provoking internal states of authenticity and trust that support consumer engagement and behavioural outcomes. The study enhanced both theory and practice by proving that trust is not a mere by-product of cause-related marketing, but rather it is a fundamental outcome,

connecting symbolic altruism with commercial growth. In summary, the results of Hypothesis 1 indicate that clearly articulating the CRM messaging enhances perceptions of brand sincerity and credibility, which is essential for the success of cause-related marketing in this context.

Having determined that message framing influences perceptions of authentic and trust, the discussion now explores H2, which examines whether these perceptions of authenticity and trust subsequently drive consumer behavioural outcomes.

6.5 Discussion: Hypothesis 2

6.5.1 Interpretation of results

Hypothesis 2 posited that elevated levels of perceived authenticity and trust would result in enhanced positive consumer behavioural outcomes. The findings offer compelling empirical evidence in favour of H2, demonstrating that millennial consumer behavioural outcomes in the South African prestige beauty sector are highly influenced by perceived authenticity and trust.

A strong regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.501$, $p < 0.001$) and a high, positive correlation ($r = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a strong association) showed that trust and authenticity are strong predictors of behaviours like loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repeat purchases. An R^2 of 0.527 signified that more than half of the variance consumer behavioural outcomes was accounted for by perceived authenticity and trust, demonstrating a significant effect.

Practically speaking, the millennial consumers are more inclined to repurchase a brand, publicly advocate for it, and develop long-lasting relationships with it if they believe it to be authentic and trustworthy. This result substantiated the assertion made in Chapter 2 that authenticity and trust are fundamental organismic states crucial for converting marketing stimuli into quantifiable behavioural outcomes within the S-O-R framework. This finding is important as it substantiates the second connection in the conceptual framework, that is millennials perceptions (organism) influence their external behaviours (response). In essence, finding the brand authentic and trustworthy in its cause-related initiatives results in tangible loyalty and advocacy, which is the ultimate objective of brands.

6.5.2 Theoretical alignment: S-O-R framework and relationship marketing

In the S-O-R framework, the CRM messaging format defined in H1 serves as the stimulus (S); perceived authenticity and trust form the organism (O); and consumer

behavioural outcomes such as loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth constitute the response (R) (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

The organism to response pathway is validated by the strength of relationship seen here. When millennials regard a brand's cause-related initiatives as genuine and credible, they undergo favourable emotional and cognitive states that result in supporting behaviours. The result aligned with the commitment-trust theory in relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which asserts that trust is a fundamental precursor to lasting relationships.

The regression analysis ($\beta = 0.501$) confirmed that trust operates as both an emotional and a behavioural catalyst, converting internal assessments into external loyalty behaviours. Likewise, authenticity enhances the relationship bond by affirming brand sincerity and purpose, consistent with empirical findings of Khan and Fatma (2023) and Lopes et al. (2024), which illustrate that genuine, altruistic brand interaction fosters advocacy and loyalty.

In the context of the prestige beauty sector, where brand symbolism and perceived sincerity are essential for value creation, authenticity and trust serve as the psychological mechanisms that transform ethical communication into concrete results.

6.5.3 Contextual insights: South African prestige beauty sector

South African millennials navigate a unique consumer environment marked by economic inequality, cultural diversity, and profound social consciousness. As indicated in Chapter 2, this generational cohort requires brands that engage in credible and transparent altruism. The robust correlation ($r = 0.716$) signified more than just statistical association; it embodied a socio-cultural expectation that authenticity and trust are foundational to brand loyalty.

Research within the reference base highlights this dynamic. Bevan-Dye and Synodinos (2025) as well as Lupindo et al. (2024) emphasise that South African millennials prioritise authenticity, viewing ethical alignment as essential for engagement. Dlamini and Mahowa (2024) demonstrate that open and trustworthy communication increases purchase intention in green cosmetics, reflecting the rising ethical awareness within the prestige beauty sector.

This context illustrates the substantial variance explained ($R^2 = 0.527$). In a context where purpose-washing has engendered scepticism (Antonio et al., 2022; Walter et

al., 2024), authenticity serves as a criterion for trust, and trust acts as the conduit for repeat purchases and advocacy. Millennials chose brands that substantiate their commitments through tangible social initiatives, hence reinforcing relational loyalty.

Consequently, H2 signified not merely statistical robustness but also cultural resonance. Authenticity and trust are essential prerequisites in South Africa's prestige beauty sector; they are imperative for establishing relationships with millennial consumers.

6.5.4 Managerial implications

The managerial implications of H2 were evident and implementable.

- **Authenticity as a strategic asset:** Prestige beauty managers must acknowledge authenticity as a strategic resource. Alignment across brand missions, cause alliances, and consumer communication are essential. Clear impact reporting and evident consistency between brand actions and social commitments cultivate enduring loyalty (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Montecchi et al., 2024).
- **Trust as a behavioural multiplier:** The robust $\beta = 0.501$ signified that trust enhances behavioural outcomes. Campaigns should prioritise credibility indicators such as verifiable donations, traceable impact statements, and authentic storytelling to foster the trust essential for repeat purchases and advocacy.
- **Millennial relationship building:** Given that loyalty in this demographic is value-driven rather than price-driven, managers should integrate social integrity into the brand's core identity rather than relying on episodic campaigns. Integrated CRM communication which encompasses digital, influencer, and experiential touchpoints must consistently reinforce the authenticity of cues identified in H1.
- **Long-term revenue implications:** The finding that authenticity and trust account for more than 50% of behavioural variances validates their monetisable significance. Establishing these constructs is not solely about reputation; it is intrinsically connected to repeat purchases, consumer lifetime value, aligning symbolic purpose with financial purpose, as articulated in Chapter 1.

6.5.5 Theoretical implications

This hypothesis expands upon established theory in several ways:

- **Empirical validation of the organism-response link:** Although a significant portion of CRM literature emphasises message framing (stimulus), this study quantitatively assessed the organism to response relationship within the S-O-R framework. Authenticity and trust collectively constituted more than 50% of the behavioural variance, affirming their role as fundamental mediating drivers of engagement.
- **Integration of relationship marketing and S-O-R:** The study enhanced the comprehension of consumer response by integrating the affective S-O-R and relational (commitment-trust) perspectives, positing that trust functions not only as an emotional state but also as a structural conduit for enduring relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).
- **Contextual expansion to emerging markets:** Empirical CRM research is predominantly centred on Western contexts. This research illustrated that in emerging economies, authenticity and trust have enhanced behavioural influence as consumers rigorously evaluate brand intentions. The robustness of these associations among South African millennials validates contextual theories of ethical consumerism in the setting of inequality (Antonio et al., 2022; Lupindo et al., 2024).
- **Validation of authenticity and trust as a mediating mechanism:** The results empirically substantiated authenticity as the psychological conduit through which explicit cause messaging (H1 stimulus) converts into loyalty (H2 response), so fulfilling the S-O-R framework.

6.5.6 Summary of the discussion of Hypothesis 2

H2 established that perceived authenticity and trust are essential psychological mechanisms that convert CRM communication into concrete consumer behaviour. The findings confirmed the organism to response connection of the S-O-R framework, as authenticity and trust collectively accounted for over 50% of the behavioural variance.

In South Africa's prestige beauty sector where millennials assess brands through ethical and relational perspectives, the authenticity-trust duality serves as both a stimulant and a guide by steering consumers from administration to advocacy. This finding reinforced the study's theoretical framework and connects ethical brand purpose with quantifiable loyalty and revenue growth.

Considering the critical importance of authenticity and trust, a pertinent question is

whether the format of message alone influences consumer behavioural outcomes in their absence, which is the emphasis of H3.

6.6 Discussion: Hypothesis 3

6.6.1 Interpretation of results

The findings of H3 indicated that the CRM message format (explicit versus implicit) does not have a statistically significant direct effect on consumer behavioural outcomes when trust and authenticity are incorporated into the model ($\beta = 0.038$). This result suggests that, whereas message format initially seemed impactful in H1, its effects diminishes upon the introduction of mediating elements.

The impact of message framing on loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth is entirely mediated by the judgements of authenticity and trust. The path coefficients indicated that the message alone is inadequate to cause behavioural changes unless it initially cultivates favourable internal perceptions. This result empirically confirmed the predicted indirect-only in the conceptual framework: the communicative stimulus must function through psychological appraisal to elicit a behavioural response.

6.6.2 Theoretical alignment: S-O-R mechanism

In the S-O-R framework (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), the stimulus (CRM message format) initiates internal evaluation processes (organism: authenticity and trust) and that results in observable consumer behaviours (response: royalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth).

