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The Musk Effect: Examining the Relationship Between Celebrity CEO and Brand Image in the Automotive Industry

A Survey-Based Analysis

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Abstract

Aim

Celebrity CEOs, such as Elon Musk of Tesla, have considerable influence in today`s corporate environment. This study investigates how consumers` perceptions of corporate brands are affected by this celebrity status. Specifically, it examines how Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers perceive the brand differently to shed light on the wider effects of celebrity leadership on brand image.

Methods

This thesis examines the effect of Elon Musk on various dimensions of Tesla`s brand image, including perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design. To answer the research question, this study conducted a quantitative survey analysis with a sample consisting of Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers (N = 159). The survey includes self-report measures investigating perceptions of Elon Musk and Tesla. To analyze the relationship between celebrity CEO and brand image, multiple regression and moderation analyses were employed.

Results

The results reveal a significant influence of certain dimensions of celebrity CEO on brand image. CEO reputation was found to be a significant predictor as higher scores on this dimension were associated with more positive perceptions on brand image. In addition, the perception on CEO innovativeness appeared to have a significant effect on brand image. Tesla drivers perceived Elon Musk and Tesla more positive than non-Tesla drivers, underscoring how car brand is a significant predictor of brand image. Conversely, CEO expertise appeared to not have any significant effect on brand image. The moderation analysis showed that being a Tesla driver significantly moderates the relationship between CEO reputation and brand

image as well as CEO innovativeness and brand image. However, being a Tesla driver does not significantly moderate the relationship between CEO reputation and brand image.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of CEO reputation and innovativeness in influencing brand perception, pointing out the need for organizations to cultivate positive CEO perceptions. The significant effect of brand loyalty and ownership emphasizes the need for tailored marketing approaches. Overall, this study adds to the corpus of knowledge about the interplay between celebrity CEOs and brand image.

Keywords: Celebrity CEO, CEO worshipping, Brand Image, Reputation, Elon Musk, Tesla

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Introduction

On a summer evening in 2018, Elon Musk decided to tweet that he considers taking Tesla off the stock exchange and already had the financing in place. This tweet triggered a wave of reactions among his followers and far beyond, affecting the Tesla stock price and causing the US Securities and Exchange Commission to start an investigation. This is just one example of the power that Tesla CEO Elon Musk holds in his hands with millions of people following him and his actions. Through this celebrity-like status, Elon Musk is significantly more than just a CEO. As a cultural figure, his impact permeates everyday consumer life and goes well beyond the boardroom. Alongside Elon Musk, leaders such as Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg have exerted similar strong reputations and tremendous influence on public discourse and the market. Such CEOs increasingly represent their organization as their public face as they possess iconic stature over the perceptions of their companies from the outside as well as the inside. Consequently, the success and reputation of the company is partially determined by their decisions, activities, and public appearance. Referring to Elon Musk`s tweet from 2018, it reveals the extent to which advocates, and stakeholders become influenced and dependent on him to the point where entire markets are affected. The extraordinary power and position of well-known celebrity CEOs stem from a dedicated and strong follower base. In contrast to rather unknown but still powerful CEOs, the media play a major role for celebrity CEOs to build such a follower base as they gain reach and thus expand their status. In literature, a CEO-follower relationship of this level is labeled as CEO worshipping (Choi & Phan, 2022). It describes how followers and advocates look up to CEOs and emulate their behaviors in an obsessing way. The idolization of CEOs can have significant implications, as CEOs with a personal brand like Elon Musk can strongly affect their companies` assets and reputation (Ante, 2023).

Through frequent public appearances, a strong community and presence on social media, CEOs rise to a position of prominence (Rudeloff & Damms, 2022). The worshipping of CEOs reinforces this celebrity effect, with potentially different implications for the company. In some cases, the popularity and reputation of a CEO can be a benefit as the public discourse can be shaped. Alongside the reputation, also the CEOs` communication, behavior, and expertise might be having an effect on the public's perception. However, if the CEO`s actions are perceived negatively, this can have far-reaching consequences for the company`s reputation. Besides a considerable loss of consumer trust, other possible outcomes may be a decline in brand loyalty and potential losses in sales and market value (Fetscherin, 2015b). Therefore, a discourse about celebrity CEOs is essential to understand their impact and operations on consumer behavior, revealing insights into how businesses may use leadership to gain market influence and a competitive edge. Although there has not been much research on this phenomenon, previous research indicates the influence of celebrity CEOs on various areas of an organization`s relationship with its consumers. High-profile CEOs can enhance consumer trust (Stravinskiene et al., 2020), change market dynamics (Mackey, 2008), and alter brand attitudes (Zhang & Zhang, 2018).

The characteristics and implications of celebrity CEOs have been explored particularly in the areas of business management and popular culture (Cho et al., 2016; Treadway et al., 2009). To complement existing research, questions about how celebrity CEOs impact brand image, especially in the automotive sector, still need to be answered. It is well-known that celebrity CEOs such as Elon Musk have the ability to influence public discourse and market dynamics, but it is less obvious how the effects of the celebrity persona actually translate into observable commercial outcomes for companies like Tesla.

Where fierce competition and rapid technological advancements make consumer brand image a crucial asset, the automotive sector presents a distinctive environment for

analyzing the effect of celebrity CEOs on brand image (Nagy & Jàmbor, 2018). Besides evaluating functional aspects and design, consumers tend to develop significant emotional attributes with automobiles that amplify the importance of brand image in this regard (Khalid et al., 2023). In a competitive landscape such as the automotive sector, it then becomes valuable to explore how a celebrity CEO like Elon Musk may shape these perceptions of consumers and set Tesla apart from its competitors. In this light, a comparison between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers may further reveal the different effects of the relationship between Elon Musk and Tesla as a brand.

In light of this background, the general research question that directs this study is "*How may brand image in the automobile industry be affected by a celebrity CEO, particularly in the context of Elon Musk in relation to Tesla?*".

Various academic disciplines, including organizational behavior, sociology, and marketing can benefit theoretically from the study of celebrity CEOs. The study of CEO worship and its impact on customer attitudes and brand image might help academics construct theoretical frameworks that explain how market conditions, organizational reputation, and charisma in leadership interact. To benefit from valuable insights into the ways in which popular CEOs may influence the brand image of customers, delving into concepts like fandom, human branding, and worshipping is crucial.

The findings of this study also provide practical insights that can directly impact corporate plans and operations. The results of this research may be particularly relevant for marketing, branding, and PR professionals. Insights into the relationship between a high-profile CEO and brand image can shed light on the potential role of leadership in marketing campaigns. To increase customer loyalty and engagement, companies can use the research findings to develop more targeted communication strategies that leverage the influence of celebrity CEOs. Furthermore, having an understanding of the particular mechanisms

underlying the "Musk Effect" enables companies to adapt their marketing strategies to connect more deeply with customers, strengthening brand image and market positioning. As this study focuses on Tesla, stakeholders in the automotive industry in particular may gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of a CEO-follower relationship.

Theoretical framework

In the context of Elon Musk and Tesla, this theoretical framework investigates the relationship between celebrity CEOs and brand image in the automotive industry. Decisions on what to buy and who to trust are influenced by perceptions of different aspects of a brand. Concurrently, different dimensions of celebrity CEOs, well-known for their prominence and power, also impact the evaluation of a brand. With this investigation, the following framework develops into a model that shows the dynamic interplay between these components, providing a thorough knowledge of how celebrity CEOs shape brand image in the automotive sector.

Brand image in the automotive sector

Brand image is one of the keys to success in practically any product and brand segment, particularly when it comes to the automotive industry. In the context of the celebrity CEO concept, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the underlying principles behind the role of brand image of car manufacturers. The image of a brand is accompanied by the reputation of a brand, with both affecting the purchasing behavior and attitudes of consumers (Zeithaml, 1988). The foundation of a company`s corporate identity is its organizational reputation, which combines stakeholders` attitudes and views about the company`s activities, values, and purpose (Fombrun, 1996). As an essential measurement in the business landscape,

organizational reputation provides information about the subjective views of stakeholders, particularly about the competence of a company and how it positions itself (Fombrun, 1996). Using this conceptualization, the behavior and statements of the CEO have a certain influence on the image and perception of a company (Love et al., 2017). As the brand image is in a continuous process of development, it is constantly influenced by new information and experiences relating to the brand (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993).

In the automotive industry, pioneer brands that are based on certain breakthroughs or a distinctive and unique history are at the forefront, allowing them to exert a strong influence on consumer perception (Alpert & Kamins, 1994). Carpenter & Nakamoto (1988) state that such pioneer brands are positioned at the top of a certain category, causing consumers to automatically recall a specific brand whenever they see or hear the name of a particular category. The top-selling products and services of such brands are often considered as prototypes by consumers, resulting in lower thresholds to buy and commit to these products (Carpenter & Nakamoto, 1988). Among electric vehicles (EV), Tesla has become the brand that most people associate with this product category.

Perceived innovation and trust

Consumers perceive brands that represent innovation and novelty as positive, strengthening the brand image and enhancing purchase intention (Alpert & Kamins, 1994). This is supported by the findings of Long et al. (2019) who show how the dimensions of design, sustainability, and innovation are key components behind Tesla`s high position in the EV market. It became evident that consumers evaluated EVs more favorably by being positively influenced by the innovative reputation of Tesla (Long et al., 2019). Within this realm of investigation, it becomes additionally evident that EV brand image has a positive mediating effect on purchase intentions and perceptions among consumers (Fu et al., 2023). Research

shows that in addition to the brand itself, the interaction between brand and consumer can affect the degree to which customers view the quality of the products and thereby improve brand loyalty and trust (Loureiro et al., 2017). Tesla`s highly innovative traits and its approach to consumers through CEO Elon Musk and its effective marketing have established the brand as a leading symbol of the electric car, creating strong ties between some advocates and the brand (Loureiro et al., 2017). Therefore, alongside traditional tasks of controlling the image, interacting with the market and potential customers is vital as well.

