

# THE RECENT SAFETY INCIDENTS AT BOEING: IMPACT ON ITS REPUTATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH AIRLINES COMPANIES

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### **3. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

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BEA : Bureau d'Enquête et d'Analyse pour la sécurité de l'aviation civile (french equivalent of the NTSB)

FAA: Federal Aviation Administration (US)

ICAO: International Civil Organization

MAX: Boeing 737MAX model

MCAS: Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System

NTSB: National Transportation Safety Board (US)

777: Boeing 777 model



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## 6. INTRODUCTION

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### 6.1 Context

Boeing has occupied for a very long time a central place in the global aeronautical industry. As an innovative American giant, the company manufactures and maintains commercial aircraft, and on the other side also defense products and space systems. The company operates in more than 150 countries and its activity is situated in a business-to-business context, selling its aircraft to commercial airlines and governments (Benabbad Touirs, 2023). However, since its aircraft are used by millions of passengers around the world, Boeing's reputation relies both on industrial relationships, but also on travelers' perception of the safety and reliability of its products. In this sense, Boeing constitutes a particular case: it is a B2B company whose products are directly used by final consumers in a sector where trust and safety are essential.

This historical position was seriously challenged by the 737 MAX crisis. The crashes of Lion Air Flight 610 in October 2018 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 in March 2019 caused 346 deaths and led to the grounding of the global 737 MAX fleet (Welch, 2021; Benabbad Touirs, 2023). These disasters generated strong controversy among the public and governments and increased concerns about Boeing's safety record, particularly because of its slow response to its own failures (Welch, 2021). Existing analyses have considered the 737 MAX events as going beyond a simple technical failure, linking them to broader organizational and ethical concerns. Benabbad Touirs (2023) argues that Boeing's prioritization of economic performance and simplified pilot training influenced decisions related to the 737 MAX and the MCAS system, while its crisis management was criticized for a lack of transparency and responsibility.

More recently, Boeing has continued to face safety-related concerns, showing that the issue remains current. Beyond the 737 MAX crashes, several incidents in 2024 have been reported, including the detachment of a door plug on an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX 9, a wheel detachment, an engine fire, and renewed concerns raised by former employees and regulators (Beckers et al., 2024). These events kept Boeing at the center of public debate and revived questions about its quality control and safety culture. This concern is also supported by the FAA Expert Panel Review Report (2024), which identified weaknesses in Boeing's safety culture, safety management systems, and internal reporting processes, including a disconnect between senior management and employees, as well as confusion around safety procedures and reporting mechanisms.

Boeing's case cannot be analyzed separately from the airlines operating its aircraft. Aircraft manufacturers, airlines and passengers are closely connected, as Boeing designs and produces the aircraft, airlines integrate them into their fleets, and passengers experience them through air travel. Collings et al. (2022) show that the 737 MAX disasters also had consequences, mainly from a financial and market perspective, for airlines closely connected to Boeing, particularly those with large 737 MAX orders. This suggests that Boeing's safety issues may have implications beyond the manufacturer itself, especially in a sector where trust, safety and responsibility are shared across several actors.

### 6.2 Research motivations

From an academic perspective, existing literature shows that organizational crises can damage reputation through responsibility attribution, trust and crisis management (Coombs, 2007; Kim, 2019). However, these mechanisms remain less studied in high-risk sectors such as aviation, where reputation is closely linked to safety, technical complexity, regulation and public trust. Second, while the literature

explains how crises can affect reputation through mechanisms, less attention is given to how consumers concretely articulate these elements together such as responsibility attribution, trust, crisis response, emotions and behavioral reactions that may follow. Finally, the Boeing–airline relationship is often addressed from a commercial or inter-organizational perspective, how this relationship is potentially affected through consumers’ interpretations remains underexplored in the literature.

From a managerial perspective, this research is relevant because safety-related crises in aviation create challenges that go beyond the immediate technical incident. In this kind of sector where reputation and trust are central, managers absolutely need to understand how consumers interpret the crisis, attribute responsibility, evaluate the organization’s response, experience emotions and reassess trust. These mechanisms are essential to diagnose the nature of the crisis as perceived by consumers and to adapt the organization’s response accordingly. Such understanding is particularly important for designing appropriate crisis communication, trust-rebuilding and reputation management strategies in a sector where reputational damage can have significant consequences.

Moreover, these insights have implications for Boeing, airlines and aviation stakeholders more broadly, as consumer perceptions may influence how reputational damage is formed, maintained or extended to connected actors.

### 6.3 Problem Statement

The problem investigated in this thesis therefore lies in the uncertainty surrounding the reputational consequences of Boeing’s recent safety issues. Boeing has long occupied a central position in commercial aviation and has historically been associated with reliability, expertise and trust. However, the recurrence and visibility of recent safety-related incidents raise questions about whether consumers still perceive the company as a trustworthy aircraft manufacturer, or whether these events have durably weakened its corporate reputation.

As discussed previously, this issue is not limited to Boeing alone. Since airline companies operate Boeing aircraft and are directly visible to passengers, Boeing’s reputational difficulties may also shape the way consumers perceive the airlines connected to the manufacturer. The problem is therefore to understand how consumers interpret Boeing’s recent safety issues, furthermore, whether the resulting perceptions and reputational consequences may extend beyond the manufacturer and affect their relationships with airline companies. This leads to the following research question:

**How do Boeing’s recent safety issues impact consumers’ perceptions of Boeing’s reputation and its relationships with airline companies?**

### 6.4 Contribution

From a managerial perspective, this thesis aims to enrich current approaches to safety-related crisis management by proposing a perspective centered on the interpretative mechanisms that shape consumers’ perceptions. It seeks to provide a framework for understanding how responsibility attribution, perceived transparency, trust and organizational values qualitatively interact in consumer’s interpretation of the crisis and, ultimately, adapt their communication and response strategies accordingly in order to mitigate reputational damage. It also aims to enrich the understanding of reputational effects that may extend beyond the focal organization, notably through the principle of spillover effect (Wang et al., 2025), and influence its relationships with other actors in

its ecosystem, where reputation constitutes an important element in the development and maintenance of inter-organizational relationships.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis contributes to enrich the existing literature on corporate crises and reputation by proposing a consumer-centered perspective on crises in high-risk sectors. It contributes to a better understanding of the dynamic nature of corporate crises by exploring how different interpretations of a crisis may combine or evolve during the same crisis. It also seeks to deepen the understanding of the underlying mechanisms involved in post-crisis reputation formation by examining how these mechanisms are constructed, connected and progressively combined in consumers' reasoning to shape post-crisis reputation. Finally, it aims to enrich the literature on reputational spillover by improving the understanding of the conditions under which reputational effects may extend beyond the focal organization and affect other actors within the B2B ecosystem.

## 6.5 Approach

This thesis is composed of six main chapters, each serving a specific purpose and guiding the reader progressively through the research, starting with chapter 6 that introduces the research context, the problem investigated, the research motivations, the contributions of the study and the overall structure of the thesis.

Chapter 7 presents the literature review, focusing on brand image, corporate reputation, organizational crises, crisis communication and spillover and contagion effects in relation to Boeing's case.

Chapter 8 explains the research design, including the qualitative approach, the semi-structured interviews, the sample, the thematic analysis process and ethical considerations.

Chapter 9 presents the main findings from the interviews, structured around the principal themes and trends emerging from participants' responses, supported by selected quotations.

Chapter 10 discusses the findings in light of the literature review, with a focus on reputational deterioration, perceived crisis, the crisis response and its associated emotional and behavioral reactions, and the Boeing–airline relationship.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings, presenting the implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

## 7. LITTERATURE REVIEW

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### 7.1 Brand image and reputation

#### 7.1.1 Definitions in a B2C framework

##### *Brand Image*

From a B2C perspective, the concept of **brand image** refers to how a brand is mentally represented by consumers, that is, the set of cognitive and perceptual contents that are activated when an individual is exposed to the brand name, its logo, or its communications. A particularly structuring definition builds on an associative memory logic, according to which brand image corresponds to brand-related information as it is stored in memory in the form of associations that are accessible (Persson, 2010). In this view, brand image is not limited to a description of the product's real attributes, rather, it denotes a network of associations that shapes what the brand "evokes" and influences how consumers interpret new information, anticipate the offering's performance, and evaluate the brand under conditions of inevitably imperfect information (Persson, 2010).

This conceptualization implies that brand image should be understood as a subjective and interpretive construct: it is composed of perceived elements, but also of inferred elements, in the sense that consumers themselves construct part of the image from partial signals. Within this interpretive logic, brand image can be viewed as the set of information an individual holds about a company or brand, including not only perceptions and beliefs but also these inferences, which highlights that image functions as an interpretive "summary" rather than a simple inventory of attributes (Martenson, 2007).

It is useful to position brand image in relation to closely related notions that will be discussed subsequently, notably corporate reputation. While some contributions clearly distinguish these constructs as conceptually different categories depending on the underlying viewpoint namely internal vs. external (Brown et al., 2006), other studies portray the two notions as closely related, sometimes overlapping in their usage, or connected through broader conceptual logics and disciplinary traditions. In this respect, Chun (2005) explicitly emphasizes the field's ambiguity, which helps explain why image and reputation can appear intertwined in parts of the literature. Similarly, Martenson (2007) discusses this proximity by referring to arguments that conceptualize reputation as more cumulative and long-term, whereas image is often portrayed as more immediate.

##### *Corporate reputation*

Regarding **corporate reputation**, the literature likewise offers multiple definitions. It is generally perceived as an external evaluation of the firm. Hence a frequently cited definition that describes corporate reputation as a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects, reflecting its overall attractiveness to its main stakeholders (Chun, 2005). This emphasis on external perceptions aligns with viewpoint-based clarifications that distinguish what organizations intend to project (intended image) or what they believe others think (construed image) from what stakeholders actually think, namely reputation (Brown et al., 2006).

Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty (2006) demonstrate that existing definitions revolve around three recurring meanings: reputation as awareness, referring to the degree of recognition or familiarity that stakeholders have with a firm, reputation as assessment, referring to a collective evaluative judgment of the firm and reputation as an asset, referring to a valuable intangible resource that can generate strategic and economic benefits. Above all, the authors argue that the assessment meaning provides the most conceptually precise foundation for scholarly research, because it captures reputation as a

collective evaluative judgment rather than reducing it to simple visibility and notoriety expressed through awareness, or defining it in terms of what it may generate for the firm as an intangible asset (Barnett et al., 2006). This observation is consistent with what Chun (2005) notes, namely that the corporate reputation field remains conceptually fragmented because it developed across multiple disciplines, resulting in the terminological ambiguity previously described between reputation, identity, and image. Following this analysis, Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty (2006) propose their own definition of corporate reputation as a concept representing observers' collective judgments, grounded in evaluations of the organization's financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the firm over time.

Regarding the nature of reputation, Raithel and Schwaiger (2015) operationalize public reputation through a balanced structure combining a cognitive component, namely beliefs about the brand's capabilities, quality, reliability, and related attributes, and an affective component, such as identification with the brand and feelings of liking toward it. This reflects the idea that the public evaluates companies not only on the basis of their perceived capabilities but also through emotional appreciation and identification. These two components can complement Barnett et al.'s (2006) assessment logic by specifying that reputational judgments may incorporate both a rational and an affective dimension, rather than relying solely on performance-based beliefs. This is precisely why reputation can play a crucial role when the public relies primarily on indirect information, the affective dimension can shape corporate and brand reputation, and more broadly public opinion toward the firm, even when direct experience of the firm's products or services is limited.

These contributions therefore support a working definition according to which, in a B2C context, corporate reputation can be understood as an externally held, cumulative, and evaluative judgment about a firm or brand, formed through the interpretation of attributed corporate impacts over time and encompassing both cognitive components related to perceived competence and affective components related to likeability (Barnett et al., 2006; Raithel & Schwaiger, 2015).

### **7.1.2 B2B specificities**

In B2B contexts, brand image operates in a structurally different decision-making environment, characterized by higher stakes, repeated interactions, as well as a greater place given to uncertainty and risk in organizational purchases (Persson, 2010). In this setting, brand image tends to function as a decision-relevant synthesis, it facilitates evaluation and supplier choice under uncertainty, because the buyer often cannot fully verify quality a priori and must anticipate performance that will be revealed over time through delivery, service, and relationship management (Syed Alwi et al., 2016). This perspective also aligns with the idea that industrial branding relies heavily on rational performance indicators, which shape overall impressions of the supplier's brand and contribute to trust as well as long-term relational outcomes (Syed Alwi et al., 2016). More specifically, it distinguishes signals of "brand performance" (tangible cues related to the functioning and execution of the offering) from a more intangible "industrial brand image" (overall impression/brand associations) and shows that these perceptions are structured around the building of brand trust, a central mechanism in inter-organizational exchanges.

A central contribution to defining B2B brand image therefore consists in clarifying what this image is made of in industrial markets. One of the specificities of B2B is that what organizational buyers associate with a supplier brand tends to integrate product-related beliefs as well as associations concerning solution capability, service execution, distribution reliability, and the nature of the relationship itself (Persson, 2010). In this logic, Persson (2010) defines B2B brand image as a multidimensional structure of associations and identifies six dimensions that collectively constitute the way organizational buyers represent a supplier brand (Persson, 2010). The brand familiarity (the

degree of awareness), the solution capability (the supplier's ability), the service (the responsiveness), the distribution, the relationship and company association for overall impression.

The overall set illustrates that what the supplier evokes for the buyer is inseparable from how the organization performs throughout the exchange and is not limited to the technical characteristics of the offering (Persson, 2010). This logic is reinforced by the distinction between brand image of product aspects (**BIPA**) and brand image of service aspects (**BISA**) (Kittur, Chatterjee & Upadhyay, 2023). BIPA is rooted in a rational evaluation of product-related attributes such as quality, reliability, and performance (Kittur, Chatterjee & Upadhyay, 2023). In contrast, BISA captures the service and interaction layer, including timely support and value co-creation through supplier–buyer interactions.

This complements findings on industrial branding suggesting that buyers often process brands hierarchically: functional performance cues shape higher-level industrial brand image perceptions, which then contribute to trust and downstream relational responses (Kittur & Chatterjee, 2023). This dynamic is also linked to key relational outcomes in B2B, such as loyalty and commitment, which reinforces the idea that industrial brand image is not only a “symbolic” perception, but a construction that fits into an explanatory chain linking perceived performance, image, trust, and relationship quality over the long term.

Thus, in B2B markets, brand image can be understood as the set of associations that buyers hold about a supplier, covering what the supplier offers as a solution, how it delivers and supports the buyer, how the relationship functions in practice, as well as the overall impression related to the company (Persson, 2010). It matters particularly because it helps organizational buyers make decisions when quality cannot be fully evaluated upfront and when the supplier's performance becomes clear only over time (Persson, 2010).

Regarding brand reputation, it can be interpreted as the overall position that a supplier is assumed to have in the market, based on relatively stable beliefs shared by external observers about what the firm is and what can reasonably be expected from it (Suh & Houston, 2010). In this sense, reputation concerns the perception of a potential supplier or partner and acts as a signal even before any direct relational experience, thereby helping organizational buyers reduce uncertainty in a context of interdependence. Reputation therefore differs from trust, which is more closely tied to the relationship itself and tends to develop through repeated exchanges and a history of interactions (Suh & Houston, 2010). Reputation matters because it is closely linked to long-term relational intentions rather than to short-term satisfaction alone. A strong reputation is perceived as, and often synonymous with, higher affective commitment, meaning that buyers feel more attached to the relationship and more willing to maintain it, and, stemming from this, a higher willingness to invest resources and effort in the future of the relationship (Suh & Houston, 2010).

Tangible impressions are reflected in what is called brand performance, which includes observable indicators of how the brand executes and delivers on its promise, how well the brand performs, whereas industrial brand image captures broader and more intangible associations, and both contribute to building trust, which then supports the overall perception of the supplier and relational responses (loyalty and commitment as stated previously) (Syed Alwi et al., 2016).

### **7.1.3 Factor of Influence (Image and reputation)**

#### *Perceived performance and quality*

Perceived performance and quality are among the main anchors that enable consumers and the general public to form and evaluate an opinion about a company's capabilities and about what they

can reasonably expect from it. This point is crucial because target audiences often evaluate firms on what is considered incomplete information, therefore, through performance, they rely on observable outcomes and credible signals to infer underlying competences. This is consistent with the construction of reputation by Fombrun and Shanley, who argue that a company's reputation is built from observable signals in a competitive environment, notably through market indicators as well as accounting cues. These pieces of information allow stakeholders to judge the company or the brand based on what it has already accomplished and what is expected from it in the future, thereby making past performance and perceived quality a central factor in the formation of reputation and brand image (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Past financial performance systematically appears as a significant antecedent of corporate reputation. Indeed, according to the meta-analysis, better past financial results are generally linked to more positive reputational evaluations by stakeholders (Ali et al., 2015). This performance-based approach is also consistent with the viewpoint-based clarifications stated earlier. Because reputation is defined by what external stakeholders actually think, and not by what the company seeks to project, it logically incorporates concrete signals such as perceived quality and performance, which are often considered observable and factual indicators and relatively less controllable through managerial communication (Brown et al., 2006). Perceived performance and quality therefore function as high-credibility signals that structure both brand-related associations and broader corporate evaluations by the general public (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).

In a B2B context, the performance and perceived quality factor also remains central, however, it does not refer to the same signals. It is typically interpreted in a more technical and execution-focused way than in B2C. Brand evaluation in B2B is anchored more strongly in execution evidence that is directly relevant to the exchange, because organizational buyers are often more informed and assess suppliers through criteria that are closer to operational reality and professional standards. This implies that perceived quality tends to be grounded in more verifiable cues such as technical conformity to specifications, reliability of execution, consistency of performance, and the supplier's ability to deliver as promised over time. Furthermore, Ali et al. (2015) highlights that reputation drivers and evaluation criteria can differ across evaluator groups, with more informed audiences (e.g., industry experts or managers) relying on more concrete information than the public when forming judgments. This aligns with the industrial brand equity logic, in which brand performance precisely captures these tangible signals of "how well the brand performs", these cues then shape a more intangible impression, namely industrial brand image and brand reputation, and they primarily build brand trust (Syed Alwi et al., 2016).

#### *Media visibility and communication*

Another key factor in the construction of these two concepts is media visibility and corporate communication, because they shape what information becomes accessible and top of mind for consumers, and therefore what cues are used to form brand-related impressions when direct knowledge is limited. The news media (and specialized publications) do not merely relay what firms do, they also contribute to propagating evaluations and to making certain signals more available, easier to recall, and such that audiences' judgments are affected by the availability of information in a given domain (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). In this respect, Cheng et al. (2022) demonstrate that social media now play a crucial role in structuring interactions between organizations and their stakeholders. In times of crisis, crisis communication increasingly takes the form of a dialogue mediated by social networks rather than a simple one-way transmission of information. They also point out that social media have their own characteristics of openness, interactivity, connectivity and the communities present, making information relating to the crisis more visible, more subject to discussion and more quickly disseminated to the public.