The insignificance of the direct path substantiates the premise that consumer conduct in cause-related marketing situations is not merely reactive to message exposure but are influenced by internal cognitive and emotive processes.

This finding is consistent with research demonstrating that, rather than directly persuading behaviour, message framing affects it indirectly through the establishment of authenticity and trust. Kim et al. (2023), for example, discovered that message clarity improves perceptions of credibility, which in turn predicts behavioural intention. According to Lopes et al. (2024) as well as Khan and Fatma (2023), authenticity serve as a psychological bridge that connects advocacy and loyalty to brand-related communication. These results are thus logically supported by the weakening of the direct path in the SEM model. The organism stage is essential for converting message clarity into behavioural outcomes.

6.6.3 Contextual insights: South African prestige beauty sector

In the South African prestige beauty sector, the millennials assess marketing communication through a lens of authenticity influenced by socio-economic disparities, ethical consciousness, and scepticism towards brand motives. The lack of direct correlation between CRM messaging and consumer behavioural outcomes underscores the fact that for these consumers, a brand's message format cannot elicit action unless it conveys authentic integrity.

Bevan-Dye and Synodinos (2025); as well as Lupindo et al. (2024) illustrate that South African millennials value brands that exhibit ethical consistency and transparency above those that prioritise stylistic communication. Similarly, Antonio et al. (2022) caution that purpose-washing undermines behavioural engagement, despite the messaging's polished appearance. In this context, message explicitness serves as a credibility indicator, but it only influences behavioural outcomes when it is viewed as sincere and trustworthy.

The finding also situates the outcomes of H1 and H2. Although explicit CRM messaging (stimulus) enhanced perceptions of authenticity and trust (organism), consumer behavioural outcomes (response) are wholly contingent upon those beliefs. This interdependence demonstrates the complexity of millennial consumers in the prestige beauty sector; as they react not to the nature of social claims but to the credibility of those claims in relation to actual brand activity.

6.6.4 Managerial implications

- **Message design by itself is inadequate:** The statistical insignificance of the direct path ($\beta = 0.038$) cautions marketers against depending solely on message clarity to loyalty or advocacy. Explicit framing must be combined with verifiable authenticity, such as the transparent disclosure of donations or collaborations, to establish trust pathways (Montecchi et al., 2024).
- **Prioritise perceptual mediators:** Campaign metrics must assess perceived authenticity and trust, rather than solely message recall. These are the psychological mechanisms that transform communication into enduring conduct (Khan & Fatma, 2023).
- **Validate purpose with evidence:** In markets that prioritise ethical integrity, such as South Africa, demonstrable proof-points impact assessments' visibility of local beneficiaries, or authentic influencer endorsements are

crucial for converting message exposure into repeat purchases, loyalty, and advocacy.

- **Incorporate CRM into the brand relationship strategy:** The findings underscored that cause-related marketing should be integrated into the brand's long-term relational framework rather than treated as a supplementary effort. Consistent authenticity cultivates a reservoir of trust that facilitates behavioural outcomes over time (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

6.6.5 Theoretical implications

This result enhanced both CRM and the S-O-R theory in three distinct manners:

- **Empirical validation of complete mediation.** It illustrated that the stimulus (CRM message format) affects the response (consumer behavioural outcomes) solely through an organismic mediator (authenticity and trust). This substantiates the indirect-only effect posited by Kline (2018) and corroborates the perspective that consumer behaviour in ethical marketing is subject to cognitive filtration.
- **Enhancement of the S-O-R model for ethical consumption.** The lack of a sizeable direct path indicates that in value-laden categories such as prestige beauty, the emotional-cognitive organism stage possesses greater explanatory significance than the stimulus itself. This expands traditional S-O-R applications (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982) into a framework of socially responsible consumerism.
- **Contextual extension to emerging markets.** The study presented one of the few SEM-based examples in an emerging market context, indicating that message design lacking authenticity and trust result in minimal behavioural outcomes. This enhances the complexity of cross-cultural CRM literature (Antonio et al., 2022; Bhatti et al., 2022), demonstrating that in markets characterised by trust deficiencies, perceived authenticity and trust serve as the sole effective behavioural outcomes catalyst.

6.6.6 Summary of discussion of Hypothesis 3

H3 indicated that the format of CRM messages alone does not directly influence consumer behavioural outcomes. Its impact is manifested indirectly via authenticity and trust, validating the S-O-R mediation framework posited in the conceptual model.

Believability and ethical alignment, rather than messaging style, are what drive behavioural loyalty and advocacy among South African millennials in the prestige

beauty industry. The result connects theory and practice. Successful cause-related marketing is a process of trust-building rather than communication, with authenticity and trust serving as a crucial bridge between brand messaging and consumer behavioural outcomes.

After observing a pattern that only showed indirect relationships, H4 formally examined the mediating role of authenticity and trust.

6.7 Discussion: Hypothesis 4

6.7.1 Interpretation of results

The findings of H4 validated a complete mediating effect of authenticity and trust on the relationship between the CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes.

The 'a' path ($\beta = 0.966$) and the 'b' path ($\beta = 0.726$) exhibited robust and statistical significance, whereas the direct path ($\beta = 0.038$) diminished in strength and significance with introduction of the mediator. The indirect effect ($a \times c = 0.497$) constituted a dominant portion of the total effect ($\beta = 0.722$), signifying that almost all the impact of the CRM message format on consumer behavioural outcomes is mediated by authenticity and trust.

These results build upon the findings of H1 - H3 where H1 demonstrated that explicit CRM messages enhance authenticity and trust, H2 verified that this variable predicted consumer behavioural outcomes, and H4 consolidated them into a unified causal chain. The evidence indicated that the clarity of CRM messages alone does not foster loyalty, advocacy or repeat purchases; it must first cultivate authentic and trustworthy perceptions to elicit behavioural responses.

6.7.2 Theoretical alignment: S-O-R framework and relationship marketing

The results offer unequivocal empirical validation for the S-O-R framework (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within this framework:

- The stimulus, which is the CRM message format, elicits internal evaluative reactions.
- The organism, which is authenticity and trust, encapsulates the consumer's psychological perception.
- The response, which is the consumer behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchase, loyalty and word-of-mouth emerge once such internal perceptions are formed.

The fully mediated pattern confirms the theory's premise that consumer behaviour in socially anchored marketing is influenced by perceptions of authenticity and trust rather than direct stimuli. This aligns with the findings of Khan and Fatma (2023); as well as Lopes et al. (2024), which indicate that authenticity and trust function as critical affective and cognitive mechanisms connecting CRM messaging to advocacy and purchase intention. Similarly, Bhatti et al. (2022) emphasise that within CRM literature, trust and authenticity consistently serve as the most significant mediator between campaign stimuli and consumer behavioural outcomes.

The results also correspond with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory, which posits that trust is the cornerstone of lasting consumer relationships. In this setting, authenticity fosters trust (the organismic state), which then stipulates behavioural loyalty (the reaction). The minimal direct effect path ($\beta = 0.038$) experimentally confirms that authenticity and trust are not a mere incidental variable but the fundamental transfer mechanism by which CRM messaging fosters consumer commitment.

6.7.3 Contextual insights: South African prestige beauty sector and millennials

In the South African prestige beauty sector, millennial consumers demonstrate increased reservations regarding brand ethics and expect that purpose-driven brands will operate transparently.

The robust 'a' path (CRM message to authenticity and trust) illustrates that explicit CRM messaging effectively mitigates scepticism, appealing to consumers who seek evidence of sincerity (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024). The 'b' path (authenticity and trust to consumer behavioural outcomes) corroborates previous research by Dlamini and Mahowa (2024) indicating that perceived ethical integrity substantially impacts purchasing and loyalty decisions within the local cosmetics market.

These consumers perceive CRM messaging not literally, but through a credibility filter established by previous brand conduct. Consequently, the brands that articulate causes effectively yet neglect to exhibit corresponding actions jeopardise the alignment between the stimulus and the organism stage, a phenomenon warned against by Antonio et al. (2022) in their examination of purpose-washing.

In this case, the mediation effect signifies a culturally rooted behavioural process where millennials will engage only when their beliefs and emotions are congruent with ethical consistency.

6.7.4 Managerial implications

The results present multiple managerial implications that explain the interaction between a CRM message format and authenticity as well as trust in shaping consumer behaviour.