The introduction of EVs to the market has led to a shift in the needs and perceptions of consumers when it comes to evaluating a brand. Studies show that besides the quality and functionality of an EV itself, emotional factors are additionally shaping attitudes and brand image among consumers (Febransyah, 2021). Research conducted by Kato (2021) further strengthens this connection by finding that consumers find themselves drawn to brands that create emotional connections, explaining the importance of emotional value and trust in brand preference.

Sustainability and product design

For the automotive industry in particular, environmental sustainability plays an important role when it comes to evaluating the brand image. Customers make a conscious decision when buying an electric car with certain expectations. Existing studies show that sustainability is increasingly becoming a central point in the evaluation of brands (Loučanová et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Yet this aspect is subject to differing attitudes, particularly in the luxury sector (Aybaly et al., 2017). Consumers who are exposed to external factors such as the reputation of the company or the CEO may evaluate the environmental aspect in a tampered way.

In addition to sustainability, product design is crucial in shaping consumer attitudes and preferences as well, specifically for forward-thinking companies such as Tesla. Tesla EVs

are not only praised for their technical aspects but also for their creative design features (Braun, 2022; Palmié et al., 2024). The direct correlation between innovation and product design has been frequently highlighted by literature. Research shows how consumers relate creative and useful design to attributes like inventiveness and practicality, impacting their choice of products (Jansson, 2011; Kaplan, 2009).

Overall, based on these findings, brand image can be constructed by combining the elements of perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design.

Celebrity CEO

Discussing the concept of the celebrity CEO requires an understanding of the concept of "celebrity". The Oxford Dictionary of English provides a straightforward definition that describes being a celebrity as "the state of being well known" (Pearsall et al., 2010). Boorstin (1992) and Kerrigan et al. (2011) use a similar definition of the term in which they describe a celebrity as a person who is known for his or her well-knownness and has achieved increased visibility and fame in the course of his or her life. As a way of describing CEOs that attract a lot of public attention, the term "celebrity CEO" is often used, transferring the main characteristics of a normal celebrity to a businessperson (Edwin & Benjamin, 2017; Hayward et al., 2004; Lovelace et al., 2018). These celebrity CEOs are often labeled as iconic figures due to their unique leadership style, professional achievements, and personal traits. In addition to their leadership styles, such CEOs are considered superior because of their use of charisma and future orientation. According to Edwin and Benjamin's (2017) conceptualization, celebrity CEOs are distinguished by their elevated prominence and influence. The mentioned characteristics can be attributed to the modern business environment where media exposure, public relations, and social media engagement play a

significant role. In contrast to regular CEOs, celebrity CEOs are more visible in the media and on social media, leading the media to explicitly attach a company`s success and positioning to the CEO's leadership (Edwin & Benjamin, 2017).

Similar to how people look up to celebrities, the popularity of well-known CEOs like Elon Musk has given rise to a phenomenon known as CEO worshipping. The worship of CEOs is partly attributable to the concept of fandom, as shared interests and a sense of belonging are fundamental to both. Harris and Alexander (1998) define fandom as a development in which groupings emerge around a shared interest or pleasure largely attributable to popular culture such as celebrities, movies, books, and sports teams. Within the context of CEO worshipping, such formations develop around progressive and innovative CEOs by building parasocial connections and creating a culture of worship (Aneiros, 2023). In essence, CEO worshipping describes cult-like gatherings of advocates and sympathizers of business leaders that are highly reminiscent of religious practices. Belk and Tumbat (2005) argue that people who worship CEOs, often referred to as fans, have close brand relationships and stand out in their loyalty to the CEO and their products and services. Connecting to loyalty and close relationships, Campbell and La Pastina (2010) point to a connection between CEO worshipping and religious movements, particularly in the idolization of iconic personalities such as Steve Jobs and Elon Musk. By referring to the iPhone as the "Jesus Phone", implying that the iPhone is godlike, the connection between innovative technologies and religious artefacts and images is further reinforced which in turn fuels the idolization of CEOs (Campbell and La Pastina, 2010).

Besides idolization, there also is a moderating effect of CEO worshipping on perceptions of celebrity brand extensions, demonstrating how this phenomenon affects brand loyalty and customer behavior (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013). Especially in identity-focused industries such as automotive, consumers may use brands as symbols and status to enhance

and signal their personal identity. This is supported by the research of Maltby et al. (2002) who investigated the potentially destructive nature of fan behavior by discovering how followers participate in fantasies and rituals that revolve around the person or brand of the admired CEO. Moreover, the incorporation of religious language and metaphors is used as a means to effectively portray complicated meanings, reinforcing the idolization of CEOs as pioneers and visionary saviors of the world (Campbell and La Pastina, 2010).

As a result, CEO worshipping forms a complex occurrence that combines business and technology with social developments and religious language. Through this interplay, certain CEOs seem prestigious and possess a mythical-like status that also reflects on their companies, products, or services. This effect may influence how an organization with a popular CEO is perceived by the public.

CEO reputation, behavior, and communication

As organizational reputation can directly influence and be influenced by the perceptions of the public, it is crucial to explore how celebrity CEOs affect consumer attitudes. The concept behind consumer attitudes can be defined as a subjective evaluation of a product or company that may be influenced by factors such as sensory perceptions, personality traits, and personal experiences (Banytè et al., 2007). Such evaluations are fixed constructs that usually remain unchanged and are consciously acted out, as they reflect the direct intentions of consumers who are reacting to certain products or brands. In this context, the emotional factors such as reactions or feelings behind consumer attitudes play a central role as they have a noticeable and significant influence on the forming of an opinion (Banytè et al., 2007).

A CEO`s reputation and behavior have a direct impact on the attitudes of consumers and the public towards the respective product or brand. Research concludes that consumers often associate the political stances and controversies of a CEO with the brand or

organization, influencing how the brand is perceived by the consumer (Mikeska & Harvey, 2014). This development can be observed in particular with Tesla CEO Elon Musk, whose activities on social media have a significant influence on the behavior of his followers (Ante, 2023; Huynh, 2022). Studies have additionally focused on the interaction between the influence of a CEO and consumer brand trust. Furukawa (2021) found that the communication and behavior of certain CEOs can positively influence trust and sympathy with the brand and the product. This interaction expands the normal attitudes towards products by now also placing symbolic and emotional factors between CEO and consumers (Furukawa, 2021). Furthermore, Stravinskienè et al. (2021) found that consumer trust in a brand or company is shaped by objective as well as subjective factors, both building knowledge-based confidence. To keep positive attitudes, trust, and purchase intentions, organizations should focus on improving both areas.

The effect of CEO influence on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions can be transferred to various sectors, such as technology, energy, and automotive. Caliber CEO Shahar Silbershatz revealed that a large percentage of Americans directly link Elon Musk to Tesla, showing how much celebrity CEOs connect with their brands and products (Jin & Carey, 2024). Moreover, Ante (2023) states, based on insights from Ohanian (1991), that favorable perceptions of a CEO can be transmitted directly to the brands and companies affiliated with him or her. To shed theoretical light on this process, the cognitive balance theory, established by Fritz Heider in the early 20th century, can be applied. As evaluated by Ante (2023), it illustrates how customers and advocates balance their assessments of the CEO with their attitudes towards the brands or products which directly affects purchase intention. In this way, consumers are highly affectable to reshape their perceptions of celebrity CEOs with their original evaluations of the brands endorsed by them.

The above findings result in the following hypotheses:

H1: CEO reputation has a positive influence on brand image.

H1a: CEO reputation has a positive influence on perceived innovation.

H1b: CEO reputation has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

H1c: CEO reputation has a positive influence on consumer trust.

H1d: CEO reputation has a positive influence on product design.

H2: CEO communication has a positive influence on brand image.

H2a: CEO communication has a positive influence on perceived innovation.

H2b: CEO communication has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

H2c: CEO communication has a positive influence on consumer trust.

H2d: CEO communication has a positive influence on product design.

H3: CEO behavior has a positive influence on brand image.

H3a: CEO behavior has a positive influence on perceived innovation.

H3b: CEO behavior has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

H3c: CEO behavior has a positive influence on consumer trust.

H3d: CEO behavior has a positive influence on product design.

CEO expertise

The star status that is given to celebrity CEOs gives them a strategic edge. The prestige and expertise in that status sends an important signal to stakeholders that may demonstrate the quality and image of an organization (Edwin & Benjamin, 2017). This signal highlights the elevated position of the celebrity CEO, especially if it is acknowledged and used (Hayward et al., 2004). Research by Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka (2021) additionally shows the public's

positive attachment to celebrity CEOs and the interplay between consumer materialism and the assessment of CEO expertise. This indicates that the more people place a high value on owning material goods, the more positively celebrity CEOs are perceived in areas such as trust and attractiveness.

The Attribution Theory, developed by Fritz Heider in the early 20th century, explains the mechanisms behind this. It highlights how certain actions are often attributed to dispositional drivers, possibly amplifying the perceived expertise and emergence of star figures among certain CEOs (Hayward et al., 2004). In the context of Elon Musk, the public may connect his success and power to his vision and intelligence, rather than outside influences. This creates a positive feedback loop that benefits not only the star status of Musk but also the outcomes for his ventures. Accordingly, CEOs who are famous have a tendency to value and profit from their celebrity status, using it to exert more control over the company's actions and increase their influence.