This implies that greater visibility can influence what the public considers important, especially in highly publicized sectors, the more a company is exposed, the more information about it becomes

memorable and therefore used to judge its reputation (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Media visibility regularly appears as an antecedent of corporate reputation, but the strength of the link depends on the study context. For example, it is higher in studies conducted in the United States, notably due to the importance of uncertainty avoidance by stakeholders and the stricter regulatory environment, than in other countries, like the United Kingdom. This suggests that visibility does not operate uniformly across national environments (Ali et al., 2015). Furthermore, Cheng et al. (2022) also highlight the ambivalent role of social media in crisis communication. Indeed, on the one hand, these platforms facilitate interactions and allow organizations to respond quickly to stakeholders, but they can also threaten the reputation and legitimacy of organizations when negative information circulates widely (Cheng et al., 2022). In this sense, the impact of communication depends not only on the content of the message, but also on its relevance, its sources, and the timing of the dissemination of information about the crisis.

The visibility and communication do not translate mechanically into reputation because firms do not fully control what stakeholders retain. A key clarification is that communication often reflects what the organization *wants* others to think (intended image), whereas reputation corresponds to the perceptions stakeholders actually hold, which are shaped not only by firm messaging but also by external information sources such as the media (Brown et al., 2006). This distinction is particularly useful because it explains why different communication strategies can amplify certain associations, making them more accessible, without guaranteeing that the resulting impressions correspond exactly to management's intentions (Brown et al., 2006). This is even more important in a crisis context within a digital world, where stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to provide timely information and to emphasize the human side of the organization through social media (Cheng et al., 2022). Therefore, the visibility of communication is also evaluated based on responsiveness, tone, and relational quality.

In a B2B context, visibility and external information remain important, but they take on a more specialized form than in B2C. A supplier's "visibility" is built less through mainstream media and more through professional channels circulating among industry players, such as reputation within a given market, feedback from other companies, or signals that spread through inter-organizational networks (Suh & Houston, 2010). The supplier's reputation serves as an external benchmark, it helps buyers judge a partner even before any direct experience, making market information and professional sources particularly important in B2B (Suh & Houston, 2010).

### Lived experience

Beyond these external signals (media, communication), lived experience constitutes a direct lever in shaping image and, by extension, reputational evaluations, since consumers transform what they observe and experience into associations (perceived quality, reliability, the way of doing things) that then structure their judgments. Corporate image is conceived as the sum of information held by individuals about a company, including perceptions, beliefs, and inferences, and it influences behavioral responses such as satisfaction and loyalty when the service experience confirms (or contradicts) expectations (Martenson, 2007). This dynamic is consistent with the idea that what ultimately matters is not the firm's "objective" claims or what it intends to project, but the perceptions held by external audiences. Consumers' lived experiences and the information they encounter shape the image and reputation that stakeholders form, and these perceptions cannot be fully controlled by managerial communication but the brand can directly operate on the direct experience (Brown et al., 2006). This lived experience factor allows to situate it within a broader data framework showing that reputation is not built solely on financial indicators. In stakeholder assessments, non-financial dimensions such as the perceived quality of products and services and the fairness of the company's treatment of stakeholders are also influential, directly linked to the consumer experience. It is precisely these types of indicators that are formed through contact with the offering and interactions with the

company, and they can therefore inform both brand image associations and overall reputation judgments (Ali et al., 2015).

### Trust relationship

In the B2B sector, trust is truly central because purchasing often involves risk and interdependence, which means that buyers primarily want to be sure they can rely on the supplier over the long term. Trust therefore refers to the idea that the brand is able to keep its promises and maintain consistent product or service performance, which makes reliability and consistency of execution particularly important when selecting a partner (Syed Alwi et al., 2016). In this sense, trust is not only an outcome of favorable brand image, brand performance and reputation perceptions, but can also become a reinforcing factor that supports loyalty, commitment and the long-term stability of the inter-organizational relationship. It is built from tangible signals of brand performance, that is to say very concrete and verifiable elements related to execution but also from more intangible elements related to the industrial brand image, which includes perceptions of reliability, technicality, good management (Syed Alwi et al., 2016). It is on the basis of this trust that results such as loyalty and long-term commitment will appear to form a lasting relationship in this inter-organizational environment (Syed Alwi et al., 2016).

**Table 1 - Summary of factors influencing brand image and corporate reputation**

| Factor                                      | Mechanism                                                                                                                                                                              | B2C Dimension                                                                                                                                                                                                           | B2B Dimension                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Perceived Performance &amp; Quality</b>  | Observable signals and outcomes used to infer the firm's competence when information is incomplete. Past performance and perceived quality serve as high-credibility signals.          | Consumers rely on market signals, financial indicators and past results to evaluate overall reputation (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Ali et al., 2015).                                                                     | Organizational buyers assess technical conformity, execution reliability and consistency of delivery over time; more informed evaluators rely on concrete operational cues (Ali et al., 2015; Syed Alwi et al., 2016). |
| <b>Media Visibility &amp; Communication</b> | Media makes certain information more accessible and memorable, shaping what cues audiences use to judge the firm. Social media amplifies crisis signals and accelerates diffusion.     | Greater exposure increases information availability; social media transforms crisis communication into a two-way dialogue, amplifying both positive and negative signals (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Cheng et al., 2022). | Visibility flows through professional channels, inter-organizational networks and industry feedback rather than mainstream media; supplier reputation acts as a benchmark signal for buyers (Suh & Houston, 2010).     |
| <b>Lived Experience</b>                     | Direct contact with the offering transforms observations into associations (perceived quality, reliability) that structure judgments. Experience confirms or contradicts expectations. | Consumer experience (satisfaction, service quality, interactions) informs both brand image associations and overall reputation judgments (Martenson, 2007 ; Ali et al., 2015).                                          | Repeated interactions and delivery history progressively build or erode trust; non-financial dimensions (product quality, fairness) are as influential as financial signals (Ali et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2006).    |

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Trust</b> | Central relational mechanism that both emerges from and influences brand image and corporate reputation. Built through performance, experiences and interactions, trust shapes stakeholders' willingness to rely on the organization and acts as both an antecedent and an outcome of reputational evaluations. | Affective and cognitive dimensions of reputation shape public trust even without direct product experience; trust supports both image evaluations and broader reputational judgments (Raithel & Schwaiger, 2015). | Trust is the primary relational outcome of brand performance and image; sustains loyalty, commitment and long-term partnerships. Strong supplier reputation reduces buyer uncertainty prior to direct experience (Syed Alwi et al., 2016; Suh & Houston, 2010). |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## 7.2 Scandals and organizational crises

After having explored brand image and reputation in greater depth attention will now be directed to the other major concept of this thesis and of the research question, namely: crises and scandals.

### 7.2.1 Definitions and responsibility

In the literature, there is a wide variety of definitions of organizational crisis. It can be defined as a sudden and unforeseen event that disrupts the normal functioning of an organization and simultaneously threatens its financial situation and reputation. Events that lead stakeholders to reassess the organization or brand negatively, especially since information about the crisis is widely disseminated by traditional and online media, which amplifies its visibility and intensifies negative judgments about it (Coombs, 2007). Indeed, these crises are understood as events perceived by stakeholders as being very significant, unexpected and potentially disruptive, likely to endanger not only immediate performance, but also the long-term objectives of the organization and its relationships with key stakeholders (Bundy et al., 2017). Another component of crises is that they also involve a temporal dimension, which in turn imposes time pressure to ultimately imply an urgent decision to respond to this situation (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Within this broader category of organizational crises, scandals constitute a distinct and more specific phenomenon. A scandal is defined by the presence of a perceived transgression of social or moral norms, provoking public condemnation and calling into question the legitimacy of the organization (Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). However, the transgression itself is not sufficient to constitute a scandal. A key element is media publicity because without public exposure, norm violations may remain internal or unnoticed, whereas media attention transforms a transgressive act into a scandal by making it visible, discussable, and subject to collective judgment (Piazza & Jourdan, 2018). Media visibility therefore plays a central role as the mechanism through which wrongdoing becomes socially amplified, converting an isolated act into a reputationally damaging scandal.

In a B2B context, there are many points in common with B2C, but the nature of the relationship in the inter-organizational environment is different, which also implies differences in the perception of the crisis. The crisis retains the unexpected character, the urgency and the gravity of the threat but where it will distinguish itself is in the nature of what is threatened (Zafari et al., 2023). Where the crisis in B2C mainly has an impact on image and reputation, here is added an impact on coordination, trust, and the exchanges of resources between companies (Moi & Cabiddu, 2022). In addition, crises may be particularly severe in B2B settings because the loss of a single major client or partner can represent a

substantial amount of revenue, whereas in B2C the risk is generally spread across a much larger number of individual consumers. In that frame, the crisis is not an isolated event, but a relational situation that unfolds over time and destabilizes the modes of interaction with key partners. The crisis is not described as linear but as a succession of sub-events, which will subsequently justify a phased approach, namely: event – response – investigation. (Moi & Cabiddu, 2022).

### 7.2.2 Typologies

Just like definitions, there are many types of crises, each with its own specific characteristics and therefore requiring a tailored management approach. To start this classification, it is important to discuss the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which classifies a crisis based on its starting point, namely the attribution logic (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). From this, three clusters are defined: victim crises, accidental crises and preventable crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Kim, 2019; Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke 2010).

#### Victim crises

The first cluster is the victim crisis, which refers to a situation in which the organization is perceived as having little or no control over the event and consequently, as bearing minimal responsibility for its occurrence (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). They are generally defined by their involuntary nature, the absence of managerial fault and a low perception of preventability which clearly distinguishes them from other types of crises within the SCCT as well as on the impacts on brand reputation which are the weakest (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke 2010).

#### Accidental crises

The accidental crisis retains the involuntary nature of a negative event, however, this event is attributable to the organization but is not considered as the result of deliberate wrongdoing (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In this case, the event is generally perceived as having a moderate level of controllability and preventability: the organization may be considered responsible, but the crisis is not viewed as a conscious choice to cause harm, which positions it between victim crises and preventable crises (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke 2010). The main difference compared to the previously mentioned crisis lies in a higher level of perceived involvement and consequently, accidental crises generally pose a greater threat to reputation than victim crises (Kim, 2019).