- **Craft CRM campaigns focusing on authenticity and trust rather than merely aesthetics:** The comprehensive mediation outcome indicates that messaging design is subordinate to perceived sincerity. Campaigns must emphasise on transparency of impact, credible alignment with the cause, and the unequivocal evidence of benefit (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Montecchi et al., 2024).
- **Assess perceptual outcomes as primary indicators:** Given that authenticity and trust influence consumer behaviour, managers ought to incorporate them into KPI dashboards, employing sentiment analysis or consumer-trust indices to assess CRM efficacy.
- **Maintaining enduring trust capital:** Trust necessitates continual reinforcement. Integrating regular cause communication across several touch points such as influencer content, digital storytelling, and local community engagement will sustain the organismic state that foster repeat purchases and advocacy (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).
- **Prevent purpose-washing:** The mediation pattern highlights that a loss of credibility disrupts the causal chain. Brands should refrain from exaggerating claims or engaging in symbolic philanthropy, as demonstrated by Antonio et al. (2022); because if authenticity is doubted, message exposure no longer affects behaviour.

6.7.5 Theoretical implications

This result enhances both CRM and consumer psychology theory in multiple significant ways:

- **Empirical validation of complete mediation in S-O-R:** The study empirically verified total mediation by demonstrating that the direct path becomes insignificant ($\beta = 0.038$) upon the inclusion of authenticity and

trust, revealing that CRM message stimuli must navigate internal evaluative states to affect behaviour (Kline, 2018).

- **Incorporation of ethical and relational frameworks:** The mediation outcome connects S-O-R and relationship marketing by demonstrating that authenticity and trust function as both an affective mediator and a relational adhesive, linking message perception to behavioural loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).
- **Contextual refinement for developing markets:** The significant mediating effect observed in a South African millennial cohort enriches CRM theory cross-culturally, demonstrating that in markets characterised by diminished institutional trust, perceived brand authenticity and trust is a crucial precursor of consumer behavioural outcomes (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Lupindo et al., 2024).
- **Contribution to the prestige beauty scholarly:** The results confirmed that prestige beauty consumers pursue both symbolic value and ethical assurance. The mediation chain (CRM message to authenticity and trust to consumer behavioural outcomes) establishes a quantifiable psychological connection between purpose and sustained revenue growth.

6.7.6 Summary of discussion of Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 posited that authenticity and trust mediates the effect of CRM message format on consumer behavioural outcomes. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.497$) and the minimal direct path ($\beta = 0.038$) indicated that behavioural change among South African millennials occurs solely upon internal confirmation of sincerity and integrity.

The result concluded the S-O-R framework of this study, which posits that the stimulus (CRM message format) affects the organism (authenticity and trust), which then prompts the response (consumer behavioural outcomes, such as loyalty, repeat purchases, and word-of-mouth). In the realm of prestige beauty, cause-related marketing thrives not on innovative execution but on the cultivation of earned conviction, that is the transformation of transparent purpose into authenticity and trust-driven consumer behavioural outcomes.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has integrated the empirical findings of the study with established theory and literature. It determined that South African millennial consumers have a strong

preference to explicit and transparent cause-related marketing messages, which substantially enhance their perceptions of brand authenticity and trust (addressing H1). Consequently, perceptions of authenticity and trust emerged as significant catalysts for consumer loyalty, advocacy, and repeat purchase behaviours (addressing H2). Notably, the format of CRM messages did not directly influence consumer behavioural outcomes when authenticity and trust were accounted for, hence confirming complete mediation (H3 and H4) and validating the study's S-O-R based conceptual model.

These findings corroborated fundamental theories that authentic and trustworthy brand engagements foster enduring consumer relationships, while also applying them to the context of an emerging market and the prestige beauty sector. In a market marked by consumer scepticism, the results indicated that millennials will only demonstrate loyalty to a brand when they perceive its sincere commitment to a cause.

In summary, the study addressed the primary research question posed in Chapter 1 by illustrating that explicit and implicit cause-related marketing messages influence millennials' perceptions of authenticity and trust, which then impact consumer behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchases, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth. The results indicated that message transparency and perceived authenticity and trust are essential for converting cause-related marketing efforts into enduring consumer relationships and, ultimately, markers of long-term revenue growth. The discussion has underscored how these findings both validate and refine existing literature.

The next chapter concludes the research by evaluating the study's contributions, offering practical recommendations, and identifying avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by putting together the key results, the theoretical and practical implications, the limitations, and the suggestions for future research. The study examined the impact of a cause-related marketing message format on perceptions of authenticity and trust, thus influencing the consumer behavioural outcomes of millennial consumers in South Africa's prestige beauty sector. Utilising the S-O-R framework (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), the format of CRM messaging was defined as the stimulus, authenticity and trust as organism, and consumer behavioural outcomes such as repeat purchases, loyalty and positive word-of-mouth as the response.

This study aimed to ascertain the impact of explicit and implicit CRM message formats on perceived authenticity and trust among South African millennials, as well as the influence of these perceptions on consumer behavioural outcomes. The findings validated that message transparency substantially enhances authenticity and trust, which subsequently completely mediates the relationship between message format and consumer behavioural outcomes.

This chapter starts with a summary of the empirical results from the quantitative analysis, subsequently presenting the revised conceptual model. The discussion encompasses theoretical and managerial implications, acknowledging the study's limits, and delineating future research opportunities. It then concludes with an integrated summary that connects the study's findings to sustainable revenue growth in the prestige beauty sector.

7.2 Research findings

Any research evaluating consumer behavioural outcomes to marketing stimuli must commence with an understanding of cognitive and affective factors that influence decision-making. This study, framed within the S-O-R framework, identified three principal determinants of behavioural outcomes in the realm of cause-related marketing within South Africa's prestige beauty sector. Firstly, CRM message transparency, secondly, authenticity and trust as a relational mediator, and lastly, the lack of direct persuasion effects in the absence of credible mediation.

These findings, based on statistical evidence and applicable theory, clarified the psychological mechanism by which CRM messaging converts brand purpose into consumer action.

7.2.1 Determinant 1: Message transparency and explicit communication

In accordance with the S-O-R framework, the primary driver resides in the stimulus, that is the structure and clarity of the CRM message format. The quantitative findings indicated a statistically significant disparity in perceived authenticity and trust across explicit and implicit message conditions ($t = -2.10$, $p = 0.037$, Cohen's $d = 0.26$). The respondents subjected to explicit messaging evaluated brands as more sincere, credible and socially responsible ($M = 4.57$) in contrast to those exposed to implicit messaging ($M = 4.10$).

These findings affirmed that transparency and trust constitute the cornerstone of credibility. When brands explicitly convey specifics of their social contributions (R100 funds a breast cancer screening) instead of depending on symbolic or aesthetic messages, the consumers regard the campaign advert legitimately and congruently with sincere intent. This observation corroborates current literature on message specificity and its influence on believability (Kim & Kim, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), while affirming that explicit messaging diminishes social distance between the consumer and the brand (Lee & Chu, 2023).

Moreover, the modest yet significant effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.26$) indicates that even slight enhancements in message clarity produce noticeable improvements in authenticity and trust. Transparency and trust serve as a rational mediator, grounding the initial consumer evaluation that dictates the subsequent emotional engagement and behavioural commitment.

7.2.2 Determinant 2: Authenticity and trust as relational mediator

The second determinant, the organism in the S-O-R framework, exists within the internal psychological states of authenticity and trust. The findings indicated a robust, positive, and statistically significant correlation between this construct and consumer behavioural outcomes ($r = 0.716$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.501$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 52.7% of the variation ($R^2 = 0.527$), highlighting the significance of these relational characteristics in influencing consumer behaviour.

Authenticity and trust operated not just as perception but also as behavioural triggers, converting message exposure into loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repeat

purchases. This discovery corroborates Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) claim that trust acts as a behavioural multiplier, and Lerro et al.'s (2019) findings that authenticity in cause-related marketing settings fosters loyalty via perceived moral congruence. In the prestige beauty sector, where identity and desire are interconnected, authenticity and trust serve as both a moral and emotional currency.

Furthermore, the robustness of this link indicates that South African millennial consumers do not merely react to philanthropic initiatives; as they assess the authenticity and consistency of brand dedication. Consistent authenticity indicators, such as, transparent donations, coherent narratives, and validated results, cultivate cumulative trust, reinforcing purchase intent.

Consequently, authenticity and trust serve as the psychological mechanisms that connect purpose and profit, transforming prosocial signals into recurring economic activity.

7.2.3 Determinant 3: Lack of direct effect without credibility

The third determinant challenged conventional marketing beliefs regarding direct effect persuasion. When authenticity and trust were accounted for in the structural equation model,

the direct relationship between CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes became statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.038$), while being positive in simple regression ($\beta = 0.686$).