The above findings result in the following hypotheses:

H4: CEO expertise has a positive influence on brand image.

H4a: CEO expertise has a positive influence on perceived innovation.

H4b: CEO expertise has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

H4c: CEO expertise has a positive influence on consumer trust.

H4d: CEO expertise has a positive influence on product design.

CEO trustworthiness

Along with the expertise and knowledge of a CEO, having trust in the CEO is another key element that can shape the brand image. This factor can be strategically exploited by companies, as studies have shown how the trustworthiness and credibility of CEOs can

contribute to a positive assessment of the respective company among stakeholders (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2021). These findings are supported by Edwin & Benjamin (2017) who found that stakeholders connect the confidence and visibility of celebrity CEOs with the success and performance of the company. As a result, organizations with a celebrity CEO may benefit from strategic advantages in various business processes, including human resources, stakeholder relations, or capital acquisition (Edwin & Benjamin, 2017).

However, the reputational developments that emerge from the concept of celebrity CEOs are not always entirely positive. Reports or negative statements in the media, unavoidable among public figures, can significantly influence stakeholder trust and disrupt the reputation of organizations (Love et al., 2017; Lambert, 2024). In a recently conducted survey, the polarizing behavior and political views of Elon Musk on social media led to irritation among Tesla advocates and owners, resulting in customers selling their Teslas and significant changes in attitude (Lambert, 2024; Huynh, 2022). Increasingly, a new dimension of celebrity CEOs is emerging resulting from the increased use of social media. A more frequent appearance and engagement in social media leads to higher CEO visibility and popularity positively affecting the trust of the followers (Tsai & Men, 2016; Bai et al., 2019). Zhou et al. (2023) describe this development as being the rise of the "social CEO" as CEOs nowadays gain parts of their star status online.

Based on data collected from 2009 to 2020 from Chinese publicly traded companies, it was discovered that companies with socially conscious CEOs perform better than companies without; additionally, the positive effects of a sociable CEO on corporate social performance and attitudes can be enhanced by having a more prestigious CEO position or a better reputation (Zhou et al., 2023). Moreover, research found that the way how CEOs appear on social media and the way CEOs use it has significant effects on their trustworthiness (Bai et

al., 2019; Ghardallou, 2021). Accordingly, negative actions or statements made by the CEO can also have a devastating impact on company performance and consumer trust.

To illustrate, Elon Musk is a good example of a social CEO as his active presence on Twitter engages a wide audience and is frequently discussed by stakeholders and the media. Celebrity CEOs therefore are a complex phenomenon that are constituted by their unique characteristics as well as their exposure to the public by the media. Through the frequent use of social media platforms, the celebrity status gets amplified and further enhances the CEO`s influence on public perception.

The above findings result in the following hypotheses:

H5: CEO trustworthiness has a positive influence on brand image.

H5a: CEO trustworthiness has a positive influence on perceived innovation.

H5b: CEO trustworthiness has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

H5c: CEO trustworthiness has a positive influence on consumer trust.

H5d: CEO trustworthiness has a positive influence on product design.

CEO innovativeness

A CEO`s ability for innovation is a key component that defines their celebrity status and influences the identity and reputation of their organization. According to research, celebrity CEOs such as Elon Musk significantly influence a company`s reputation, mainly through their popularity, innovativeness, and leadership style (Edwin & Benjamin, 2017). While Musk`s human brand in the public spotlight is notable for his behavior on social media, his mindset, and innovative projects, it develops in parallel with the companies he leads, especially Tesla and SpaceX (Lambert, 2024).

The portrayal of innovative business leaders and founders in the media, especially in movies, series, and social media, additionally contributes to shaping public attitudes and evaluations of a CEO. These depictions not only influence perceptions of CEO performance and leadership style but may also lead to the phenomenon of CEO worshipping (Fournout, 2016). By presenting CEOs as attractive and visionary figures, the media feeds into the worship of CEOs for their innovative contributions as people are increasingly transferring the feelings they develop from the media towards certain groups into the real world (Igwe et al., 2020). In addition, a culture of reverence for innovation and development is fostered by the confluence of technology and transcendental ideals (Noble, 1998). This is especially observable in the ambitious initiatives of CEOs like Elon Musk who is even compared to Tony Stark by The Guardian (Hern, 2018).

By examining consumer behavior, the psychological mechanisms behind the effect of innovative celebrity CEOs become more visible. From this point of view, the concept of worshipping these CEOs can be explained by the principles of parasocial interactions and the longing for ideals and exclusivity (Liao et al., 2021). Based on these principles, some individuals develop one-sided relationships with certain celebrity figures, in this case innovative CEOs. In practice, this means that some individuals feel a strong connection to celebrity CEOs who are involved in visionary projects and admire them based on the projected persona they have in mind. However, the CEO is not reciprocating this connection nor is he aware of it. Moreover, these individuals feel drawn to the idealized image that certain CEOs represent and seek to associate themselves with them to signal their own status and identity (Liao et al., 2021; Tsai & Men, 2016).

The above findings result in the following hypotheses:

H6: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on brand image.

H6a: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on perceived innovation.

H6b: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

H6c: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on consumer trust.

H6d: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on product design.

Impact of brand ownership

In this study, the differentiation between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers could act as a key moderator impacting the dynamics of brand image and the impact of celebrity CEOs. The consumer attitudes towards a brand might be influenced by the ownership of the respective brand. In the context of car brands, Eklund (2022) found that brand love and brand image have a mediating role between brand loyalty and experience. Existing positive experiences with Tesla could lead to stronger brand love which enhances brand loyalty. Tesla owners may therefore have a more intense attachment to the brand. Findings by Özer et al. (2022) indicate that ownership of a brand that is attached by a celebrity results in stronger brand loyalty. This loyalty among brand owners could amplify the moderation effect on the relationship between celebrity CEOs and brand image. According to Long et al. (2019), Tesla owners might additionally be influenced by the alignment and association of Tesla with Elon Musk's innovativeness and vision. This could possibly strengthen the impact of a celebrity CEO on the brand image of Tesla owners.

The above findings result in the following hypothesis:

H7: *The relationship between CEO reputation and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.*

H8: *The relationship between CEO communication and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.*

H9: *The relationship between CEO behavior and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.*

H10: *The relationship between CEO expertise and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.*

H11: *The relationship between CEO trustworthiness and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.*

H12: *The relationship between CEO innovativeness and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.*

Conceptual model

Based on the findings of the literature review, brand image can therefore be divided into the categories of perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design. To measure the impact of a celebrity CEO on brand image, the concept of a celebrity CEO can be parted into the categories of CEO reputation, CEO communication, CEO behavior, CEO expertise, CEO trustworthiness, and CEO innovativeness. The selection of the categories is based on the findings of the evaluation of previous research. For an overview of the theoretical model, refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1 – *Conceptual Model*
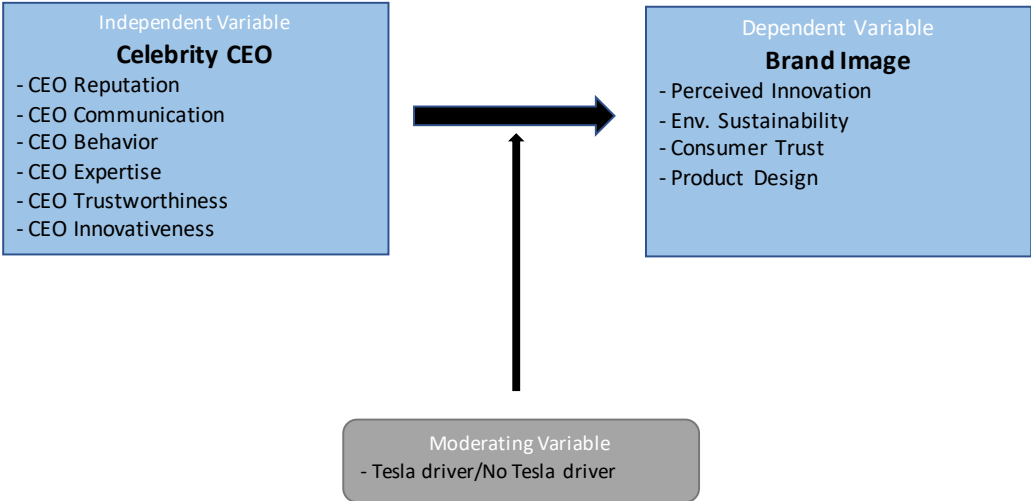
Methods

Research design

To answer the research question that examines the influence of CEO worshiping on brand image in the automotive industry and test the hypotheses, this study conducted a quantitative survey analysis. This approach is most suitable for the nature of this research as it can effectively evaluate the attitudes and opinions of respondents, allowing for in-depth analysis. Through the systematic collection of data from a vast and diverse population through surveys, conclusions may be generalized to a wider target audience (Nardi, 2005). The survey measured the perceptions of respondents regarding the influence of Elon Musk on the image of Tesla, thereby making a distinction between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers. Most of the survey items are built on constructs from earlier research on brand image. However, due to limited research on CEO worshipping, this study has developed its own scales as well.

Procedure

Before data collection could begin, ethical approval had to be obtained from the ethical committee at the University of Twente (request nr. 240769). This ensured that the use of the survey was safe for each participant and had no consequences that were psychologically harmful. At the beginning of the survey, the participants were informed about the topic and the context of the research, their complete anonymity, and the option to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time.