#### Preventable crises

The last cluster focuses on preventable crises, which differ significantly from the two other types of crises mentioned previously. They represent situations in which the organization is perceived as largely responsible for the event and are characterized by intentional actions, manifest negligences, violations of laws, regulations, or ethical standards, leading stakeholders to believe that the organization could and should have avoided the situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Consequently, this kind of crisis takes the most critical position for an organization within this SCCT, which will naturally and consequently lead to the strongest deterioration of its brand reputation (Kim, 2019).

#### Creeping crises

Beyond SCCT theory, other types of crises exist, each with their own specific characteristics. One of them is the creeping crisis, which takes its name from the temporal nature of this type of crisis (Badu et al., 2023). Indeed, the distinctive feature of this type of crisis is that it does not emerge suddenly but develops gradually over time, often going unnoticed or being insufficiently addressed until its

consequences become severe. The reason these crises often go unnoticed is that, unlike classic sudden crises, there is no clear triggering event but rather a slow emergence with an ambiguous evolution, which makes them very difficult to detect and prioritize in their early stages and therefore to manage (Badu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these crises evolve through precursor elements that are visible yet fragmented, meaning that these signs exist but fail to capture the attention of decision-makers and stakeholders. As a result, creeping crises tend to persist and worsen rather than being clearly resolved and they threaten societal or organizational values which may gradually erode legitimacy or trust without generating a sense of immediate urgency (Badu et al., 2023). Managing this type of crisis proves to be very complex due to the ambiguity surrounding the allocation of responsibility by stakeholders. This leads to a discussion of the trust mechanism, which is crucial in the resolution of crisis on the same level as communication, because due to ambiguity and fragmented elements, stakeholders are only willing to pay attention to information, believe it and act in a coordinated manner if they consider the source to be credible and legitimate (Badu et al., 2023).

#### *Performance related crises – values related crises*

Another distinction to be made regarding the types of crises, is the difference between performance-related crises and values-related crises developed by Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019, two types of events that threaten brands through different psychological mechanisms. First, a performance-related crisis occurs when an organization or brand fails to fulfill its core functional promise, for example due to a product failure that makes the product potentially dangerous, or simply because the product does not meet stakeholders' expectations at all (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019). In that specific case of crisis, there is a major questioning of trust in the brand or organization regarding its competence and ability to deliver on expected promises. The values-related crisis, on the other hand, appears when the brand or organization adopts behaviors that are perceived as unethical, morally or socially unacceptable by stakeholders, such as environmental damage, lack of transparency or the use of child labor (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019). These two types of crises generate different assessments and emotional reactions, even though in both cases the reactions of stakeholders are generally motivated by negative emotions. In general, value-related crises tend to provoke deeper emotional reactions and harsher judgments than performance-related crises because this type of crisis arouses stronger moral emotions, such as anger, disgust, or outrage, as consumers perceive a violation of shared social values and ethical norms (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019). Given that the two types of crises lead to different assessments and emotional reactions, managerial responses must also differ. For performance-related crises, the measures taken are coercive and must address the perception of competence. Whereas for value-related management, the required managerial responses are the acknowledgment of mistakes that have been made and putting ethical and moral issues back at the center (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019). This distinction can also be interpreted through the lens of anti-branding.

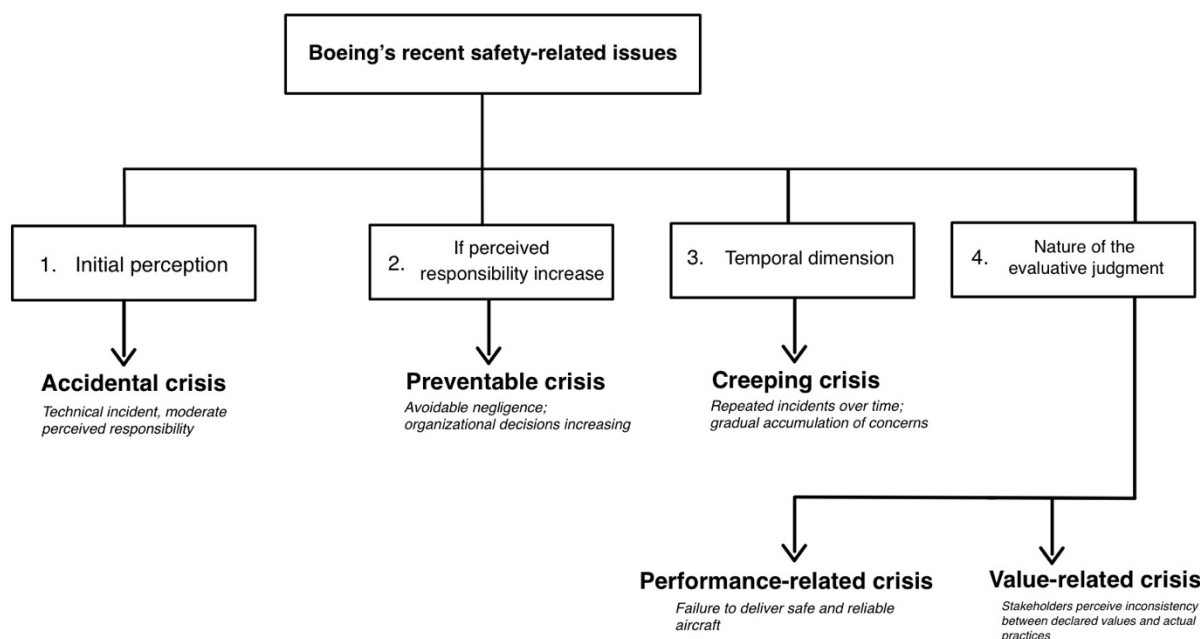
As highlighted in the anti-branding literature, negative brand responses may arise from negative past experiences, ideological incompatibility or symbolic incongruity, and can lead to behaviours such as brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth and even brand retaliation (Hegner et al., 2017). From this perspective, performance-related crises tend to reinforce rejection through dissatisfaction with the product or service itself, whereas values-related crises are more likely to activate ideological incompatibility and deeper forms of moral and symbolic rejection.

#### *Kind of crisis specific to the Boeing's case*

Boeing's recent incidents are difficult to classify into a single category, as their interpretation largely depends on how stakeholders attribute responsibility. At first glance and given the nature of the technical incidents and observed failures, they could be considered an accidental crisis. Stakeholders may attribute some responsibility to the company, while acknowledging that the events were neither

intentional nor entirely controllable beforehand, which corresponds to a moderate level of control and perceived responsibility (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010). However, this interpretation can evolve, as stakeholders become more informed about the root causes of incidents, organizational choices, or economic constraints, the crisis may shift towards a preventable crisis if Boeing is found guilty of avoidable negligence or deliberate decisions that increased risks, and therefore these events could and should have been avoided (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Furthermore, the recurrence of incidents over a prolonged period partially aligns the situation with a creeping crisis, even though a clear triggering event can be identified with the 737 MAX crisis, this logic is particularly relevant in the B2B context, where managing prolonged crises highlights the central role of trust in the relationship between aircraft manufacturers and airlines. Ultimately, the crisis initially could appear to be performance-related, as it calls into question Boeing's fundamental promise to design safe and reliable aircraft, consistent with its mission and commitments regarding safety and quality (Boeing, n.d., -a; Boeing, n.d., -b; Boeing, n.d., -c). However, it could evolve into a values-related crisis if stakeholders believe that Boeing's practices are contrary to the moral standards or values that the company claims to uphold, particularly when it declares that it prioritizes safety, quality, and integrity (Boeing, 2025).

**Figure 1 - Illustration of kind of crisis specific to Boeing**



Adapted from: Coombs & Holladay (2002), Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke (2010), Boeing (2024)

**Table 2 - Summary of crisis typologies and illustrative examples**

| Type of crisis | Short definition                                                                                                             | Concrete example                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Victim crisis  | The organization is perceived as having little or no control over the event and therefore as bearing minimal responsibility. | The disruption experienced by airlines during the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull volcanic eruption, where air traffic was severely affected by an external natural event rather than by organizational wrongdoing. (ICAO,2010) |

|                            |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accidental crisis          | The event is attributable to the organization, but it is not perceived as the result of deliberate misconduct.                           | The Air France Rio–Paris Flight 447 crash in 2009, which resulted from a combination of technical, human and operational factors. Although the event was attributable to the organizational sphere, it was not perceived as the result of deliberate wrongdoing. (BEA, 2012)                        |
| Preventable crisis         | The organization is perceived as largely responsible because the event is linked to negligence, misconduct, or avoidable failure.        | The crash of ValuJet Flight 592 in 1996, where the fire was caused by improperly transported chemical oxygen generators, making the event strongly associated with avoidable negligence. (NTSB, 1997)                                                                                               |
| Creeping crisis            | A crisis that develops gradually over time through fragmented warning signs and becomes severe because it is not addressed early enough. | The recurring Pratt & Whitney engine issue linked to powdered metal anomalies, which led over time to repeated inspections, airworthiness directives and prolonged operational disruption, thereby reflecting the gradual and cumulative nature of a creeping crisis. (Reuters, 2023)               |
| Performance-related crisis | A crisis that results from failure to deliver the expected functional or technical performance of the product or service.                | The Rolls-Royce Trent 1000 engine problem, which caused recurring technical malfunctions and durability issues on Boeing 787s, led to inspections, aircraft grounding, and flight disruptions. This type of event directly calls into question the brand's operational reliability. (Reuters, 2019) |
| Values-related crisis      | A crisis that stems from behavior perceived as unethical, socially unacceptable, or contrary to shared norms and values.                 | The Airbus bribery case, in which the company agreed to pay global penalties following allegations of bribery and regulatory misconduct, thereby triggering condemnation rooted less in product failure than in ethical and governance concerns. (U.S Department of Justice, 2020)                  |

### 7.2.3 Impact on reputation and image

As mentioned previously, the common point of all types of crises is that they all have an impact on brand image and reputation. However, the extent and nature of this impact vary depending on the type of crisis the organization is facing. Beyond the immediate disruption, crises trigger a reputational assessment process, during which stakeholders re-evaluate not only the events that occurred, but also what the organization represents. The various crises tend to damage reputation and brand image, but this relationship tends to be indirect (Kim, 2019). Indeed, according to Kim (2019), in Situational Crisis Theory (SCCT), the crisis primarily influences stakeholder assessments by acting on key psychological mechanisms such as responsibility and trust, which then determine the judgments made about reputation after the crisis. As mentioned earlier, the type of crisis is important because it determines how the public interprets the event, and the fundamental principle of SCCT is that the higher the responsibility attributed to the organization, the greater the threat to its reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010; Kim, 2019). This is why Coombs & Holladay (2002) empirically demonstrate that there is a negative relationship between perceived responsibility of a crisis and organizational reputation, and that reputation is particularly threatened when crises are perceived as preventable, compared to victim crises or accidental crises.