The weakening signified that mere exposure to a message does not compel action. Its influence is wholly contingent upon the existence of authenticity and trust. The consumer's behavioural response is not a linear reaction to message content but rather a condition response influenced by credibility.

This discovery corresponds with the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and refutes the notion that the awareness or aesthetic appeal directly translates to consumer behaviour. For prestige beauty brands, it indicates that cause messaging lacking authentic trust-building mechanisms is ineffective.

7.2.4 Full mediation and emotional-cognitive chain

The SEM mediation analysis integrated the aforementioned results into a cohesive causal chain.

- Path a (stimulus to organism): $\beta = 0.966$;
- Path b (organism to response): $\beta = 0.726$;
- Indirect effect (a x b) = 0.497;
- Path c (direct effect) = 0.038;
- Total effect = 0.722

These results validated full mediation, indicating that the entire behavioural impact of a CRM message format functions through authenticity and trust. The model empirically validated the S-O-R process, that is the stimulus (CRM message format) elicits an organismic state (authenticity and trust), which subsequently results in consumer behavioural outcomes such as positive word-of-mouth, loyalty, and repeat purchase.

The extent of the mediation highlights the robustness of the emotional-cognitive connection. The organism is not simply a passive processing stage; it is the spot where persuasion evolves into commitment. Authenticity and trust provide neutral and emotional foundation of consumer decision-making in prosocial branding scenarios.

7.2.5 Integrative summary: The CRM-behaviour continuum

Integrating these outcomes, the findings demonstrated a cohesive CRM-behaviour continuum:

Table 7.1: CRM-behaviour continuum

CRM-Behaviour Continuum		
Explicit CRM message	→ Authenticity and trust	→ Consumer behavioural outcomes

This continuum illustrates that millennial consumers in South Africa perceive cause-related messaging via both rational and emotional lenses. Logically, they value transparency and demonstrable impact; emotionally, they react to authenticity and ethical congruence. Consumer behavioural outcomes occur solely when both dimensions are fulfilled.

This cohesive pattern offers robust empirical validation for the S-O-R framework, confirming that external marketing stimuli (CRM) provoke behavioural reactions only when mediated by internal psychological states. This also corresponds with current CRM literature (Antonio et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024; Lopes et al., 2024) that recognises authenticity and trust as the foundations of cause credibility.

7.2.6 Contribution to the body of knowledge

The results enhance existing literature in three significant aspects:

Theoretical contribution

The results empirically substantiate the mediation mechanism posited in the S-O-R framework, illustrating that emotional and cognitive trust processes completely convey the influence of message format on consumer behavioural outcomes, thereby empirically substantiating the complete mediation chain within this context.

Although previous studies have identified comparable mediation patterns, this study offers more quantitative evidence specific to the prestige beauty sector, demonstrating that authenticity and trust serves as both a cognitive and emotional link between brand cause-related marketing and advocacy, loyalty, and repeat purchase behaviours.

Methodological contribution

This study employed structural equation modelling to differentiate between direct and indirect pathways, providing quantitative validation of relational mediation on CRM and building upon previous quantitative findings,

Practical contribution

The findings revealed practical psychological levers, that is authenticity and trust, that may be implemented in communication and KPI development for prestige beauty brands.

Collectively, these results indicated that the transition from corporate purpose to consumer purchase is not automatic but dependent on perceived integrity. Brands must first establish credibility before anticipating behavioural outcomes.

7.3 Refined conceptual framework

Figure 7.1 illustrates the refined conceptual framework demonstrating complete mediation among CRM message format, authenticity and trust, as well as consumer behavioural outcomes.

This refined conceptual framework demonstrated that millennial consumers in South Africa perceive brand purpose not through the aesthetics of messaging but through indications of authenticity and trust. Clear and open communication (stimulus) engenders notions of authenticity and trust (organism), which in turn elicit positive

consumer behavioural outcomes (response). The pattern supports both the S-O-R framework (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and the organism to response correlation is supported by the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), demonstrating how trust cultivates commitment and influences behavioural outcomes.

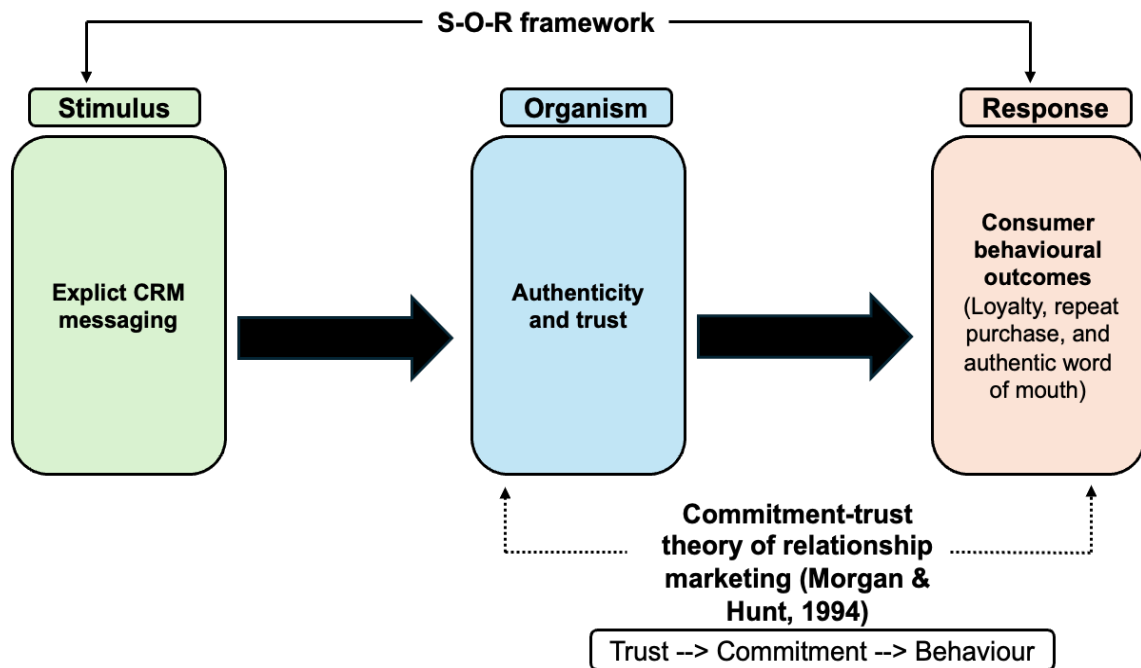


Figure 7.1: Refined conceptual framework

Source: Researcher's own, based on S-O-R model by Mehrabian & Russell, 1974 and Commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing by Morgan & Hunt, 1994

7.4 Recommendations for business

The recommendations are structured according to the three sequential stages of the abovementioned conceptual framework, stimulus, organism, and response to synchronise management actions with the psychological and behavioural mechanism uncovered in the study. Each phase delineates specific treatments aimed at enhancing message clarity (stimulus), bolstering authenticity and trust (organism), and reinforcing favourable consumer behavioural outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, and repeat purchases (response). This structure guarantees that the suggested actions are theoretically substantiated, empirically validated, and practically implementable within the context of prestige beauty brands.

7.4.1 Strategic messaging actions: Activating the "stimulus"

The initial phase of the structure emphasises message clarity as the primary catalyst for consumer evaluation. Clear CRM messaging serves as a catalyst that influences

perceptions of authenticity and transparency. Consequently, it is advisable for prestige beauty brands to formalise evidence-based message design, underpinned by the interlinked actions shown in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Strategic messaging actions

Strategic Focus	Actionable Step	KPI	Measurement	Theoretical Anchor
a) Use clear, goal-oriented message framing.	Brands should use measurable and verifiable claims to convey the social impact of every purchase (e.g., “R100 funds one breast cancer screening”). This strategy activates authenticity by lowering consumer suspicion.	x % of CRM assets to include a statement that is either outcome-based or numerical.	Brand tracking every three months to observe a + x points shift in the perceived authenticity score.	The S–O–R Framework posits that message clarity serves as the stimulus that activates perceptions of sincerity and authenticity.
b) Incorporate transparency throughout all touchpoints.	Information linked to the cause must be uniform across packaging, in-store materials, digital platforms, and influencer content. Uniformity enhances cognitive trust and mitigates the fragmentation of communication trustworthiness.	Consistency rating exceeding x % across evaluated brand channels.	Annual cross-channel communication assessment verified by an impartial third party.	S–O–R Framework: Consistency bolsters trust by preserving stimulus integrity across several channels.
c) Establish impact disclosure dashboards.	It is advisable for each CRM effort to publish quarterly outcome summaries, validated by partners or NGOs. Transparency not only demonstrates impact but also fosters long-term trust development.	Publication compliance rate = x %.	Enhancement of the brand trust index by at least x each quarter.	The commitment–trust theory posits that transparent disclosure fosters relationship trust and commitment.
d) Collaborate with consumers in the selection of causes to enhance perceived alignment and authenticity.	Prestige beauty firms are advised to adopt a Co-creation cause framework, allowing consumers to nominate, vote for, or promote thematic causes for each campaign cycle. This democratic method matches the Stimulus (cause message) with consumer values, enhancing cause–brand congruence and perceived authenticity.	Attain a minimum x point enhancement in perceived authenticity score among CRM-aware consumers subsequent to co-created campaigns	Quarterly post-campaign surveys assessing trust and authenticity metrics among participants versus non-participants	The commitment–trust theory , underpinned by the S–O–R framework , posits that co-creation enhances relational commitment and fortifies the authenticity–trust connection.