The survey was created using the online survey platform Qualtrics, as this is the standard at the University of Twente and has proven its value due to its ease of use and effectiveness. After the survey was finalized, it was distributed through various channels to reach as many participants as possible. These channels include the distribution of anonymous links, the use of social media channels and flyers printed with QR codes. The anonymous

links were utilized to ensure the anonymity and privacy of potential participants. LinkedIn and Instagram were used as social networks as they allow the most people to be reached. On Instagram in particular, it is possible to reach a broad audience, as a wide variety of groups are present here. In addition, QR codes were printed on creatively designed flyers in German and English. The flyers were distributed in locations that are frequented by potential electric car owners and car owners in general. Data was collected from 08.05.2024 until 26.05.2024, allowing a good amount of time for the recruitment of the participants. Within this period, the survey could be completed at any time and participants were able to pause the questionnaire to come back at another time point.

The survey was divided into different sections to ensure that each construct was adequately covered. The first section of the survey is the informed consent (Appendix A) which informs the participant about the subject of the research and his/her rights. This is followed by a section containing demographic questions about age, gender, origin, type of car, brand of car, and income. After this section, the survey focuses on examining the brand image of Tesla with statements measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". Constructs that are investigated in this section are perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design. For measuring the perception about Elon Musk, the next section measured statements about the constructs of the celebrity CEO on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". The constructs that are examined in this section are CEO reputation, CEO communication, CEO behavior, CEO expertise, CEO trustworthiness, and CEO innovativeness. In the last section of the survey, the participant is thanked for their time and given space for ideas or feedback along with an invitation to share the survey further.

Participants

This study focuses on the relationship between celebrity CEOs and brand image in the automotive industry in the context of Elon Musk and Tesla, making it crucial to include a variety of different car drivers in this research. Tesla drivers in particular might have a more informed perception of the brand which makes it essential to include this group to compare the different types of car owners. Participants were recruited through the distribution of anonymous links on Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. Additionally, QR codes were printed on flyers that were spread at parking lots, car dealers, and the University of Twente. Furthermore, Tesla drivers were also approached directly by providing them with a brief introduction to the research and asking them to complete the survey. Having both groups included in the research, it is possible to test the hypotheses and research question guiding this study. The overall purpose of choosing this sample is to investigate how the brand image of Tesla is influenced by the association with Elon Musk and how it is different between Tesla and non-Tesla drivers.

In total, 159 participants were obtained for this study. After cleaning the data and removing participants with missing values, 156 participants were remaining. Participants who took too long (longer than 35 minutes) or too little (below 1.5 minutes) to finish the survey were excluded from the analysis as well. This resulted in the final dataset with 143 respondents, comprising 82 Tesla drivers and 61 drivers of other car brands. The participants were selected in this manner to analyze the relationship between celebrity CEOs, in this context Elon Musk, and the brand image of Tesla among different types of car owners. The average age was 38 years. The distribution of genders is well balanced as 80 of the participants are male and 63 are female. Most participants are from Germany (94), followed by the Netherlands (42) and other countries (7). With 100 participants driving an electric car, there is a strong representation of this group. The remaining participants either drive a petrol

(29), a diesel (10), or a hybrid car (4). Of the 143 participants, 26 individuals earn less than 30.000€ annually, 46 earn between 30.000€ and 60.000€, 56 earn between 60.000€ and 100.000€, and 14 earn more than 100.000€. The sample is thus representing a range of different economic backgrounds and income levels. A more detailed overview can be seen in Table 1.

The diverse nature of the sample with a focus on electric car drivers and Tesla owners aligns with the objective of this study to investigate the relationship between celebrity CEO and brand image in the automotive industry.

Table 1 - *Frequencies of demographics*

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	80	55.9
Female	63	44.1
Country		
Netherlands	42	29.4
Germany	94	65.7
Other	7	4.9
Car Brand		
Tesla	82	57.3
Other	61	42.7
Car Type		
Electric	100	69.9
Hybrid	4	2.8
Diesel	10	7.0
Petrol	29	20.3

Income

Less than 30.000€	26	18.2
30.000€ - 60.000€	46	32.2
60.000€ - 100.000€	56	39.2
More than 100.000€	14	9.8

Note. N = 143

Instruments

To ensure that the survey is measuring the intended constructs, the statements and scales used in it have been carefully compiled. A large proportion of the survey items were adopted from existing and previously applied scales to increase validity and reliability. All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale with the scores "Strongly disagree" (1), "Somewhat disagree" (2), "Neither agree nor disagree" (3), "Somewhat agree" (4) and "Strongly agree" (5).

The brand image of Tesla was measured using adapted items from a scale developed by Long et al. (2019b). Existing items were modified and attributed to the constructs of perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design. The perceived innovation construct measures how participants perceive the innovation aspect of Tesla with items focusing on innovative features, technologies, and how Tesla can be differentiated from competitors. An example item of this scale is "I associate Tesla with breakthrough innovations in the automotive industry.". Environmental sustainability measures how participants assess Tesla in caring for the environment and being a sustainable brand. An example item of this scale is "I believe Tesla contributes positively to the environment.". Consumer trust measures how participants view Tesla`s ability to be transparent, ethical, and responsible in its processes. This scale includes items such as "I associate Tesla with being a

reliable brand." and "Tesla is transparent in its dealings with customers issues.". Lastly, the items measuring product design assess the participants` perception of the design and appeal of Tesla`s electric cars. An example of an item of this scale is "I view the electric cars of Tesla as elegant.".

Perceptions about Tesla`s CEO Elon Musk were measured using survey items that were partly adapted from a scale constructed by Chen & Chung (2017) and a scale constructed by Ohanian (1990). The items adapted from Chen & Chung (2017) were used to measure CEO reputation, CEO communication, and CEO behavior. The items for CEO reputation measured how participants assess Elon Musk`s persona, especially regarding how it impacts Tesla as a brand. An example of an item measuring CEO reputation is "I perceive Elon Musk as an influential and respected figure within the industry.". CEO communication measured how Elon Musk`s communication style, including transparency, effectiveness, and identity, is evaluated by the participants with items such as "Elon Musk effectively communicates Tesla`s values and vision.". Moreover, items attributed to CEO behavior focused on how participants perceived the actions and leadership of Elon Musk. An example item of this scale is "Elon Musk effectively manages challenges faced by Tesla.".

Survey items constructed by Ohanian (1990) were adopted and modified to measure CEO expertise and CEO trustworthiness. CEO expertise measured the participant`s perceptions of the industry knowledge of Elon Musk including skills and qualifications. An example item of this scale is "I perceive Elon Musk as highly skilled and qualified to lead Tesla to achieve its goals.". CEO trustworthiness assessed how participants evaluated Elon Musk regarding his honesty, commitment, and sincerity. Items such as "I trust Elon Musk`s leadership of Tesla." and "I view Elon Musk as reliable in his capacity as the CEO of Tesla." were included on this scale.

Furthermore, additional survey items were developed specifically for this study to measure CEO innovativeness. The survey items were carefully compiled through an iterative process by two social science researchers. Based on the literature review, it became apparent how CEO innovativeness plays a role in shaping the attitudes of the public. In the survey, this dimension measured participants` views on the innovative nature of Elon Musk`s role in leading Tesla and bringing creative and progressive ideas to the company. An example of an item is "Elon Musk fosters a culture of creativity and experimentation within Tesla to drive innovation forward.".

By combining existing scales that have been modified and newly developed items, the survey allows for a detailed and comprehensive examination of the relationship between brand image (Tesla) and celebrity CEO (Elon Musk). A complete overview of the survey items can be seen in Appendix B.

Scale construction

Before analyzing the collected data, reliability, and validity were assessed by first conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for each factor and its items. RStudio was used to analyze and interpret the results. EFA is a statistical strategy in which correlated variables are transformed into uncorrelated factors to reduce the dimensionality of the data and reveal underlying patterns. The correlations between the observable variables can be explained by latent factors that can be found using this approach. After the factor analysis, the reliability of the individual factors was assessed by calculating Cronbach`s alpha. A higher internal consistency of the items is indicated by higher values of the reliability coefficient of Cronbach`s alpha, which lies between zero and one. A value of 0.7 or higher suggests that the reliability is satisfactory but when interpreting the alpha, external factors and the context of the study should be considered. Table 2 shows a more detailed overview of the results.

Prior to the factor analysis and the calculation of the Cronbach alphas, the dataset was cleaned and formatted. For this purpose, the RStudio packages haven, rjson, jsonlite, dplyr, tidyr, janitor, tidyverse, psych, CTT, Lambda4, knitr and KableExtra were installed first. These packages allow cleaning and editing of the dataset and can be used to perform factor analyses, calculate the Cronbach alphas, and other data analysis functions. The first two rows of the dataset were deleted as they contained irrelevant data. In addition, rows with missing values and respondents who took longer than 35 minutes to complete the survey or less than 1.5 minutes were excluded from the analysis.

According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the four-factor model selected for the brand image variable has proven its suitability. The use of Cronbach's alpha to measure the reliability of the individual factors showed that most factors have excellent internal consistency. The alpha for the factor "Perceived Innovation" was 0.83, indicating a high degree of reliability. However, as item PI_2 "I perceive Tesla as a pioneer in introducing innovative features in its cars." had a factor loading of 0.42, it was removed from the scale, which in turn improved the Cronbach`s alpha. Factor "Environmental Sustainability" displayed high internal consistency with an alpha of 0.93. No items were removed as all of them demonstrated high relations with the underlying construct. Factor "Consumer Trust" also performed well with an alpha of 0.91 which suggests that the items of this factor are reliable to measure the intended construct. Lastly, the factor "Product Design" showed a high reliability score as well with an alpha of 0.91. These results confirm the overall validity and reliability of the brand image factors and items.