The literature, through Baghi & Gabrielli (2019), also highlights that the emotional and moral evaluations of stakeholders influence reputation as much as responsibility. This is why value-related crises, which tend to elicit stronger moral emotions and harsher judgments than performance-related crises, intensify negative reputation assessments. However, this reputational and image damage can be mitigated by the mechanism of empathy, which appears to be just as important as the other mechanisms mentioned previously. Indeed, Schoofs et al. (2019) distinguish two forms of empathy: cognitive empathy, which refers to the intellectual understanding of stakeholders' feelings, and affective empathy, which consists of expressing and sharing emotions in response to their experiences. Both forms of empathy significantly reduce reputational damage, with affective empathy playing a distinctly more decisive role, while cognitive empathy has a more limited effect.

Since reputational damage is closely linked to stakeholder interpretations, according to Benoit (1997), one means can be seen as an image restoration effort aimed at correcting perceptions after damage to the organization's image and reputation: crisis communication.

#### 7.2.4 Communication theories

In the SCCT logic, it is crucial to determine the type of crisis the company is facing, as this assessment will determine the implementation of various communication strategies. Indeed, SCCT is based on a principle of adequacy, meaning that response strategies must be aligned with the type of crisis the company is facing and therefore with the perceived level of responsibility (Coombs, 2007). According to Claeys, Cauberghe and Vyncke (2010), SCCT groups response strategies into three main categories: **denial** strategies that deny the existence of a crisis as well as any responsibility, **diminish** strategies that minimize both the severity of the crisis and the organization's responsibility, and finally **rebuild** strategies that accept responsibility for the crisis and seek to provide sincere solutions to repair the damage. These three categories can in turn be linked to the levels of responsibility defined by Coombs and Holladay (2002). A crisis involving low responsibility will therefore be associated with a defensive strategy including denial strategies, a moderate level of responsibility will call for a diminish strategy including partial apologies or attempts at explanation, and finally an organization facing a crisis with high responsibility will adopt rebuild strategies. This principle of alignment is necessary because, for example, an overly defensive response in a situation of high responsibility (or an excessively conciliatory response in a situation of low responsibility) may prove counterproductive and deteriorate stakeholders' evaluations (Coombs, 2007). Following this and based on their results, Claeys, Cauberghe and Vyncke (2010) conclude that rebuild strategies tend to produce more positive reputational outcomes than more defensive approaches, which confirm that accepting responsibility and implementing more robust corrective measures are often better perceived when the crisis is severe.

Among other crisis communication theories, there is Image Repair Theory developed by Benoit (1997), which proposes a broader typology of response options but remains quite similar to what is explained in SCCT, as it is also based on the principle that threats to image depend primarily on the public's perception of the organization's responsibility. Five categories of responses are identified, corresponding to the level of responsibility or offensiveness of the act: denial, the evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective actions and mortification, that is, apologies and full acceptance of responsibility (Benoit, 1997).

Along the same lines as mortification, regarding the presence or absence of apologies, based on their results, Verhoeven and Van Hoof (2012) conclude that this is not a strategy with major effects on outcomes and therefore that apologies do not represent a miraculous or automatic solution for reputation. By contrast, another more subtle and more effective mechanism, which has already been mentioned earlier, is empathy as developed by Schoofs et al. (2019), in which a distinction is made between cognitive and affective empathy, which tend to moderate reputational impact with an

advantage for affective empathy. Another mechanism that has already been discussed is trust, which makes it possible to navigate crises with high temporal complexity. In this context, Badu et al. (2023) proposes a typology of four crisis management contexts based on the interaction between the level of trust and communication. The first is **controllable crisis management**, which is characterized by a high level of trust and a similarly high level of communication, allowing for easy understanding, acceptance, and coordination of crisis responses. Second, **uncertain crisis management** corresponds to a situation in which trust remains at a high level but communication is insufficient or imprecise, which increases ambiguity and complicates the collective understanding of the situation. Then, **complex crisis management** appears when communication is relatively effective but trust in crisis managers is low, which leads stakeholders to question their intentions as well as their acceptance of the responses proposed by the organization. Finally, **uncontrollable crisis management** represents the least favorable configuration within this typology. Indeed, it is associated with very low levels of trust and communication, which leads to incomplete interpretations of the situation and coordination problems that will cause difficulties in managing the crisis (Badu et al., 2023).

### 7.3 Impact of the crisis and reputational effects

#### 7.3.1 Formation of public perception

Following Baghi & Gabrielli's (2019) distinction between performance-related crises and values-related crises, Sohn and Lariscy (2014) propose a similar conceptualization, distinguishing between corporate ability (CA) crises and corporate social responsibility (CSR) crises. The formation of perception, for these four types of crises, lies in the fact that there is an activation of distinct cognitive patterns in information processing via biases that are also different. Individuals tend to give more weight to positive information regarding traits related to competence, which is referred to as the *positivity bias*. In contrast, when it comes to morality-related traits, they tend to give more weight to negative information, which is therefore more decisive, this is known as the *negativity bias* (Sohn & Lariscy, 2014). It is therefore through this negativity bias that, when a crisis is interpreted as being related to a CSR dimension, negative information is perceived as revealing a deep lack of integrity and consequently leads to more negative evaluations than in CA crises, where failure may be perceived as circumstantial or less indicative of the organization's true nature (Sohn & Lariscy, 2014). This logic primarily explains why these types of crises are more difficult to neutralize but another explanation can be found in the Halo Effect principle. Indeed, the halo effect is based on the idea that a good pre-existing reputation for a brand acts as a partial shield against crises. However, Sohn and Lariscy (2014) demonstrate that this effect only holds in the context of performance-related crises and disappears in cases of crises related to morality and values. Indeed, the initial perceptual filter suggests that when a brand is involved in this type of crisis, negative information dominates cognitive processing and tends to neutralize previously held positive signals.

Perception is also shaped by the interpretive framework within which the crisis is presented. In this sense, Nijkraake et al. (2015) demonstrate that the crisis is first and foremost an object framed by different actors. Several frameworks are developed by Nijkraake et al. (2015): human interest, responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, and finally, morality. Empirically, Nijkraake et al. (2015) emphasize that organizational communication (mostly press releases) is primarily and overwhelmingly structured around the human-interest frame, accounting for 96% of press releases. While the coverage activates more conflict frames, responsibility frames, economic consequence frames, or even the morality frame, which hardens and complicates the reading of the crisis itself. In this sense, the media have an attributed role as the final arbiter of interpretative frames, judged and perceived as more credible than the company's direct communication. In addition to the content, Nijkraake et al. (2015) highlight the tone used by the actors. In the media space, it is associated with a

more negative tone than that used by the organization, which is judged to be more neutral. This is due to the frames used by the media, especially conflict and responsibility frames, which reinforce the accusatory nature of a crisis.

Another component of public perception is the emotional reactions triggered by the crisis, especially when the latter is interpreted as a moral transgression. Indeed, Shim et al. (2021) study anger as a form of moral outrage that intervenes in the way publics attribute responsibility and that is defined as indignation in response to the violation of fundamental norms. Shim et al. (2021) draw on Moral Foundations Theory, which distinguishes between two types of moral foundations. The first is *individualizing moral foundations*, characterized by principles focused on the protection and well-being of individuals, including respect for others by avoiding harming them, as well as fair treatment. The other major type is the *binding moral foundations*, more focused on group cohesion and order within the collective, including loyalty, authority, and respect. What is important is that Shim et al. (2021) indicate that individualizing foundations are more strongly correlated with the attribution of blame and with anger toward a brand or organization. This means that when a crisis is perceived as causing harm or a lack of fairness/injustice, it automatically and directly triggers a negative moral judgment (Shim et al., 2021). Whereas the binding foundations are less linked to cognitive blame but may nevertheless amplify emotional reactions depending on the context. In this sense, anger is not merely a secondary affective reaction, but becomes a structuring mechanism of evaluation (Shim et al., 2021). In this context, it is crucial for the organization that its communication is perceived as consistent with its actions. Indeed, when the statements made by the company do not correspond to the observed behaviors, publics may interpret this gap as hypocrisy, which influences perception (Shim & Yang, 2016). Perceived hypocrisy is defined as the impression that an organization adopts socially responsible discourse that does not correspond to its actual practices, and the occurrence of a crisis, combined with an unfavorable reputation or a weak CSR history, significantly increases this perception of hypocrisy (Shim & Yang, 2016). This perceived hypocrisy then makes it possible to condition the formation of attitudes toward the organization (Shim & Yang, 2016).

### **7.3.2 Potential reactions and behaviors**

The perception of the crisis does not remain merely something intellectual or intangible but can translate into tangible and observable reactions and actions, as well as concrete behaviors toward a brand or organization. These actions can be diverse, taking the form of sanctions that are both ideological and economic.