These actions, collectively transform stimulus clarity into psychological credibility, ensuring that messaging functions as a credible behavioural primer rather than a mere symbolic gesture.

7.4.2 Trust building mechanisms: Strengthening the “organism”

Authenticity and trust were established as the primary mediator conveying the impact of message format on consumer behavioural outcomes. Brands should therefore use these notions presented in Table 7.3 as strategic relational capital instead of mere unclear perceptions.

Table 7.3: Authenticity and trust building mechanisms

Strategic Focus	Actionable Step	KPI	Measurement	Theoretical Anchor
a) Establish authenticity via partner verification.	All causes must be subjected to thorough due diligence screening for compatibility and authenticity. Brand-cause alignment must be explicitly articulated within corporate governance charters to safeguard perceived authenticity.	x % of active partners have been validated and recorded in a due diligence register.	Annual partner-fit review; cause-brand congruence score target of x .	S–O–R Framework: Genuine narratives elicit emotional and cognitive trust reactions.
b) Integrate trust into employee behaviour and brand culture.	The legitimacy of a brand is extended by frontline staff and beauty consultants. Organisational authenticity can be translated into the consumer experience through training modules on ethical disclosure and cause storytelling.	x % of employees complete their training; post-training trust increases by at least x %.	Quarterly consumer trust surveys conducted before and after training to evaluate how customers who are serviced by trained staff perceive brand trust.	The commitment–trust theory posits that employee behaviour enhances relationship trust via credible communication that aligns with shared ideals.
c) Create a dashboard for authenticity and trust.	The finance, insights, and marketing departments must interact to monitor monthly fluctuations in authenticity, trust, and behavioural indicators like as loyalty, repeat purchases, and Net Promoter Score (NPS).	Maintain a positive correlation $> x$ between trust index and repeat-purchase rate.	The brand-finance committee conducts a monthly evaluation of the dashboard.	The commitment–trust theory posits that transparent disclosure fosters relationship trust and commitment.
d) Preserve relational continuity by adhering to a consistent communications schedule.	Intermittent silence erodes trust. Brands ought to implement quarterly CRM updates irrespective of marketing cycles to ensure continuity.	Four validated updates annually; variation in authenticity perception $< x$ between quarters.	Monitor quarterly brand-tracking data to assess stability in perceived authenticity and trust scores; deviations beyond x will need message evaluation and remedial measures.	The commitment–trust theory , underpinned by the S–O–R framework , posits that consistent involvement fosters trust and strengthens enduring relational commitment.
e) Close the feedback loop through transparent impact reporting.	A prevalent consumer frustration highlighted in post-campaign feedback is the ambiguity around the utilisation of donations and the concrete results attained. Brands are advised to establish an Impact Feedback framework that transparently outlines the entire donation process, encompassing collection, allocation, and quantifiable beneficiary results.	Complete publishing of donor allocation data within x days following the conclusion of each campaign.	Enhancement of the trust index by at least x points among consumers indicating “clear impact feedback” in post-campaign surveys.	S–O–R Framework: Feedback engagement amplifies perceived authenticity via reciprocal communication.

Through these actions, the organism stage of the model transforms into a systematically managed system rather than a mere incidental perception. Enduring authenticity and trust constitute the emotional foundation that influences all subsequent behavioural outcomes.

7.4.3 Behavioural reinforcement strategies: Sustaining the “response”

The response element of the framework encapsulates the conversion of credibility into consumer behavioural outcomes. After establishing authenticity and trust, brands must sustain momentum through experiential reinforcement that rewards and re-legitimises consumer engagement. Table 7.4 outlines these actions.

Table 7.4: Behavioural reinforcement strategies

Strategic Focus	Actionable Step	KPI	Measurement	Theoretical Anchor
a) Establish loyalty programs that acknowledge social engagement.	It is advisable to include CRM contributions into loyalty-point systems (e.g., double points for purchases tied to causes). The acknowledgement of ethical consumption converts trust into recurring purchases.	x % increase in repeat purchase rate among CRM SKU purchasers during two quarters.	Analyse quarterly loyalty program data to evaluate repeat purchase rates between CRM-linked and non-CRM SKUs, separating increase resulting from cause participation.	The commitment-trust theory , underpinned by the S-O-R framework , posits that trust developed through CRM engagement fosters relational commitment, manifested as recurrent purchasing behaviour.
b) Promote advocacy with transparent storytelling.	Consumers who believe a brand is legitimate frequently end up endorsing it. Social media material that tells a story and features local partners or verified beneficiaries can turn emotional fulfilment into positive word-of-mouth.	Positive sentiment of x %; share rate per CRM post increase by x % year over year.	Perform quarterly social listening and engagement analytics to monitor sentiment scores and sharing rates for verified CRM campaign postings.	The S-O-R Framework posits that genuine storytelling fosters emotional trust (Organism), resulting in advocacy and favourable word-of-mouth (Response).
c) Utilise co-creation with socially aware consumers.	Co-creation activities, including community voting for endorsed causes or limited-edition collaborative products, augment participatory trust and foster enduring attachment.	x % of yearly CRM projects incorporate consumer co-creation elements.	Yearly evaluation of CRM campaigns for co-creation integration and associated variations in trust or loyalty metrics.	The commitment-trust theory , underpinned by the S-O-R framework , posits that co-creation enhances relational ties and converts trust into enduring loyalty and engagement.
d) Enhance behavioural conversion via ongoing experimentation.	Brands are encouraged to do systematic A/B tests on CRM messaging, impact feedback formats, and incentive structures to determine the combinations that produce the greatest trust-to-behavior conversion.	Attain statistically significant x % enhancement in conversion rates between experimental and control groups.	Quarterly experimental evaluation conducted by the Insights and Finance departments.	S-O-R Framework: Iterative testing enhances stimuli that most successfully translate feelings of trust and authenticity into behavioural reactions.

These behavioural reinforcement tactics complete the S-O-R loop by illustrating how validated authenticity and trust (organism) results in repeated, quantifiable consumer responses. Feedback visibility converts trust into habit; loyalty programs convert belief into economic actions; and co-creation fosters emotional reciprocity. These

techniques collectively guarantee that CRM transcends mere donation, evolving into a continuous circle of trust, wherein each verified impact encourages continued engagement and advocacy.

7.4.4 Performance and governance integration

In addition to the previously outlined actions, for the validated S-O-R framework to function as a continuous behavioural system rather than as a campaign-level effect, prestige beauty brands must establish governance mechanisms that measure, safeguard, and enhance authenticity and trust over time.

The combination of performance and governance systems guarantees that each CRM initiative adheres to the complete chain, transforming cause-related marketing from occasional altruism into a verifiable, strategic revenue growth lever. Table 7.5 outlines these mechanisms.