For the analysis of the celebrity CEO construct, it was first assumed that a 6-factor approach is suitable for measuring the variable. The EFA, however, resulted in a three-factor model that consists of CEO Reputation, CEO Expertise, and CEO Innovativeness. This was due to certain items not fitting the initially selected factors. Therefore, the items CC_2 "Elon

Musk's communication style and messaging resonate well with the target audience of Tesla." and CB_5 "Elon Musk effectively manages challenges faced by Tesla." were deleted from the dataset because of low factor loadings. Factor "CEO Innovativeness" reached an alpha of 0.91, showing that the items have strong internal consistency and measure the correct construct. For the factor "CEO Expertise", items CR_2 "I perceive Elon Musk as an influential and respected figure within the industry." and CR_3 "Elon Musk is committed to the success of Tesla." were added as they scored higher on this factor than on the intended one. With an alpha of 0.90, this step helped to improve the consistency of "CEO Expertise". Due to the results of the EFA, the factor "CEO Reputation" was adapted by including items from the CEO Trustworthiness, CEO Behavior, and CEO Communication scales. All these items loaded high on the same factor, enhancing the reliability for measuring the correct construct. After the incorporation of the additional items, the Cronbachs`s alpha was 0.96, indicating excellent reliability of the factor "CEO Reputation".

Due to the adjustments based on the results of the factor analysis, the hypotheses have been modified as follows:

H1: CEO reputation has a positive influence on brand image.
H1a: CEO reputation has a positive influence on perceived innovation.
H1b: CEO reputation has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.
H1c: CEO reputation has a positive influence on consumer trust.
H1d: CEO reputation has a positive influence on product design.

H2: CEO expertise has a positive influence on brand image.
H2a: CEO expertise has a positive influence on perceived innovation.
H2b: CEO expertise has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.
H2c: CEO expertise has a positive influence on consumer trust.
H2d: CEO expertise has a positive influence on product design.

H3: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on brand image.
H3a: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on perceived innovation.
H3b: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.
H3c: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on consumer trust.
H3d: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on product design.

H4: The relationship between CEO reputation and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.

H5: The relationship between CEO expertise and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.

H6: The relationship between CEO innovativeness and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.

The factor analysis enabled the factor composition of the dependent variable "brand image" to be confirmed and the independent variable "celebrity CEO" to be refined. Furthermore, there is a better understanding of the internal consistency as well as the item-level properties of each factor. The high values of Cronbach`s alpha coefficients indicated strong reliability of all factors.

Table 2 - *Alpha values*

Factor	α
Perceived Innovation	*0.83*
Env. Sustainability	0.93
Consumer Trust	0.91
Product Design	*0.91*
CEO Innovativeness	0.91
CEO Expertise	0.90
CEO Reputation	0.96

Data analysis

The data was analyzed using RStudio, a software that enables statistical computing and conducting analyses. After importing the dataset into RStudio and cleaning the data, two subsets were created to separate Tesla drivers from non-Tesla drivers. The conducted factor analyses gave valuable insights about the structure and patterns of the data which resulted in the confirmation of the predefined factors for the dependent variable and the redefinition of

the factors for the independent variable. The high values of the subsequent calculated Cronbach alpha`s confirmed the reliability and consistency of the survey items.

In the next step, descriptive statistics were computed to get insights about the participants` responses by summarizing means and standard deviations of the data. Subsequently, to compare the scores of Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers, t-tests were conducted. This was done to uncover whether there are differences in perceptions.

To test the hypotheses and research question guiding this study, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The analysis was done with the independent variables CEO reputation, CEO expertise, and CEO innovativeness as well as the demographics age, gender, income, and car type. All regression analyses were performed on the dependent variable brand image by first evaluating the effect on the variable "Brand_image", including all dimensions, and then the effects on each individual dimension, including perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design. Moreover, to test the moderating effect of being a Tesla driver, a moderation analysis was conducted.

Results

The result section first discusses the descriptive statistics, which provide valuable information about the participants` scores on each construct and allow the comparison of the groups. Subsequently, the results of the regression and moderation analyses will be presented to answer the specified hypotheses. See Appendix C for an overview of the outcomes of the hypotheses.

Descriptive statistics

The mean scores of the participants on each construct provide an overview of the differences in perception between the groups that represent the full dataset, only Tesla drivers, and only

non-Tesla drivers. Table 3 reveals significant differences in perceptions between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers by showing the respective means and standard deviations. The strong variation in means shows that Tesla drivers rate all constructs notably higher than non-Tesla drivers. Particularly favorable opinions were expressed by Tesla drivers on the brand`s perceived innovation and product design. Non-Tesla drivers were much less positive about the brand as they scored especially low on environmental sustainability and consumer trust. Comparing the subgroups, significant differences appear in the evaluation of the environmental sustainability of Tesla (3.66 vs. 2.42), consumer trust in the brand (3.70 vs. 2.59), and CEO reputation (3.78 vs. 2.64). With a difference of 1.24 between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers, environmental sustainability is the construct with the largest variation. The construct that received the most positive ratings across all groups is CEO innovativeness.

To statistically test if the scores between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers differ, a t-test was performed. The results show that the mean scores of each construct significantly differ from each other as all p-values are < .05. A p-value is a statistical metric that shows the likelihood of obtaining the observed data, or more extreme if the null hypothesis is true. A common threshold that suggests evidence to reject the null hypothesis for a specific variable is $p < .05$. Accordingly, p-values that fall above .05 are considered not significant, indicating there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

The findings indicate that Tesla drivers perceive Elon Musk and Tesla significantly more positively than non-Tesla drivers.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics – Means and Standard Deviations

Scale	All drivers	Tesla drivers	Other drivers	p-values
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	

Perceived Innovation	*3.65 (0.76)*	*3.92 (0.49)*	*3.27 (0.89)*	****p < .001*
Env. Sustainability	3.13 (0.92)	3.66 (0.61)	2.42 (0,78)	****p < .001*
Consumer Trust	3.28 (0.87)	3.79 (0.60)	2.59 (0.70)	****p < .001*
Product Design	*3.85 (0.91)*	*4.27 (0.49)*	*3.28 (1.04)*	****p < .001*
CEO Innovativeness	4.01 (0.82)	4.46 (0.48)	3.42 (0.80)	****p < .001*
CEO Expertise	3.54 (0.77)	3.77 (0.49)	3.22 (0.96)	****p < .001*
CEO Reputation	3.29 (0.86)	3.78 (0.43)	2.64 (0.85)	****p < .001*

Note. N = 143 (All drivers), N = 82 (Tesla drivers), N = 61 (Other drivers)
Constructs were measured on five-point Likert scales (1 =Strongly disagree, 5 =Strongly agree); *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Regression analyses

After the data was cleaned and the dataset was prepared and formatted, multiple regression analyses were performed. This method was chosen to deeply explore the complex relationship between the independent and dependent variable by exploring the p-values.

The regression analysis was done on the complete dataset, including the independent variables and the demographics age, gender, income, and car type. Regression analysis was done with the code "model_all_brand_image <- lm(Brand_Image_z ~ CR_mean_z + CE_mean_z + CI_mean_z + Gender + Age + Income + Tesla_Driver, data = survey_data_filtered2) summary(model_all_brand_image)". The "z" shows that the values are standardized. In addition to the summarizing variable brand image, the four dimensions perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design were analyzed separately.

The analysis showed that CEO reputation and CEO innovativeness have a significant positive effect on brand image with coefficients of 0.31 (p < 0.001) and 0.25 (p < 0.001). An increase in the perception of CEO reputation and innovativeness thus positively impacts brand image. In addition, Tesla drivers appeared to have a more positive brand image perception

compared to non-Tesla drivers with a coefficient of 0.47 (p < 0.01). The explained variance of this model was 74.05%. See Table 4 for a detailed overview of the results.

Table 4

Results of the regression analysis (dependent variable: brand image)

Intercept	All drivers
(Intercept)	-0.15
CEO Reputation	0.31***
CEO Expertise	0.03
CEO Innovativeness	0.25***
Gender	0.12
Age	0.00
Income2	-0.19
Income3	-0.10
Income4	-0.23
Tesla Driver	0.47**
R^2	0.74
F	41.85
df	132

Note. N = 143 (All drivers)
Scores represent standardized coefficients; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

For perceived innovation, CEO innovativeness and CEO expertise were significant predictors with coefficients of 0.40 (p < 0.001) and 0.24 (p < 0.05). Therefore, the evaluation of CEO innovativeness and expertise has a positive effect on the perceived innovation of a company. The car type did not appear to be a significant predictor. This model explained 46.75% of the variance in perceived innovation. See Table 5 for a detailed overview of the results.

Table 5

Results of the regression analysis (dependent variable: perceived innovation)

Intercept	All drivers
(Intercept)	-0.13
CEO Reputation	0.12
CEO Expertise	0.24*
CEO Innovativeness	0.40***
Gender	0.05
Age	0.00
Income2	0.07
Income3	0.10
Income4	-0.22
Tesla Driver	-0.09
R²	0.47
F	12.88
df	132

Note. N = 143 (All drivers)
Scores represent standardized coefficients; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

For environmental sustainability, only CEO reputation had a positive effect with a coefficient of 0.45 (p < 0.001). Thus, a higher evaluation of the reputation of a CEO increases the perceived environmental sustainability of the company. For this model, being a Tesla driver was a significant predictor as well with a coefficient of 0.59 (p < 0.01), indicating that Tesla owners view the company as more environmentally sustainable. This model explained 59,44% of the variance in this model. See Table 6 for a detailed overview of the results.