One of the most well-known, and which is developed by Shim et al. (2021), is the boycott. Indeed, when a crisis is perceived as morally problematic, publics may go so far as to develop boycott intentions (Shim et al., 2021). When individuals attribute blame to the company, this attribution activates moral anger which becomes the main driver of boycott intention (Shim et al., 2021). In their results, they even show that anger is a robust and consistent predictor of boycott and also that moral dispositions condition the likelihood of this boycott. The individualizing moral foundations, being more strongly linked to blame and to feelings of anger, promote boycott because they reinforce these two variables, their effects on boycott are thus mediated by these two mechanisms (Shim et al., 2021). In short, when the crisis is perceived as causing harm to a person or as an injustice, for example, the likelihood of behavioral sanctions such as boycott increases significantly. On the other hand, binding moral foundations, due to their less evident link with blame, produce more ambivalent effects on boycott, which is mainly influenced by anger (Shim et al., 2021). In specific contexts, they may even exert a direct inhibiting effect on boycott, when the latter is perceived as a behavior that disrupts social order and thus goes against these moral foundations (Shim et al., 2021). An example could be a crisis involving an emblematic national company, some individuals may feel loyalty and attachment to the company as part of the national group and consider, through the action of a boycott, this could harm

the economy or the nation. However, in other contexts, when moral anger is very active, these same foundations may, on the contrary, reinforce the sanction (Shim et al., 2021). It is for these reasons that boycott is based above all on a more emotional than cognitive dynamic, anger being the main lever for moving to sanction, while the cognitive dimension (blame) plays a preparatory role but is not sufficient on its own (Shim et al., 2021).

Post-crisis or in-crisis behaviors are not limited to emotional expressions. In the case of United Airlines analyzed by Varma (2021), the viral spread of the video showing the forced removal of a passenger triggered massive outrage, which was quickly amplified by the media and social networks. This collective indignation constitutes a first form of reaction. Varma (2021) emphasizes that the pressure exerted by the public leads to an explicit demand for accountability and results in concrete actions on the part of the company concerned. They are led to issue public apologies, to offer financial compensation, and, in the case of United, to announce structural changes to their internal policies (Varma, 2021). The public reaction therefore takes the form of a normative demand for reparation and organizational transformation. Actions may also be of an economic nature, the negative perception generated by the crisis influences investor behavior, as they reassess the credibility and stability of the organization.

To pursue with financial sanctions, Akyildirim et al. (2025) observe that events that affect reputation, particularly in the aviation sector, lead to immediate negative abnormal returns, meaning that stock returns that are lower than those that would have been expected given normal market conditions. The publication of negative information related to reputation, triggers a rapid reaction from investors who reassess the value of the company downward. In their study, Akyildirim et al. (2025) show that this reaction is not homogeneous, events judged to be severe and of a new nature generate more persistent declines, whereas companies already accustomed to scandals may face a form of partial market desensitization. Moreover, as previously stated, strong media exposure of events produces more lasting effects over time (Akyildirim et al., 2025). The novelty and intensity of the event are not the only elements that make the consequences vary, reactions are all the more negative when there is a social or governance dimension, perceived as indicators of organizational failure (Akyildirim et al., 2025). Similarly, during periods of recession, the effects are amplified, stock market reactions become more negative, as investors grow more sensitive to reputational risks, thereby intensifying the decline in returns. However, the company does not bear these impacts alone. There is what is called a sectoral contagion effect, whereby an event affecting one company can lead to similar effects on other actors in the same sector (Akyildirim et al., 2025).

In the same logic as the contagion effect mentioned earlier, there is the spillover effect in the B2B environment, defined by Wang et al. (2025). Negative publicity related to a crisis affecting one company can impact organizations that are linked to it, even if they are not directly involved in the crisis, because stakeholders may perceive inter-organizational ties as signs of association and shared legitimacy and as a result, negative publicity affecting one firm can also cast doubt on the credibility, judgment, or reliability of its partners (Wang et al., 2025). Therefore, the crisis becomes a factor of systemic vulnerability, capable of altering business relationships and the economic stability of a network of firms. Moreover, Wang et al. (2025) show that negative media coverage acts as an informational signal likely to alter the perception of a firm's legitimacy. It concretely leads certain stakeholders to reassess their willingness to maintain or initiate business relationships with the company concerned, thereby reflecting a loss of organizational trust.



## 8. RESEARCH DESIGN

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### 8.1 Research approach

This study is centered on understanding how recent safety issues at Boeing affect and shape public perception of the company, particularly its reputation. The objective of this research does not lie in measuring attitudes statistically. It aims instead to gain an in-depth understanding of how individuals interpret these events, the meanings they assign to them, and how they express their judgments, impressions, and reactions. In this sense, the study is concerned with subjective evaluations, nuanced interpretations, and emotionally charged perceptions, all of which are complex dimensions that cannot easily be reduced to simple standardized indicators.

For these reasons, a **qualitative research** approach was selected. One of these definitions is proposed by Malhotra et al. (2017), who define qualitative research as “an unstructured, primarily exploratory design based on small samples, intended to provide depth, insight and understanding.” This definition is particularly relevant to this study, whose objective is precisely to select a limited number of participants and to explore in depth their perceptions of Boeing and their interpretations of the recent events surrounding it. In a similar vein, Malhotra et al. argue that qualitative research aims « to explore and understand the nature and interrelationships of marketing phenomena (...) the data collected are analyzed through an explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of consumer actions. » This perspective is equally relevant to the present study, above all in order to gain a deeper understanding and interpretation of how these opinions are formed and shaped, more specifically through the role played by perceptions of responsibility and safety, emotional reactions, and broader judgments about the company.

For all these reasons, conducting qualitative interviews appears to be the most appropriate methodological approach. A purely quantitative study based on a questionnaire would not have made it possible to capture the reasoning underlying respondents' views. Qualitative interviews allow for a deeper exploration of how participants construct their evaluations of Boeing, attribute responsibility, and the consequences of the recent incidents. The objective is not to determine statistically how Boeing's reputation has been affected, but rather to understand how consumers interpret these events and how the underlying mechanisms shape their perceptions and, ultimately, their evaluation of Boeing's reputation.

### 8.2 Data collection

As a qualitative approach was chosen to conduct this research, in-depth interviews were privileged at the data collection stage. They are defined as “an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single participant is probed by an experienced interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic” according to Malhotra et al. (2017), which is compatible with the objective of the study. Indeed, this method is particularly well suited to a study aimed at exploring respondents' opinions, but also the impressions and interpretations they develop in response to the recent issues affecting the company. The purpose of the interviews is precisely to access the meanings respondents attribute to the recent events involving Boeing, the beliefs they develop about the company, and the feelings that accompany these perceptions. The in-depth nature of these interviews makes them especially appropriate for gathering this type of information.

More specifically, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, as they rely on the use of an interview guide composed of open-ended questions. Its role is to provide a clear guiding structure for

the interview and to ensure that the main themes identified in the literature review are covered, while at the same time allowing participants sufficient freedom of expression. In this sense, the guide is not intended to function as a rigid questionnaire, but rather as a tool to support the discussion, helping to facilitate the interview and maintain its overall coherence. The questions were deliberately formulated in a relatively broad and non-intrusive manner to encourage participants to express themselves freely, to develop their reasoning, and to provide additional opinions or ideas.

Moreover, all interviews were conducted in accordance with participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were informed that the interviews were conducted for strictly academic purposes and that their responses would remain anonymous within the thesis. With participants' prior consent, the interviews were recorded in order to ensure more accurate transcription. These recordings were essential for the subsequent data analysis, as they allowed participants' responses to be captured in a reliable and detailed manner, while also enabling the interviewer to remain fully attentive during the discussion rather than focusing primarily on notetaking.

The topics addressed in these interviews are as follows, many of which echo those already discussed in the literature review:

- A profiling section aimed at understanding the respondent's relationship with air travel and, more broadly, with the aviation sector.
- The respondent's general perception of Boeing *before* addressing the recent incidents, with the aim of capturing an initial impression of the company without immediately activating the crisis context.
- The respondent's knowledge of and exposure to Boeing's recent safety issues, particularly the way in which these events were remembered to introduce the next topic.
- The perception of the company *following* the incidents, thereby enabling an analysis of whether and how respondents' judgments have evolved.
- The interpretation of the crisis, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of how respondents categorized the nature of the events and attributed responsibility.
- Emotional reactions and the perceived appropriateness of Boeing's response, thereby making it possible to explore both respondents' feelings and their views regarding the relevance of the company's communication.
- Behavioral reactions and the potential impact on airlines, with the aim of identifying more tangible consequences.

### 8.3 Sampling process and size

To conduct this study, 14 participants were interviewed. Given the qualitative nature of the research, the sample size remains relatively small, as the emphasis is placed on depth of understanding rather than on statistical generalization (Malhotra et al., 2017). The objective is not to obtain a statistically representative sample, but rather to recruit participants capable of providing rich, relevant, and meaningful insights in relation to the research question. Consistent with the qualitative nature of the study, greater importance is therefore attached to the depth, nuance, and relevance of the data collected than to the statistical representativeness of the sample.

The sample is composed mainly of members of the general public, with just a small proportion made up of aviation professionals due to the sensitive nature of the topic, thereby providing a limited B2B participation. Participants were required to meet specific criteria, namely, to be frequent air travelers and to demonstrate at least a minimum level of interest in aviation and the airline industry. In this respect, the sampling strategy initially followed a purposive logic (Malhotra et al., 2017), as participants

were selected because they were considered relevant to the study and capable of providing meaningful and relevant insights. In order to recruit participants, the process also relied on convenience sampling (Malhotra et al., 2017), a technique aimed at forming a sample of relevant participants, with the selection being largely determined by the researcher. In practical terms, a call for participants was disseminated across various social media platforms in order to reach as many individuals as possible who were likely to meet the required criteria. In addition, posts were also shared on aviation-related groups and forums with the aim of targeting a more specific audience whose profile was considered particularly relevant to the study. This approach made it possible to broaden the recruitment process while also directing it toward participants more likely to provide useful and meaningful insights in relation to the research topic. In parallel, a number of professionals were contacted directly via email. However, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, they account for only a very limited proportion of the sample.