Table 7.5: Performance and governance systems

Strategic Focus	Actionable Step	KPI	Measurement
a) Integrate relational metrics into performance scorecards.	Authenticity and trust must to be seen as essential performance measures within company scorecards, alongside conventional financial metrics. This necessitates quarterly reporting on authenticity, trust, and advocacy indices to indicate that relational capital is a quantifiable asset.	Authenticity and trust metrics integrated into x % of brand performance dashboards.	Quarterly variance $\leq$ x %; correlation between trust and repeat-purchase $\geq$ x %.
b) Formulate an autonomous ethics and transparency committee.	An internal cross-functional committee, consisting of representatives from Finance, Corporate Affairs, Legal, and Brand, is advised to supervise all CRM communication and impact-feedback initiatives. The committee is tasked with validating claims, approving partner selection, and auditing post-campaign disclosures.	x % adherence to disclosure and verification processes throughout the campaign.	Annual audit reports indicating $\leq$ x corrective actions.
c) Establish impact-feedback governance as a formal practice.	The newly suggested Impact Feedback Framework (Section 7.4.2) must be integrated into governance policy, ensuring explicit accountability for data collection, verification, and dissemination. Finance departments must balance monies raised against those disbursed, while marketing ensures that validated outcomes are publicly conveyed.	Impact-feedback compliance rate equals x % of CRM campaigns.	Disclosure validated by external NGO partners within a x -day timeframe.
d) Link executive incentives to behavioural and relational results.	Align leadership focus with the S-O-R model, a portion of annual performance compensation should be contingent upon enhancements in authenticity, trust, and loyalty metrics rather than solely on revenue. This guarantees that the quest for credibility is integrated into managerial accountability.	x % of the annual bonus pool is contingent upon trust-index performance, with a target of x points year-over-year improvement.	Annual evaluation of leadership scorecards in accordance with brand trust and loyalty index performance.
e) Benchmark authenticity and trust externally.	Engagement in independent reputation or authenticity audits offers comparative insights and indicates transparency to consumers. External benchmarking enhances credibility and mitigates internal complacency.	Attainment of top-quartile position in industry authenticity criteria each year.	Annual engagement in third-party reputation assessments, with benchmarking outcomes monitored annually to evaluate progress within industry quartiles.

These governance actions guarantee the ongoing assessment and management of CRM credibility. By integrating these into formal structures, brands can maintain accountability and avert purpose-washing. This alignment transforms the S-O-R framework into a systematic management system that enhances consumer trust and sustains long-term brand performance.

7.5 Limitations of the research study

The study provided significant insights into the impact of cause-related marketing on consumer behavioural outcomes within the South African prestige beauty sector,

although certain limitations must be noted. Identifying these limitations was crucial for contextualising the results and directing future research endeavours.

- *Sampling and demographics*

The survey primarily represented female millennial consumers, illustrating gendered beauty consumption trends. Male perspectives were insufficiently investigated, which may limit the generalisability of gender studies. Future research may use a more equitable gender distribution to evaluate whether gender influences the association between a CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes.

- *Geographical scope*

The findings are confined to South Africa. The cultural and socio-economic diversity in other Sub-Saharan Africa (Andriantomanga et al., 2023) indicates the need for caution in making regional generalisations. Markets like Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana may demonstrate different reactions to cause-related marketing owing to differing cultural norms and various degrees of brand trust.

- *Cross-sectional design*

Data was collected at a singular point in time; hence, causal inferences were limited. The observed relationships suggest associations instead of directionality. Longitudinal research could ascertain whether perceptions of authenticity and trust result in enduring loyalty or if they vary in reaction to campaign exposure.

- *Industry scope*

The study focused only on the prestige beauty sector, where brand significance and identity are closely linked to perceptions of authenticity and aspiration. This context may not completely represent other sectors where utilitarian or functional value prevails. As a result, the results should be interpreted in light of the symbolic and high-involvement characteristics of this category. Future research could evaluate the model's applicability across sectors such as fashion, mass-market beauty, or Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG).

- *Construct boundaries*

The model ignored potential moderators and control factors, including brand familiarity, purchase frequency, and disposable income. Integrating these elements in future models may provide a more sophisticated comprehension

of how socio-economic context and brand awareness influence consumer reactions to CRM messages.

- *Self-reported measures*

Despite the use of validated scales (Cheung et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2015), self-reporting may lead to social desirability or recollection bias. Respondents may have exaggerated prosocial attitudes or loyalty intentions to conform to perceived social standards. Future studies may use behavioural or observable data, such as purchase monitoring or social media engagement metrics to triangulate self-reported replies and enhance validity.

7.6 Suggestions for future research

Based on the research study's findings, the following areas are suggested for additional study:

- *Cross-cultural expansion*

The current study should be expanded beyond South Africa in future research to incorporate comparative assessments across other African and global markets. Cultural values shape the perception of authenticity and trust, especially in collectivist versus individualist contexts, where concepts of sincerity, altruism, and reciprocity differ (Kang et al., 2022). Investigating how these cultural factors influence consumer reactions to CRM might yield a more refined comprehension of the generality or cultural specificity of the S-O-R framework. Future research could examine whether consumers in markets characterised by robust communal norms (Nigeria or Kenya) exhibit increased sensitivity to co-created or community-driven initiatives compared to those in markets with greater individualism (e.g. United Kingdom or the United States of America).

- *Longitudinal designs*

The cross-sectional design of this study restricted understanding of the stability of authenticity and trust over time. Future research could utilise longitudinal designs to examine the effects of frequent exposure to CRM initiatives on the maintenance or deterioration of trust and loyalty. Monitoring alterations in these impressions across various campaign cycles would elucidate whether authenticity and trust functions as a momentary emotional reaction or a cumulative aspect of brand equity. This longitudinal evidence would aid in assessing whether trust, once compromised, can be restored

through consistent and transparent communication, thereby addressing a significant gap in the temporal aspect of commitment-trust theory.

- *Inclusion of moderators and mediators*

Future research could enhance the S-O-R framework by incorporating supplementary moderators and mediators that reflect individual or contextual factors affecting consumer behaviour. Factors like brand familiarity, perceived product quality, consumer scepticism, and social consciousness can substantially influence the relationship among message stimulus, perceived authenticity and trust, and consumer behavioural outcomes. For instance, the consumers possessing substantial brand familiarity may interpret CRM messaging with heightened trust, hence diminishing scepticism even without specific evidence. Incorporating these variables may enhance predictive accuracy and elucidate boundary conditions in CRM effectiveness.

- *Generational comparisons*

This research concentrated on millennials, although increasing evidence indicates that Gen-Zs demonstrate unique behavioural and attitudinal patterns concerning social concerns and digital activism (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025). Comparative generational studies could evaluate whether younger consumers prioritise participatory engagement, transparency, or alignment with social justice when considering brand purpose. These investigations may determine if the elements of authenticity and trust vary throughout generations, assisting marketers in adapting CRM messaging to changing value orientations and media preferences.

- *Mixed-method approaches*

Future research could employ mixed-methods designs to enhance an understanding of the emotional and psychological elements that underlie authenticity and trust. Quantitative methods such as SEM offer statistical validation, whereas qualitative techniques, such as in-depth interviews, or focus groups can elucidate the emotional and symbolic aspects of consumer internalisation of brand purpose (Ndasi & Akcay, 2020). Incorporating these viewpoints would deepen theoretical comprehension by situating statistical correlations within actual consumer lived experiences, thereby improving the ecological validity of the S-O-R framework in the realm of CRM.

7.7 Conclusion

This research offers empirical evidence that authenticity and trust completely mediate the relationship between the CRM message format and consumer behavioural outcomes in South Africa's prestige beauty sector. Explicit, transparent CRM messages enhance perceptions of authenticity, thereby fostering trust and eliciting positive behaviours such as loyalty, advocacy, and repeat purchases, which are considered markers of revenue growth. Nevertheless, actual financial performance was not assessed, and subsequent research could evaluate whether enhanced loyalty and purchase intent genuinely result in increased sales. The lack of direct connection between message and behaviour highlights that persuasion alone is inadequate; credibility and authenticity are the genuine drivers of behaviour.

This study enhances theoretical understanding by confirming the complete S-O-R mediation chain, combining affective and relational approaches in CRM research, and offering practical insights by identifying authenticity and trust as concrete drivers of sustainable revenue growth. In a market increasingly characterised by ethical consciousness and socio-economic disparity, prestige beauty brands that fulfil their promises and demonstrate them, transform purpose into performance.

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APPENDIX 1: EXPLICIT CUES QUESTIONNAIRE

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on **leveraging cause-related marketing to drive revenue growth in the South African prestige beauty sector**. Your responses will help me understand **how cause-related marketing influence millennial purchasing decisions**. The questionnaire will take about **10 minutes to complete**. All questions relate to your views on prestige beauty brands and their cause-related marketing efforts. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. **Your participation is anonymous, and only aggregated data will be reported**. By completing the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Kabelo Marutla

Email: 13338392@mygibs.co.za

Phone: 082 822 2979

Research Supervisor: Silas Matlala

Email: matlalas@gibs.co.za

Phone: 011 771 4000

Screening questions

1. Have you bought a *prestige* beauty product (e.g., Lancôme, Estée Lauder, Dior, Clarins, Chanel, Clinique, Tom Ford) in the last six months?
☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Were you born between 1981 and 1996 (aged 29 – 44 in 2025)?
☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Residence – Do you currently live in an urban area in South Africa?
☐ Yes ☐ No



Section A: Cause-related marketing perception (Stimulus)

7-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

4. I clearly understood which social cause the brands support
5. The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.
6. The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.
7. I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.
8. The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.
9. The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.
10. Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.