Table 6

Results of the regression analysis (dependent variable: environmental sustainability)

Intercept	All drivers
(Intercept)	-0.44
CEO Reputation	0.45***
CEO Expertise	-0.03
CEO Innovativeness	0.10
Gender	0.12
Age	0.00
Income2	-0.10
Income3	0.05
Income4	0.20
Tesla Driver	0.59**
R²	0.59
F	21.49
df	132

Note. N = 143 (All drivers)
Scores represent standardized coefficients; *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Consumer trust was significantly predicted by CEO reputation (coefficient = 0.49, $p < 0.001$) and CEO innovativeness (coefficient = 0.18, $p < 0.05$). This means that high scores on CEO reputation and CEO innovativeness lead to higher consumer trust. Moreover, being a Tesla driver also had a significant positive effect on consumer trust with a coefficient of 0.56 ($p < 0.01$). This model explained 68.04% of the variance in consumer trust. See Table 7 for a detailed overview of the results.

Table 7

Results of the regression analysis (dependent variable: consumer trust)

Intercept	All drivers
(Intercept)	-0.43*
CEO Reputation	0.49***
CEO Expertise	-0.06
CEO Innovativeness	0.18*
Gender	0.21
Age	0.00
Income2	-0.22
Income3	-0.13
Income4	-0.07
Tesla Driver	0.56**
R^2	0.59
F	31.22
df	132

Note. N = 143 (All drivers)
Scores represent standardized coefficients; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

For the dimension measuring product design, only CEO innovativeness appeared to have a significant positive effect with a coefficient of 0.32 (p < 0.01), indicating that the perceptions of the innovativeness of a CEO affect perceptions of product design. Furthermore, Tesla drivers had a more positive perception of product design than non-Tesla drivers as being a Tesla driver was a significant predictor with a coefficient of 0.84 (p < 0.001). In this model, the income of the respondents had a significant negative effect. Respondents with an income of 30.000-60.000€ rated product design significantly lower than the reference income group

with an income below 30.000€ (coefficient = -0.51, p < 0.05). In addition, respondents with

an income above 100.000€ also rated product design significantly lower (coefficient = -0.85,

p < 0.01). This model explained 54.37% of the variance in product design. See Table 8 for a

detailed overview of the results.

Table 8

Results of the regression analysis (dependent variable: product design)

Intercept	All drivers
(Intercept)	0.37
CEO Reputation	0.19
CEO Expertise	-0.04
CEO Innovativeness	0.32**
Gender	0.09
Age	-0.01
Income2	-0.51*
Income3	-0.43
Income4	-0.85**
Tesla Driver	0.84***
R^2	0.54
F	17.48
df	132

Note. N = 143 (All drivers)
Scores represent standardized coefficients; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Moderation analyses

To test the moderation hypotheses, a moderation analysis was conducted. This was done by

using interaction terms between the dimensions of the celebrity CEO construct and the

variable indicating whether the respondent is a Tesla driver or not. The model controlled for the demographic variables gender, age, and income.

The moderating effect of being a Tesla driver on the relationship between CEO reputation and brand image was not significant (coefficient = 0.04, p = 0.79). Thus, being a Tesla driver does not significantly moderate the relationship between CEO reputation and brand image, disproving H4. The relationship between CEO expertise and brand image appeared to be significantly moderated by being a Tesla driver (coefficient = 0.29, p < 0.05). Therefore, being a Tesla driver positively moderates the relationship between CEO expertise and brand image, confirming H5. For the relationship between CEO innovativeness and brand image, being a Tesla driver also appeared as a significant moderator (coefficient = -0.26, p < 0.05). As the coefficient is below zero, the interaction negatively moderates the relationship between CEO innovativeness and brand image.

Discussion

The guiding research question (RQ) of this study was: "*How may brand image in the automobile industry be affected by a celebrity CEO, particularly in the context of Elon Musk in relation to Tesla?*". For this purpose, the effect of a celebrity CEO, constructed by CEO reputation, CEO expertise, and CEO innovativeness on brand image, constructed by perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, as well as product design, was explored. In addition, the moderating effect of being a Tesla driver was assessed, adding a valuable layer of knowledge about the dynamics of brand image.

Main findings

Firstly, it is worth addressing the findings of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The latter have provided valuable insight into the structure and composition of the brand image and celebrity CEO constructs. For brand image, the EFA validated the four-factor model and

showed good reliability for the factors. These constructs are robust when it comes to capturing stakeholders' impressions of Tesla's brand image, as evidenced by the high reliability ratings for the aspects of perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust and product design.

The celebrity CEO variable yielded more intriguing findings. While it was initially assumed to measure the variable with a six-factor model, the factor analysis revealed a better fit with a three-factor model that includes CEO reputation, CEO expertise, and CEO innovativeness. The constructs CEO trustworthiness, CEO behavior, and CEO communication are perceived collectively under the umbrella of CEO reputation. This finding shows how consumers do not view these attributes as individual components but rather as joint components of the overall reputation. Moreover, it shows that the reputation of the CEO is perceived by the public in a multifaceted way, with different factors influencing public opinion differently. Studies confirm how different elements interact and influence the reputation of a CEO and the company, showing the complexity of this construct. According to Carter (2006) and Fombrun (1996), behavior is a major predictor of a CEO`s reputation and acts as the foundation of how stakeholders perceive his or her image. Research by Men (2015) indicates that communication is another key element of CEO reputation. This is further supported by Love et al. (2017) who found that the combination of CEO behavior and CEO communication shapes perceptions of CEO reputation. Lastly, trustworthiness appears to be crucial for building and maintaining a positive and strong reputation, making it part of the construct as well (Davies et al., 2004). The results of this factor analysis are valuable for this study but also for future research that aims to validly measure the reputation of a CEO.

When comparing the means of survey scores between Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers, the findings show that Tesla drivers have a more positive perception of brand image. This indicates that brand ownership highly predicts the evaluation of brand image as Tesla

drivers had higher scores across all dimensions. This is in line with existing research that points out the strong effect of brand loyalty and ownership on brand perception (Banytė et al., 2007; Eklund, 2022; Long et al., 2019b; Khalid et al., 2023). According to this study's findings, particularly the influence of Elon Musk as a celebrity CEO has an influence on brand image. The influence of celebrity attachment and endorsement on brand loyalty and perception was already indicated by earlier research (Aneiros, 2023; Özer et al., 2022; Rudeloff & Damms, 2022; Treadway et al., 2009b).

Continuing with the results of the multiple regression analysis, the independent variable celebrity CEO significantly affects the dependent variable brand image. The findings revealed that CEO reputation has a significant effect on brand image which indicates that a positive brand image can be predicted by a positive evaluation of the CEO`s reputation. H1 can thus be confirmed. Findings of previous research support this relationship by showing how the reputation of a CEO can shape the way consumers evaluate the brand or company (Gray & Balmer, 1998; Jung & Seock, 2016; Stravinskienė et al., 2021). Jung and Seock (2016) revealed how CEO reputation indeed is an important factor influencing brand perception. If the public evaluates a CEO to have a positive image, the brand they represent also appears more positive. The findings thus complement the research on CEO reputation by showing the critical role it plays in shaping the perceptions, especially in the automotive sector where identity and status play an important role (Sandu, 2015).

CEO expertise was not found to have a significant positive effect on brand image, dismissing hypothesis H2. A CEO`s expertise and knowledge thus appear not to be critical factors when it comes to the evaluation of a company. Contrary to these findings, Cummings & Knott (2016) stress the value that CEO expertise has on brand perception, particularly in combination with CEO innovativeness. According to their findings, CEOs with a lot of expertise perform better than outside CEOs who lack such expertise (Cummings & Knott,

2016). Custodio & Metzger (2012) further support this stance by finding that CEOs with strong industry knowledge and expertise have better negotiation skills, resulting in more revenue and success. It is therefore needed to further explore the reasons behind the unexpected findings. A possible explanation could be the unique persona of Elon Musk that stands out from other popular CEOs. The odd and controversial actions and statements of Musk could overshadow his expertise, resulting in a stronger effect of other factors such as his reputation.

Nevertheless, the findings show that hypothesis H3, positing the positive impact of CEO innovativeness on brand image, can be confirmed. Hence, CEOs who are perceived as innovative and progressive directly improve the image of a brand. Interestingly, this was evident for both Tesla drivers and non-Tesla drivers, highlighting the overall appeal of innovative leadership. This is consistent with literature emphasizing the value of innovation for consumers and stakeholders (Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 1992; Long et al., 2019; Octavia et al., 2021). For the automotive sector in particular, innovation and future orientation play a crucial role in shaping consumer`s brand image (Alpert & Kamins, 1994; Long et al., 2019). The findings of this study therefore add valuable insights to this relationship by highlighting the significant effect in the context of Elon Musk and Tesla.

For perceived innovation, CEO expertise and CEO innovativeness were found to be significant predictors, confirming hypotheses H2a and H3a. The interplay between CEO expertise and CEO innovation was also found to be effective in shaping the innovativeness of a brand by Cummings & Knott (2016), further supporting these hypotheses. Contrary to existing research, there was no significant effect of CEO reputation, implying that this relationship in the automotive sector is more complex (Gaines-Ross, 2020; You et al., 2020). Therefore, H1a could not be confirmed.