At the end of each individual interview, participants were invited to share the call for participation with other potentially relevant individuals within their network. This helped to increase the visibility of the study without requiring any additional content to be published. This process corresponds to snowball sampling (Malhotra et al., 2017), whereby subsequent participants are identified on the basis of recommendations made by the initial respondents, thus allowing word of mouth to operate naturally.

## 8.4 Data analysis

The data collected through the individual interviews were analyzed through **thematic analysis** (Malhotra et al., 2017), which makes it possible to identify recurring patterns in respondents' discourse while preserving its depth and nuance. Once the interviews have been conducted, they were first transcribed in order to establish a reliable textual basis for the analysis. It made it possible to identify recurring themes and shared ideas and emerging tendencies, group them into common categories, and interpret them in light of the concepts developed in the literature review in the discussion chapter.

## 8.5 Ethics

Before each interview, participants were informed that the discussion would be conducted exclusively for academic purposes within the framework of this thesis. They were also clearly informed about the general objective of the research, the subject of the study, and the way in which their responses would be used in this research.

In addition, all participants were informed that their anonymity and the confidentiality of their data would be fully respected. None of their names will appear in the research, and all data will be handled in accordance with the general data protection principles in the academic context of the University of Liège and HEC Liège. The aim is to guarantee respondents the possibility to express themselves freely, without fearing that their identity could later be disclosed or associated with their statements.

As mentioned previously, participants' consent was requested before any audio recording of the interview took place. However, participants were also informed of their right to refuse the recording and that, in such a case, the interview would be conducted under conditions adapted to their preferences. Participation therefore remained entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to choose the conditions under which they felt most comfortable taking part in the research.



## 9. RESULTS

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This chapter presents the main findings emerging from the thematic analysis of the interviews. In total, fourteen participants were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in French, either face-to-face or through videoconference, and lasted on average around 25 minutes.

The analysis is based on the interview transcriptions ([Appendix 2](#)), which were examined to identify recurring patterns and relevant differences between participants (illustrated in [Appendix 3](#)). This process led to the identification of six main analytical themes. While the interview guide ([Appendix 1](#)) provided the initial structure for the analysis, the final themes were refined and organized through an iterative examination of the data. The results section presents the main patterns and tendencies that emerged across the interviews, supported by selected quotations from participants.

### 9.1 Initial perception of Boeing

The first theme addressed during the interviews was the participants' perception of Boeing, more specifically their perception before discussing the different incidents. This made it possible to understand their initial view of the company without directly influencing them toward the recent difficulties faced by Boeing in recent years. A first trend that emerged was **that Boeing was perceived as a historic and trusted leader in aviation**.

This initial perception can be explained by Boeing's brand image and reputation, which were strongly present and perceived positively by most participants. In terms of image, Boeing was spontaneously associated with a flagship of American industry, and more broadly, in aviation itself. The company was linked to its history, its position as a global leader, and an image of innovation, pioneering spirit in the sector, and also safety. Its reputation, built through its history and size, was also associated with seriousness, reliability, and experience. Several participants therefore seemed to connect Boeing's size and long-standing presence with an initial form of trust, even when this trust was not based on an in-depth technical knowledge of the company's internal processes, as one participant explains:

*"When considering Boeing as a company from its beginnings, it can be said that it is a company that inspires trust." P9*

The company was first perceived as a major and well-established player in the aviation sector, which gave it a symbolic foundation and a strong reputation before the recent incidents were discussed. Several extracts illustrate this dominant initial perception:

*"A company of such size and with such a reputation (...) is a historic company that is deeply rooted in the history of aviation." P2*

*"The first thing that comes to mind is that it is one of the world leaders in aircraft manufacturing, alongside Airbus." P12*

*"Serious and reliable, I think yes (...) it is, after all, a large, historic company" P6*

*"Before, Boeing really had a strong image of innovation and safety." P11*

However, this positive initial perception was not always presented as entirely stable or unquestioned. Several participants also immediately associated the company with its recent crisis and the different

safety-related incidents. In this sense, the initial perception was also marked by a **tension between legacy and crisis**. Indeed, the company remained recognized for its history, its size, and therefore its past reputation, but this symbolic legacy was counterbalanced by more recent concerns about the brand. Respect for Boeing's past therefore coexisted with doubts, criticism, or unease regarding the company's recent trajectory, already revealing a more ambivalent initial image. Several extracts illustrate this:

*"In terms of aircraft, Boeing has proven in the past that it could produce high-quality and reliable planes. Now, however, things seem a bit more complicated, and as for being serious, I don't think it always is, at least when it comes to safety."P7*

*"On the one hand, a historic and powerful company, and on the other, a company that has recently severely damaged its reputation."P12*

*"There is still respect for its history, but there is much less respect for the company itself and its recent decisions." P14*

## 9.2 Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's incidents

As stated in the previous overarching theme, Boeing initially benefited from a strong historical image and reputation. However, the final trend already showed that a shift in perception had begun to emerge even before the discussion of the different incidents involving Boeing. This shift was then confirmed for most participants following the exchanges about these incidents. A transition can be observed **from historical legitimacy toward a more negative image, reputation, and trust placed in the company**.

For several participants, their initial perception evolved. Indeed, Boeing's historical, expert, and innovative image gave way to associations with safety issues, accidents, and internal failures. This led to an altered view of the company, now considered and described as less reliable, less serious, or less rigorous than before. Boeing's historical legitimacy did not disappear, but it was no longer sufficient to maintain the same positive perception. This change was also reflected in an erosion of the initial trust placed in the company. Boeing's status no longer inspired the same level of confidence as before, and the perception therefore became more cautious, more critical, and marked by a significantly lower level of trust. Several extracts illustrate this point of view:

*"Today, when I hear the name Boeing, I immediately think of the recent safety issues, whereas before, that was not the case at all." P12*

*"I admit that I have a little less confidence in Boeing aircraft than before, especially regarding issues of reliability, internal management, and safety, particularly on the more recent models." P3*

*"Given the events that have occurred recently, it no longer really inspires much confidence in me."P4*

*"With the latest events that have happened in recent years, I think that, from this point of view, it has quite significantly damaged the image and perception I have of Boeing."P2*

However, this change was not equally strong among all participants. A small number of participants reported little or no real change. For them, the recent difficulties were acknowledged, but did not fundamentally alter Boeing's brand image and reputation, as illustrated by the following participant:

*"No, my opinion has not really changed. I still believe that Boeing remains a very important and historic company in aviation, even though the past few years have been a bit more complicated, I would say. It could have happened to any other manufacturer." P8*

This erosion of trust persisted over time for several participants, eventually turning into **persistent distrust** toward Boeing. The recurrence and unfolding of the incidents generated erosion of trust, then some doubts, which then developed into feelings of distrust and uncertainty about Boeing's ability to fully prevent future problems, even when some participants acknowledged that technical corrections had probably been made. Several extracts illustrate this point:

*"In fact, as soon as Boeing says something, I no longer take their word for it. There is no longer any trust in Boeing." P10*

*"Given the mistakes Boeing has made in the past, there is nothing that can tell me that things have truly improved." P11*

*"If it is no longer that aircraft, the 737 MAX, then why not the others? It becomes a vicious circle. You doubt everything. You doubt the manufacturer." P13*

*"I tell myself that just because they managed to find a solution to that specific problem, it does not mean that other problems will not arise" P1*

Within this broader shift, the **737 MAX emerged as a central memory** in the way several participants referred to Boeing's recent safety problems. It was often cited as the main reference point through which participants remembered and understood the company's recent difficulties. They associated this aircraft with the two crashes, the MCAS system, design problems, insufficient pilot training, more broadly, the idea that safety-related issues had not been properly managed and that mistakes had been made. The 737 MAX therefore became a strong post-incident association linked to Boeing's image, while also shaping participants' evaluation of the company's seriousness, reliability, and credibility after the accidents. A few examples of extracts that illustrates this central position:

*"The most serious issue by far is what caused the crash of the two 737 MAX aircraft in 2018" P5*

*"Myself, it's the Boeing 737 MAX. It traumatized me." P6*

*"The most striking point concerns the MCAS system installed on the 737 MAX aircraft, which led to the loss of hundreds of lives and had design flaws." P3*

### 9.3 Interpretation of the crisis

This reference to the 737 MAX as a central and striking element of the crisis already introduced a first layer of interpretation, which this third theme explores in more detail. Indeed, the analysis also focused on how participants interpreted the crisis itself. The aim was to understand what they remembered about the incidents, but also how they explained them, based on their knowledge, the

information they had gathered, and their own understanding and feelings about the situation. This part of the analysis therefore examines how participants made sense of Boeing's recent safety incidents, by exploring how they described the possible causes of the crisis, their perception of the events and their seriousness with the factors influencing it, and the actors or decisions they identified as potentially responsible.