Section B: Message-based brand integrity

7-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

11. Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.
12. The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.
13. The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.
14. I would trust the brand that published this message.
15. The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.
16. Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.



Section C: Revenue-linked behavioural intent

7-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

17. If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.
18. I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.
19. Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.
20. I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts.
21. I would share or “like” the brand's cause-related marketing content on social media.
22. The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.

Section D – Brand recognition

Did you recognise which prestige beauty brand created the message?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Section E: Purchasing-habit questions

23. How many times have you bought prestige beauty in the last six months?
☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ 5–6 ☐ > 6
24. Roughly how much did you spend on prestige beauty last month?
(....., ZAR)
25. Where do you usually buy prestige beauty products?
☐ Department store (e.g. Edgars, Woolworths) ☐ Brand boutique ☐ Specialist retailer (e.g., ARC, Skins) ☐ Online (brand or retailer website)
26. Which platform most influences your prestige beauty purchases?
☐ Instagram ☐ TikTok ☐ Facebook ☐ YouTube ☐ Magazines ☐ In-store beauty advisor ☐ Television and Billboards

Section F – Demographic questions

27. What is your age in years? ____
28. Gender
☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say
29. Highest qualification
☐ High school / Matric ☐ Diploma ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Honours ☐ Master's or above
30. Monthly personal after-tax income (ZAR)
☐ < 10 000 ☐ 10 000–19 999 ☐ 20 000–34 999 ☐ 35 000–49 999 ☐ 50 000–74 999 ☐ ≥ 75 000 ☐ Prefer not to say
31. Where do you live most of the year? (drop-down list of SA provinces with "Other city, please specify ____")

APPENDIX 2: IMPLICIT CUES QUESTIONNAIRE

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on **leveraging cause-related marketing to drive revenue growth in the South African prestige beauty sector**. Your responses will help me understand **how cause-related marketing influence millennial purchasing decisions**. The questionnaire will take about **10 minutes to complete**. All questions relate to your views on prestige beauty brands and their cause-related marketing efforts. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. **Your participation is anonymous, and only aggregated data will be reported**. By completing the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Kabelo Marutla

Email: 13338392@mygibs.co.za

Phone: 082 822 2979

Research Supervisor: Silas Matlala

Email: matlalas@gibs.co.za

Phone: 011 771 4000

Screening questions

1. Have you bought a *prestige* beauty product (e.g., Lancôme, Estée Lauder, Dior, Clarins, Chanel, Clinique, Tom Ford) in the last six months?
☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Were you born between 1981 and 1996 (aged 29 – 44 in 2025)?
☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Residence – Do you currently live in an urban area in South Africa?
☐ Yes ☐ No



Section A: Cause-related marketing perception (Stimulus)

7-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

4. I clearly understood which social cause the brands support
5. The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.
6. The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.
7. I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.
8. The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.
9. The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.
10. Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.



Section B: Message-based brand integrity

7-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

11. Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.
12. The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.
13. The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.
14. I would trust the brand that published this message.
15. The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.
16. Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.



Section C: Revenue-linked behavioural intent

7-point Likert (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

17. If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.
18. I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.
19. Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.
20. I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts.
21. I would share or “like” the brand’s cause-related marketing content on social media.
22. The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.

Section D – Brand recognition

Did you recognise which prestige beauty brand created the message?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Section E: Purchasing-habit questions

23. How many times have you bought prestige beauty in the last six months?
☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ 5–6 ☐ > 6
24. Roughly how much did you spend on prestige beauty last month?
(....., ZAR)
25. Where do you usually buy prestige beauty products?
☐ Department store (e.g. Edgars, Woolworths) ☐ Brand boutique ☐ Specialist retailer (e.g., ARC, Skins) ☐ Online (brand or retailer website)
26. Which platform most influences your prestige beauty purchases?
☐ Instagram ☐ TikTok ☐ Facebook ☐ YouTube ☐ Magazines ☐ In-store beauty advisor ☐ Television and Billboards

Section F – Demographic questions

27. What is your age in years? ____
28. Gender
☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say
29. Highest qualification
☐ High school / Matric ☐ Diploma ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Honours ☐ Master's or above
30. Monthly personal after-tax income (ZAR)
☐ < 10 000 ☐ 10 000–19 999 ☐ 20 000–34 999 ☐ 35 000–49 999 ☐ 50 000–74 999 ☐ ≥ 75 000 ☐ Prefer not to say
31. Where do you live most of the year? (drop-down list of SA provinces with “Other city, please specify ____”)

APPENDIX 3: CONTENT AND FACE VALIDITY: EXPERT REVIEWS



Kabelo Marutla

Questionnaire - Face and content validity

To: [REDACTED] za

Hello Palesa,

Hope you are well.

As discussed, kindly browse through the questionnaire and evaluate the face and content validity.

Kindly forward this to Lomanja and Bose as well to cast over an eye from a market research perspective.

Thanks and regards

Kabelo



Questionnaire.docx



From: Marutla, Kabelo <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Tuesday, July 1, 2025 11:51 AM

To: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]

_____n,

[psmetics.com](#)>

[\[Redacted\]ee.com>](#)

Subject: Questionnaire - Face and content validity

Hello Ladies,

I need your help please.

As part of my thesis, I will be conducting quantitative survey-based research on
**“Leveraging CSR/Sustainability Messaging for Revenue Growth: A Millennial
 Consumer Study in the South African Prestige Beauty Sector.”**

As marketing experts, kindly evaluate the draft questionnaire for face and content validity.

Your input will be highly appreciated.

Thanks.



Palesa [REDACTED]
FW: Questionnaire
To: Kabelo Marutla

Hi Kabelo,

Please find attached feedback from Lomanja.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED] | PROJECT PLANNER

TEL: +27 11 327 2020 | FAX: +27 11 327 2019 WEBSITE: <https://www.plus94.co.za/>



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From: Lomanja [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, July 8, 2025 5:23 PM
To: Palesa [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Questionnaire

Dear Palesa,

Please find attached. The questionnaire is fine. I have inserted some text that the owner may modify in red font.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED] | Project Director- Data Science, Statistics and Modelling

TEL: +27 11 327 2020 FAX: +27 11 327 2019 WEBSITE: <http://www.plus94.co.za/>



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PLEASE CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT BEFORE PRINTING THIS EMAIL.



Palesa [REDACTED]

FW: Questionnaire - Face and content validity

To: 13338392@mygibs.co.za

Hi Kabelo,

Please find attached feedback from Bose.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED] I PROJECT PLANNER

TEL: +27 11 327 2020 | FAX: +27 11 327 2019 WEBSITE: <https://www.plus94.co.za/>



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From: Bose [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, July 4, 2025 9:34 AM

To: Palesa [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Questionnaire - Face and content validity

Good Morning Palesa

Trust this email finds you well,

Kindly find attached my feedback on the request below.

Thank you!

Kind Regards ,

[REDACTED] RESEARCH EXECUTIVE

TEL: +27 11 327 2020 | FAX: +27 11 327 2019 WEBSITE: <https://www.plus94.co.za/>



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PLUS94RESEARCH



PLUS94RESEARCH



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PLUS94RESEARCH

From: Ma [REDACTED]@e.com>
Sent: Wednesday, 02 July 2025 08:32
To: Marutla, Kabelo <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Questionnaire - Face and content validity

Hey KB - looks good and appears to comprehensively cover your research objectives.
All the best!

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]ne
Sent: Tuesday, July 1, 2025 1:50 PM
To: Marutla, Kabelo <kn[REDACTED]m>
Subject: RE: Questionnaire - Face and content validity

Hi Kabelo

Looks good, the only thing I would suggest is to put the CSR/Sustainability message at the forefront in the questions VS the Brand... Don't think it will make a big impact but thinking of the brand before the message might give you mixed messages based on the feeling a person is getting from the look and feel of the Brand:

For example:

1. I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family.

Recommendation: Based on the message or how this message makes me feel I would recommend the Brand to friends and Family.

Hope this makes sense- Its about the CSR message not about the brand... from what I gather in your introduction.