Environmental sustainability was solely significantly predicted by CEO reputation, confirming hypothesis H1b. Accordingly, high scores on CEO reputation led to high scores on environmental sustainability. These findings are in line with studies by Sun et al. (2023) and Walls & Berrone (2015) who also found a connection between CEO reputation and environmental sustainability. Interestingly, environmental sustainability was more positively assessed by Tesla drivers compared to non-Tesla drivers. This shows just how strong the relationship between a car brand and its consumer can be (Loureiro et al., 2017b). To explain this further, research by Homer (2008) highlights the importance of brand image over brand quality. This means that Tesla drivers with a strong brand loyalty might overlook issues connected to environmental sustainability as the quality is a less important driver. A strong brand image can therefore act as a distinguisher for quality concerns. However, CEO expertise and CEO innovativeness were found not to have a significant effect on the environmental aspect of brand image. Hypotheses H2b and H3b could not be confirmed. This might suggest that consumers link environmental sustainability to other factors than the expertise and innovativeness of a CEO. Future research could therefore investigate underlying predictors that look beyond general CEO attributes such as specific initiatives or campaigns that shape consumer perception.

Looking at consumer trust, the results indicate that CEO reputation and CEO innovativeness have a positive effect, confirming hypotheses H1c and H2c. Existing research further supports the hypotheses positing the positive influence of CEO reputation and innovation on consumer trust (Mal et al., 2018; Stravinskienė et al., 2020; Stravinskienė et al., 2021). However, the expertise of a CEO is not a significant predictor of consumer trust, disproving H3c. Hence, CEO expertise is valued less than reputation and innovativeness when it comes to trust. This is in contrast with the expectations of this study and existing literature that found evidence for the effect of CEO expertise on consumer trust (Furukawa, 2021a;

Stravinskienė et al., 2020). This unexpected outcome might be explained by the unique environment of the automotive sector where consumers may perceive the expertise and knowledge of the CEO as less visible and more technical. The emotional aspects outweigh the functional ones, connecting stronger with the reputation and innovativeness of the CEO (Febransyah, 2021; Kato, 2021).

Interestingly, only CEO innovativeness was found to have a significant positive effect on product design, confirming hypothesis H3d. This is supported by existing research that found how perceived innovativeness has a significant relationship with product design (Kaplan, 2009). Especially for a brand like Tesla, regarded as a pioneer brand, consumers value the innovativeness of the CEO and connect it to the design of the electric vehicles (Braun, 2022; Palmié et al., 2024). Innovation is known to be directly connected to aspects like creativity and design, making this result consistent with the findings of earlier research about how consumers value innovative leadership in developing unique products (Jansson, 2011; Kaplan, 2009). However, the results have shown that CEO reputation and CEO expertise are insignificant predictors of product design, disproving hypotheses H1d and H2d. Consumers might focus solely on the innovation aspect of the CEO and place less importance on the knowledge and image. This makes sense as Tesla's brand identity is strongly associated with innovation and progression (Long et al., 2019b).

Finally, for the moderation analysis, the findings show that there is no moderation effect of being a Tesla driver on the relationship between CEO reputation and brand image. This may be attributable to the uniform perception of a CEO's reputation among different groups, making it an established predictor of brand image. These results are in line with existing research that points to the robustness of reputation in the perception of a brand (Gaines-Ross, 2000; Love et al., 2017; Sandu, 2015). However, the findings revealed that there is a significant positive moderation effect of being a Tesla driver on the relationship

between CEO expertise and brand image. Compared to non-Tesla drivers, Tesla drivers appeared to perceive the expertise of Elon Musk in a way that has a stronger positive impact on brand image. This may be explained by the passion and enthusiasm of some Tesla drivers who praise and value Musk's knowledge more than non-Tesla drivers (Long et al., 2019b; Palmiè et al., 2024). In addition, this finding may also be connected to the strong brand loyalty of Tesla owners as this could influence the way certain attributes of Elon Musk are perceived (Eklund, 2022; Khalid et al., 2024). In contrast to expectations, the relationship between CEO innovativeness and brand image was found to be significantly negatively moderated by being a Tesla driver. CEO innovativeness still has a positive impact on brand image, but the effect is less strong among Tesla drivers. This might be explained due to Tesla drivers having already opted for innovation by buying a Tesla and therefore not placing too much emphasis on the CEO's innovativeness.

Practical implications

The main message of the findings of this study is that celebrity CEOs have a strong influence on various dimensions of brand image, particularly the CEO`s reputation and innovativeness. CEO reputation significantly affects environmental sustainability and consumer trust, whereas CEO innovativeness significantly affects perceived innovation, consumer trust, and product design. This knowledge is essential to understand the importance of developing an innovative and strong leadership to positively shape brand perception and trust. There are several practical implications for companies in the automotive and technology industry.

The strong impact of CEO reputation on brand perception makes it crucial for companies to develop and maintain a positive reputation for their CEOs. This could be made possible through effective and transparent communication and engagement in CSR practices. Especially companies with a celebrity CEO show how much of an influence the attributes and characteristics of a CEO can have on the attitudes of consumers. However, this also means

that companies need to act if the CEO has developed a negative reputation. In this case, there should be an effort to keep the CEO independent from the company to minimize possible destructive effects on brand image.

In addition, CEO innovativeness appeared to be a significant predictor of brand image. Companies should therefore build on the innovativeness of the CEO to positively shape the way consumers perceive the brand. In practice, this means investing in innovative and progressive leaders who bring a culture of innovation to the company. Through this decision, there will be a greater emphasis on developing unique and appealing products which leads to a more positive evaluation of perceived innovation and product design.

Most importantly, this research highlights how Tesla owners have a more positive brand perception than non-Tesla drivers. This can be used as a significant strategic advantage by fostering a loyal customer base and creating a strong connection between client and company. Companies can create such an advantage by building a unique community around the brand with exclusive offers and benefits, making the customer feel part of a group. The example of Tesla shows how owning a Tesla can make consumers feel elevated and have a higher status or identity, directly translating into a more positive brand image. Uprising companies should start by focusing on the unique selling points and communicating them to customers through regular updates on interactive platforms, newsletters, and events. Focusing on this strategy can further strengthen brand loyalty and create a dedicated customer group that simultaneously acts as a promoter in the market.

Strengths and limitations

To assess the reliability and validity of this research, it is critical to consider the strengths and limitations of the used methods. First, the strength of this study lies in the rigorous factor analyses for both the dependent and independent variable by identifying an appropriate and

fitting factor number. This accounted for the constructs to be robust and theoretically sound. Furthermore, the high Cronbach`s alphas, way above 0.7, indicate a high level of reliability and consistency. Thus, the items measured the correct and intended constructs. Lastly, the high number of Tesla drivers among the respondents made the sample highly relevant and targeted, enhancing external validity.

However, this study comes with limitations. First, the deletion of items as part of the factor analysis may have influenced the content validity. While the deletion of items improved the reliability, it may lead to a lack of representation of the constructs. In addition, the sample size could have been larger to increase the statistical power. Nevertheless, the sample included respondents that are very specific and difficult to reach, and the data collection was limited by time, making the sample size large enough for this study. Moreover, the country of residence for most of the participants was Germany or The Netherlands which limits the findings to a specific geographical region.

Second, just a few studies focused on the relationship between celebrity CEOs and brand image, making it difficult to compare the results to similar findings. This study may also be influenced by other external factors that were not accounted for in the conceptual model. This could be factors like marketing exposure, personal experiences, or education. Besides, the distinctive characteristics of Elon Musk might present a limitation to this research as his personality is quite unique and could have an influence on the findings.

While considering these limitations, this study provides insightful information about the connection between celebrity CEOs and brand image in the automotive sector. The findings emphasize the need for extensive research surpassing the limitations and posing a solid basis for future research.

Future research

Considering the findings of this study as well as the limitations, a number of guidelines for future research emerge. Firstly, a larger sample size would account for a higher statistical power and improvement of the generalizability. Future research could conduct studies encompassing several months and including multiple groups of respondents to detect patterns or structures that predict the assessment of brand image within the context of celebrity CEOs. Furthermore, there should be an investigation into the various factors outside CEO influence that may moderate the relationship between celebrity CEO and brand image. Relevant areas for further investigations would be to focus on the social media use of CEOs or the impact of education on brand perception.

Secondly, longitudinal studies could further explore the long-term effects of CEO influence on the perception of a brand by detecting changes over time and observing the development. This could also be facilitated by qualitative research methods such as focus groups to provide more detailed insights into the attitudes of consumers. Based on the results of this study, it may be valuable to explicitly explore how brand loyalty in Tesla drivers influences brand perceptions and the evaluation of Elon Musk.

Lastly, future research could look deeper into the dimensions that constitute brand image and celebrity CEO. This study summarized brand image with perceived innovation, environmental sustainability, consumer trust, and product design. The independent variable celebrity CEO was analyzed with the dimensions of CEO reputation, CEO expertise, and CEO innovativeness. However, there was still a small amount of unexplained variance left. By diving deeper into the literature about brand image and the attributes of a celebrity CEO, future research could improve the model and enhance the validity of the findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how celebrity CEOs, particularly Elon Musk, affect brand image in the automotive sector, with a focus on Tesla. The guiding research question, "*How may brand image in the automobile industry be affected by a celebrity CEO, particularly in the context of Elon Musk in relation to Tesla?*", was answered by conducting a quantitative survey analysis that collected data from Tesla and non-Tesla drivers.