Kind Regards
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX 4: PEARSON'S CORRELATIONS TEST OF VALIDITY

CONSTRUCT 1 Correlations									
		I clearly understood which social cause the brands support.	The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.	The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.	I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.	The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.	The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.	Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.	CRM_Mean
I clearly understood which social cause the brands support.	Pearson Correlation	1	.588**	.582**	.454**	.402**	.455**	.510**	.666**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.	Pearson Correlation	.588**	1	.773**	.692**	.699**	.678**	.714**	.864**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.	Pearson Correlation	.582**	.773**	1	.746**	.766**	.780**	.862**	.925**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.	Pearson Correlation	.454**	.692**	.746**	1	.747**	.705**	.742**	.854**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.	Pearson Correlation	.402**	.699**	.766**	.747**	1	.733**	.775**	.861**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.	Pearson Correlation	.455**	.678**	.780**	.705**	.733**	1	.838**	.872**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.	Pearson Correlation	.510**	.714**	.862**	.742**	.775**	.838**	1	.914**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
CRM_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.666**	.864**	.925**	.854**	.861**	.872**	.914**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250

CONSTRUCT 2 Correlations								
		Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.	The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.	The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.	I would trust the brand that published this message.	The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.	AT_Mean
Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.	Pearson Correlation	1	.812**	.831**	.825**	.755**	.826**	.919**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.	Pearson Correlation	.812**	1	.784**	.757**	.721**	.800**	.886**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.	Pearson Correlation	.831**	.784**	1	.860**	.782**	.837**	.929**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
I would trust the brand that published this message.	Pearson Correlation	.825**	.757**	.860**	1	.785**	.844**	.925**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	Pearson Correlation	.755**	.721**	.782**	.785**	1	.833**	.890**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.	Pearson Correlation	.826**	.800**	.837**	.844**	.833**	1	.938**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
AT_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.919**	.886**	.929**	.925**	.890**	.938**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250

CONSTRUCT 3 Correlations								
		If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.	I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.	Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.	I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts	I would share or "like" the brand's cause-related marketing content on social media.	The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.	CBO_Mean
If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.	Pearson Correlation	1	.687**	.661**	.775**	.664**	.722**	.844**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.	Pearson Correlation	.687**	1	.769**	.784**	.658**	.760**	.873**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.	Pearson Correlation	.661**	.769**	1	.863**	.678**	.816**	.897**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts	Pearson Correlation	.775**	.784**	.863**	1	.755**	.904**	.953**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
I would share or "like" the brand's cause-related marketing content on social media.	Pearson Correlation	.664**	.658**	.678**	.755**	1	.733**	.841**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.	Pearson Correlation	.722**	.760**	.816**	.904**	.733**	1	.927**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250
CBO_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.844**	.873**	.897**	.953**	.841**	.927**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	250	250	250	250	250	250	250

APPENDIX 5: FACTOR ANALYSIS USING PCA

CONSTRUCT 1 Correlation Matrix								
		I clearly understood which social cause the brands support.	The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.	The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.	I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.	The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.	The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.	Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.
Correlation	I clearly understood which social cause the brands support.	1,000	,588	,582	,454	,402	,455	,510
	The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.	,588	1,000	,773	,692	,699	,678	,714
	The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.	,582	,773	1,000	,746	,766	,780	,862
	I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.	,454	,692	,746	1,000	,747	,705	,742
	The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.	,402	,699	,766	,747	1,000	,733	,775
	The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.	,455	,678	,780	,705	,733	1,000	,838
	Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.	,510	,714	,862	,742	,775	,838	1,000
CONSTRUCT 1 KMO and Bartlett's Test								
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of		,920						
Bartlett's Approx. Chi-Square		1536,500						
Test of df		21						
Sphericity Sig.		0,000						

CONSTRUCT 1 Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	%	Total	Variance	%
1	5,117	73,097	73,097	5,117	73,097	73,097
2	,705	10,069	83,166			
3	,345	4,929	88,095			
4	,283	4,039	92,134			
5	,236	3,377	95,511			
6	,196	2,794	98,305			
7	,119	1,695	100,000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

CONSTRUCT 1 Component Matrix^a						
	Component					
	1					
I clearly understood which social cause the brands support.	,644					
The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.	,861					
The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.	,928					
I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.	,857					
The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.	,867					
The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.	,877					
Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.	,919					

CONSTRUCT 1 Rotated Component Matrix^a
a. Only one component was extracted. The solution cannot be rotated.

CONSTRUCT 2 Correlation Matrix							
		Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.	The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.	The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.	I would trust the brand that published this message.	The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.
Correlation	Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related	1,000	,812	,831	,825	,755	,826
	The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.	,812	1,000	,784	,757	,721	,800
	The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.	,831	,784	1,000	,860	,782	,837
	I would trust the brand that published this message.	,825	,757	,860	1,000	,785	,844
	The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	,755	,721	,782	,785	1,000	,833
	Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.	,826	,800	,837	,844	,833	1,000
CONSTRUCT 2 KMO and Bartlett's Test							
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling		,931					
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		Approx. Chi-Square	1670,387				
		df	15				
		Sig.	0,000				

CONSTRUCT 2 Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative	Total	% of	Cumulative
1	5,019	83,655	83,655	5,019	83,655	83,655
2	,301	5,009	88,664			
3	,240	3,993	92,657			
4	,164	2,735	95,393			
5	,146	2,430	97,823			
6	,131	2,177	100,000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

CONSTRUCT 2 Component Matrix^a						
	Component					
	1					
Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.	,920					
The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.	,887					
The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.	,929					
I would trust the brand that published this message.	,925					
The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	,888					
Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.	,938					

CONSTRUCT 2 Rotated Component Matrix^a
a. Only one component was extracted. The solution cannot be rotated.

CONSTRUCT 3 Correlation Matrix							
		If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.	I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.	Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.	I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts.	I would share or "like" the brand's cause-related marketing content on social media.	The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.
Correlation	If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.	1,000	,687	,661	,775	,664	,722
	I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.	,687	1,000	,769	,784	,658	,760
	Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.	,661	,769	1,000	,863	,678	,816
	I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts.	,775	,784	,863	1,000	,755	,904
	I would share or "like" the brand's cause-related marketing content on social media.	,664	,658	,678	,755	1,000	,733
	The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.	,722	,760	,816	,904	,733	1,000
CONSTRUCT 3 KMO and Bartlett's Test							
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		,913					
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		Approx. Chi-Square 1490,317					
		df 15					
		Sig. 0,000					

CONSTRUCT 3 Rotated Component Matrix ^a	
a. Only one component was extracted. The solution cannot be rotated.	

APPENDIX 6: CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY AND ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

Reliability Statistics

(Construct 1)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.937	.936	7

Item-Total Statistics (Construct 1)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
I clearly understood which social cause the brands support.	25.09	129.200	.561	.404	.947
The brand clearly explains how its cause-related marketing initiative works.	25.90	117.228	.809	.672	.926
The cause-related projects highlighted here feels genuine.	25.96	113.416	.894	.815	.918
I feel I have enough information to judge the brand's cause-related marketing claims.	26.40	118.040	.797	.657	.927
The brand is transparent about the results achieved through its cause-related marketing campaigns.	26.69	117.355	.806	.702	.926
The cause-related marketing campaign feels consistent with what I would expect from a prestige beauty brand.	26.07	116.830	.821	.731	.925
Overall, the brand's cause-related marketing appears credible.	25.90	114.685	.879	.824	.920

Reliability Statistics

(Construct 2)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.961	.961	6

Item-Total Statistics (Construct 2)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Based only on this message, I believe the brand will keep its cause-related marketing promise.	22.01	85.100	.883	.790	.953
The cause-related initiatives described here seem consistent with genuine / typical brand values.	21.93	86.738	.838	.722	.957
The message feels sincere rather than just a marketing spin.	22.17	83.356	.895	.810	.951
I would trust the brand that published this message.	21.80	82.576	.889	.807	.952
The message suggests the brand acts responsibly even when no one is watching.	21.93	84.943	.840	.727	.957
Overall, the brand behind this message appears authentic.	21.70	81.369	.908	.828	.950

Reliability Statistics
(Construct 3)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.947	.947	6

Item-Total Statistics (Construct 3)

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
If the brand behind this message was revealed, I would likely buy it.	23.53	78.716	.776	.631	.944
I would pay a little more for a prestige beauty product from a brand supports a cause in this way.	23.78	77.054	.815	.674	.940
Because of this cause-related marketing, I would choose this brand over other prestige beauty brands offering similar products.	23.78	76.686	.850	.772	.936
I would recommend the brand behind this message to friends and family on the strength of its cause-related marketing efforts	23.77	73.207	.930	.888	.926
I would share or "like" the brand's cause-related marketing content on social media.	23.64	78.343	.771	.602	.945
The next time I shop for beauty products, I will actively look for this brand because of its cause-related marketing.	23.92	73.121	.889	.830	.931