The main findings of this study showed that the reputation and innovativeness of Elon Musk significantly predict the brand image of Tesla. CEO reputation and CEO innovativeness were found to have the strongest positive influence, proving the crucial role of a celebrity CEO in shaping consumer attitudes, and affecting brand image. CEO expertise, however, appeared to have no significant effect on brand image. A significant effect was only found for the dimension of perceived innovation. Moreover, the findings revealed that Tesla drivers assess Elon Musk and Tesla more positively compared to non-Tesla drivers. This insight highlights the value of brand loyalty and ownership for companies with a strong customer base. In addition, the results indicate that being a Tesla driver moderates the relationships between CEO expertise and brand image, as well as between CEO innovativeness and brand image.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the relationship between celebrity CEOs and brand image by showing evidence of how such CEOs are capable of significantly shaping perceptions on various dimensions of brand image. Adding to the phenomenon of the "Musk Effect", this study provides valuable practical recommendations for companies seeking to improve their brand image by unveiling the different factors that are prioritized by consumers. Given the significance of this area of study, future research should continue to explore the dynamics between celebrity CEOs and brand image while considering the mentioned limitations.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Informed Consent Form (English and German)

Dear participant,

-> You are able to change the language on the top right corner of this page.
-> Sie können die Sprache oben rechts auf der Seite ändern.

you are being invited to participate in an online survey on brand image of cars, more specifically of Tesla. This study is being done as part of a Bachelor thesis in Communication Science from the University of Twente (Netherlands). The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Additionally, your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. All data will be handled with care and for research purposes only. If you have questions about the study or your participation, please do not hesitate to me send me an e-mail: y.fischer@student.utwente.nl.

Thank you for your efforts and investing your time – I really appreciate it!

Kind regards,
Yannik Fischer

After reading the information above, do you understand and agree to participate in this study?

Sehr geehrte Teilnehmerin, sehr geehrter Teilnehmer,

-> You are able to change the language on the top right corner of this page.
-> Sie können die Sprache oben rechts auf der Seite ändern.

Sie werden eingeladen, an einer Online-Umfrage zum Markenimage von Autos, genauer gesagt von Tesla, teilzunehmen. Diese Studie wird im Rahmen einer Bachelorarbeit in Kommunikationswissenschaften an der Universität Twente (Niederlande) durchgeführt. Die Umfrage dauert ungefähr 10 Minuten. Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Studie ist völlig freiwillig und Sie können sie jederzeit ohne Konsequenzen abbrechen.

Darüber hinaus werden Ihre Antworten vertraulich und anonym behandelt. Alle Daten werden mit Sorgfalt und nur für Forschungszwecke behandelt. Wenn Sie Fragen zur Studie oder Ihrer Teilnahme haben, zögern Sie bitte nicht, mir eine E-Mail zu senden: y.fischer@student.utwente.nl.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Bemühungen und Ihre investierte Zeit – ich weiß das wirklich zu schätzen!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen
Yannik Fischer

Sind Sie nach dem Lesen der obigen Informationen mit der Teilnahme an dieser Studie einverstanden?

Appendix B – Survey Items

Brand Image

Perceived Innovation

1. I associate Tesla with breakthrough innovations in the automotive industry.
2. I perceive Tesla as a pioneer in introducing innovative features in its cars.
3. I frequently consider Tesla when thinking about innovative brands in the automotive industry.
4. Tesla has increased my belief that electric cars are an innovative technology.
5. I feel that Tesla's commitment to innovation sets the company apart from other automotive brands.

Environmental Sustainability

1. Tesla demonstrates a commitment to environmental sustainability.
2. I believe Tesla contributes positively to the environment.
3. I am likely to support Tesla due to its efforts in promoting sustainability.
4. By driving a Tesla, I contribute to a greener environment.
5. I associate Tesla with the image of being environmentally sustainable.

Consumer Trust

1. I am confident that Tesla acts ethically and responsibly in its operations.
2. I trust Tesla to prioritize customer satisfaction.
3. I associate Tesla with being a reliable brand.
4. Tesla is transparent in its dealings with customers issues.
5. I am likely to recommend Tesla to others based on my level of trust in the brand.

Product Design

1. I view the products of Tesla as elegant.
2. Tesla's product designs stand out from competitors in terms of both value and performance.
3. I believe Tesla's electric cars positively impress my friends and family.
4. Tesla`s product design makes electric vehicles fun to drive.
5. I associate Tesla with a modern design.

Celebrity CEO

CEO reputation

1. I perceive Elon Musk as a CEO who displays honesty.
2. I perceive Elon Musk as an influential and respected figure within the automotive industry.
3. Elon Musk is committed to the success of Tesla.

4. Elon Musk has a positive impact on the public perception of Tesla.
5. Elon Musk's proven track record enhances my confidence in his leadership role at Tesla.

CEO communication

1. Elon Musk effectively communicates Tesla`s values and vision.
2. Elon Musk's communication style and messaging resonate well with the target audience of Tesla.
3. I perceive Elon Musk's communication about Tesla`s performance as transparent.
4. Elon Musk's communication style reflects Tesla's brand identity.
5. Elon Musk's frequent communication in the media enhances my understanding of Tesla's initiatives.

CEO behavior

1. Elon Musk's behavior reflects responsibility in leading Tesla.
2. Elon Musk's decision-making is aligned with Tesla's brand values.
3. Elon Musk's leadership style at Tesla promotes a positive work culture and encourages innovation.
4. Elon Musk's public statements and actions positively influence perceptions of Tesla as a brand.
5. Elon Musk effectively manages challenges faced by Tesla.

CEO expertise

1. Elon Musk demonstrates expertise in leading Tesla based on his extensive experience and industry knowledge.
2. Elon Musk's expertise in both automotive and technology industries makes him a capable CEO for Tesla.
3. Elon Musk's track record of innovation and success exemplifies his expertise.
4. I perceive Elon Musk as highly skilled and qualified to lead Tesla to achieve its goals.
5. Elon Musk's leadership decisions and strategic vision demonstrate his deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the automotive market.

CEO trustworthiness

1. I view Elon Musk as dependable and reliable in his capacity as the CEO of Tesla.
2. I trust Elon Musk's leadership, considering him to be honest and sincere in his actions and communications.
3. Elon Musk's reputation for transparency and integrity contributes to his image as a trustworthy CEO.
4. Elon Musk's track record of fulfilling promises and commitments makes him a reliable CEO of Tesla.
5. I view Elon Musk as trustworthy, believing in his sincerity and honesty in leading Tesla forward.

CEO innovativeness

1. Tesla's innovation is constantly fueled by Elon Musk's introduction of unique and inventive concepts.
2. I respect Elon Musk for developing ground-breaking, inventive ideas that transform the car sector.
3. Elon Musk exhibits a willingness to take chances and investigate unusual methods of creativity.
4. Elon Musk fosters a culture of creativity and experimentation within Tesla to drive innovation forward.
5. Tesla's capacity to innovate and remain ahead of the competition is encouraged by Elon Musk's leadership.

Appendix C – Overview of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Confirmed	Disproved
H1: CEO reputation has a positive influence on brand image.	X	
H1a: CEO reputation has a positive influence on perceived innovation.		X
H1b: CEO reputation has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.	X	
H1c: CEO reputation has a positive influence on consumer trust.	X	
H1d: CEO reputation has a positive influence on product design.		X
H2: CEO expertise has a positive influence on brand image.		X
H2a: CEO expertise has a positive influence on perceived innovation.	X	
H2b: CEO expertise has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.		X
H2c: CEO expertise has a positive influence on consumer trust.		X
H2d: CEO expertise has a positive influence on product design.		X
H3: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on brand image.	X	
H3a: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on perceived innovation.	X	
H3b: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on environmental sustainability.		X
H3c: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on consumer trust.	X	
H3d: CEO innovativeness has a positive influence on product design.	X	

		X
H4: The relationship between CEO reputation and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.		X
H5: The relationship between CEO expertise and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.	X	
H6: The relationship between CEO innovativeness and brand image is moderated by driving a Tesla.	X	

Appendix D – Literature Search Log

The literature search was carried out exclusively on the databases Scopes, Google Scholar, and the UT Library. The search strings were carefully selected and are based on a preliminary literature review at the beginning of the dissertation. Relevant articles are the ones that were used to write this dissertation.

Date of search	Database	Search terms	Amount of hits	Relevant articles
8-3-2024	Scopus	"CEO" AND "Influence" AND "Consumer"	75	6
10-3-2024	Scopus	"Celebrity" AND "CEO"	82	5
14-3-2024	UT Library	"Brand" AND "CEO"	4.000	9
22-3-2024	Google Scholar	"Elon Musk" AND "Influence" AND "Brand"	8.300	4
27-3-2024	Google Scholar	"Elon Musk" AND "Tesla" AND "Brand" AND "Image"	3.700	3
2-4-2024	Web of Science	"Superstar" OR "Worshipping" OR "Idoliz*" AND "CEO"	15	3
4-4-2024	Google Scholar	"Celebrity CEO" AND "Impact" AND "Brand image"	89	0
9-4-2024	UT Library	"Automotive" AND "Brand image"	63	3

9-4-2024	Google Scholar	"CEO" AND "Celebrity" AND "Traits"	198	7
9-4-2024	UT Library	"CEO" AND "Media" AND ("Exposure" OR "Appearance")	1.800	4
16-4-2024	UT Library	"CEO" AND "Consumer" AND ("Relationship" OR "Influence" OR "Effect" OR "Impact")	4.200	8
19-4-2024	Google Scholar	"CEO" AND ("Communication" OR "Behavior" OR "Reputation")	14.300	6
24-4-2024	UT Library	"CEO" AND ("Expertise" OR "Innovat*" OR "Trust*") AND ("Image" OR "Perception" OR "Attitude")	2.800	13
24-4-2024	UT Library	"Celebrity" AND "CEO" AND ("Loyalty" OR "Owner*") AND ("Image" OR "Perception" OR "Attitude")	161	4
14-5-2024	UT Library	"Tesla" AND ("Environ*" OR "Sustain*") AND "Consumer" AND ("Perception" OR "Attitude" OR "Image")	46	1

Appendix E – Use of AI

During the preparation of this work the author used ChatGPT, Grammarly and DeepL to check for spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.