A first interpretation of the crisis, shared by the vast majority of participants, suggested that Boeing's recent safety issues were not perceived as simple, occasional, and isolated **technical failures**. Although the incidents were often described through concrete technical elements that could suggest this, such as the MCAS system mentioned earlier, design flaws, aircraft parts, or quality control issues, these failures were frequently interpreted as **signs of deeper internal problems and decisions**. For many participants, the technical nature of the incidents did not make them accidental or neutral but, it suggested that something had gone wrong within Boeing's internal organization, decision-making process, safety culture, or production logic. Few examples that illustrate this:

*"Of course, there are the technical errors that Boeing had to face, but these technical errors have a source, and I think that source comes from deeper problems within the company (...) For me, the company's deeper problems are the causes of these technical errors." P1*

*"It is true that this could give the impression of isolated technical errors (...) One could say, yes, it is unfortunate, it is bad luck. But no, it is not bad luck, these were decisions that were made internally" P9*

This interpretation was reinforced by the recurrence of the incidents. While an isolated accident could still be understood as a specific technical failure, the **accumulation of problems** led several participants to question whether these events reflected a broader organizational weakness. In this sense, the recurrence of incidents contributed to the perception that Boeing's crisis was the **visible result of deeper structural problems** within the company. Some examples that illustrate this:

*"When you see that there has been an incalculable number of incidents, they cannot all be isolated errors each time, that's just not possible. When there are that many, it means there is something deeper causing the problem." P13*

*"The fact that these incidents keep recurring creates a more negative impression than if it had been a more isolated case. (...) It reinforces the idea that these are not just isolated errors, but rather deeper internal and structural problems." P3*

This repetition also made the situation appear more serious and further damaged Boeing's reputation, because participants tended to see these events as part of a broader continuity rather than as separate technical failures as following participants' state:

*"We are clearly dealing with a continuity, with small and major events that have gradually built up over the years." P4*

*"To see that it is Boeing again, that it is again due to that, that it is again due to errors. So yes, it definitely further changes the image. » P7*

Another central interpretation, part of that internal logic, found among almost all participants, was that these internal problems which are identified as the underlying causes of the incidents, came from a corporate culture increasingly focused on financial performance, in which **profit appeared to have**

**become the main priority at the expense of quality and safety.** For these participants, there was an excessive focus on maintaining profitability, accelerating production, reducing costs, and protecting Boeing's position in the market, particularly against Airbus. This interpretation was often illustrated through the 737 MAX incidents, where several participants mentioned Boeing's decision to adapt an existing aircraft in order to avoid costly pilot training and move too quickly within this competitive logic. The crisis was therefore seen as the result of a change in corporate culture where economic objectives had taken too much importance in decision-making. Several extracts illustrate this interpretation:

*"These are technical errors, but they were caused by a poor corporate culture, driven by greed and the pursuit of profit at all costs." P2*

*"I think Boeing tries to reduce costs as much as possible, even if it means neglecting passenger safety." P4*

*"It was part of the safety barriers, and among the most important ones, and they deliberately chose not to respect them for the sake of profit." P5*

### 9.3.1 Blame attribution

Because Boeing's crisis was seen as reflecting deep internal problems and a profit-driven corporate culture, most participants tended to identify Boeing as the main responsible actor behind the incidents. For many of them, responsibility could not be equally shared between different actors such as pilots, airlines, regulatory authorities, or external circumstances. Boeing received **strong blame** because it was considered responsible for the production and validation of these aircraft. Several extracts illustrate this strong attribution of responsibility:

*"It still bears significant responsibility for these incidents, because it was in charge of designing the models that caused problems." P8*

*"I think Boeing bears a fairly significant share of responsibility. They have many deaths on their conscience (...) the company is directly responsible for the design, testing, validation, and the decisions it makes." P3*

*"I think the manufacturer is necessarily responsible in these types of accidents." P6*

This strong attribution of responsibility was also reinforced by the way participants described Boeing's actions, which created a sense that the events were avoidable. Several participants referred to the deliberate nature of certain actions, such as a lack of transparency and intentional omissions, the tendency to act too quickly and the impression that warnings and safety issues had not been properly taken into account. As a result, Boeing was seen as having had both the means and the responsibility to prevent these incidents, as these extracts illustrate:

*"They knew very well where the problem came from. They knew where the problem came from because a Boeing internal engineer had already warned about those issues." P2*

*"For the MAX, for example, if there had been a quicker grounding after the first accident and full transparency, maybe the second accident could have been avoided." P14*

*"It could have been avoided if they had paid more attention to the safety of their aircraft, instead of trying to move too quickly and thinking like a business focused on making profit." P1*

But it was also influenced by the very nature of the aviation sector. Indeed, it was emphasized by many that Boeing operates in a particular sector where decisions have a direct impact on human lives and therefore cannot be treated in the same way as a conventional company, given that the product has high-risk characteristics. As aircraft manufacturers design products that carry millions of passengers, participants expected from them a higher level of caution, anticipation, and responsibility.

*“Here, when Boeing decides to compromise a bit on the quality of its product, it leads to much greater risks and consequences involving loss of life. It is not just about unhappy customers (...) the products are aircrafts, they are not products like any others.” P9*

*“The aviation sector is a bit like the nuclear sector: you need an absolute level of safety (...) there is simply no margin for error.” P5*

#### 9.4 Media exposure and influence

The media also played a role in how participants interpreted the incidents and contributed to shape their perception of Boeing. All participants became aware of these events not through direct experience, but through information shared by different media sources, mainly traditional media such as television news, and press articles but also through social media, with online videos and extracts of documentaries. This contributed to making Boeing’s crisis more visible in the society and more present in their minds. Most of them felt that this media coverage had an **amplifying effect**, particularly because of Boeing’s repeated presence in the media and the frequent association of its name with these incidents, which made the events even more striking and gave them greater importance. Here some examples:

*“An amplification by the media regarding these different topics, or at least they contribute to it significantly.” P10*

*“Each incident involving a Boeing was presented as new evidence against Boeing (...) when Boeing is associated for months with crashes and quality defects, the overall image becomes very negative » P14*

*“The media always do more to amplify things. The more deaths there are, the closer it is, the more they amplify it.” P7*

Beyond this amplification, media coverage also encouraged some participants to question the situation more actively and to look for additional information. The media gave greater visibility to the incidents, but also sparked curiosity, doubts, and a desire to deepen their research. Through this strong visibility, media coverage was seen as **a trigger** that encouraged participants to develop a critical perspective. Some participants explained that, after becoming aware of the information through the media, they searched for additional sources, compared different types of content, or tried to determine whether the information was exaggerated or accurate and through this process, they developed a more precise perception of the incidents and of Boeing.

*“The media influence us, and then we ask ourselves questions, and it is precisely by reading the media that we will go and do our own research.” P4*

*“I can see the news in the newspaper, but then I will take a further approach to what is being said, and I will look into it on the side to get additional information.” P3*

## 9.5 Transparency and crisis response

During the interviews, the knowledge of Boeing's response to the crisis and their evaluation of this response were also discussed. Most participants highlighted the insufficiency of Boeing's response. They described a reaction that was too late, more dictated by social, media, or regulatory pressures than by a spontaneous willingness to respond to the situation. They also highlighted a lack of transparency regarding the real causes of the incidents, as well as the impression that Boeing was trying to minimize or clear itself of responsibility by shifting part of the blame onto other actors, such as pilots or airlines. In general, the company's **response and communication** were perceived as **inadequate** given the seriousness of the incidents. Several extracts illustrate this perception of inadequate crisis management:

*"I had the impression that the company was often late in relation to the seriousness of the situation. It only reacted because the authorities, the airlines, the families, and the media forced it to." P14*

*"They did not directly acknowledge their wrongdoing in these cases, and it was following pressure (...) popular pressure, where consumers and the media put pressure on these accidents, that they were forced to acknowledge their wrongs. (...) Nobody wants Boeing to react in that way." P1*

*"I think its way of reacting was communicated, but in a very limited level of detail." P8*

This **lack of transparency** was a central element mentioned by several participants, both in relation to the period before the incidents and to Boeing's communication afterwards, as described above. This lack of transparency was often perceived as **deliberate** and intentional, particularly when participants referred to the two 737 MAX crashes. Several of them highlighted what they saw as deliberate omissions toward pilots and airlines regarding essential technical components, similarly by trying to conceal information afterwards regarding its responsibility in the crisis. Here some examples:

*"Boeing was deliberately not transparent enough with us" P4*

*"Boeing deliberately hid information in order to put this aircraft on the market" P13*

Because of this perceived inadequacy, for some participants, **Boeing's reaction** and response were described as an **aggravating factor in the crisis**. The accidents were already serious in themselves, but the way Boeing communicated and responded, as described previously, seemed in their eyes to make the situation worse. In this sense, Boeing's response to the incidents appeared to be an integral part of the crisis, rather than a real attempt to resolve it, therefore producing the opposite effect of what a crisis response should be, as illustrated by these participants:

*"If there was also a crisis, it is because Boeing reacted poorly from the start." P2*

*"It makes the situation even more serious because we can see that no change has been made in terms of Boeing questioning itself about the different accidents that happened, that is certain." P9*

Faced with this feeling of insufficiency, most participants described a reaction different from the one they expected from Boeing. An **expected response** from Boeing which, according to them, should have been equal to the seriousness of the crisis and based above all on **total transparency**. Transparency about its involvement and responsibility in the different events, toward the public and the sector, while avoiding any withholding of information. Transparency in its communication and in its corrective measures, as proof that the problems had been identified and that measures had been taken to prevent such incidents from happening again. A mechanism of transparency allowing trust to be restored among the general public. A few illustrative extracts:

*"Me, what I would like after an accident like that, I tell myself that there should be total transparency on how they actually proceed to build an aircraft." P6*

*"They should have assumed 100% responsibility and their involvement in these different crashes, be totally transparent." P9*

*"We regain people's trust in a legitimate way. Not by trying to cover up a case." P1*

## 9.6 Emotional impact and consequences

### 9.6.1 Emotional reaction and impact

During the interviews, participants were also asked about the emotional impact of Boeing's recent safety incidents and crisis. Their responses showed a diversity of emotional reactions. **Anger** was strongly present among some participants and was associated with incidents that were interpreted in relation to the internal organizational choices discussed earlier, the aggravating effect of Boeing's crisis response and the fact that some of these incidents could have been avoided.

*"A terrible lack of consideration for human beings because profits are more interesting, because they must not lose money, and that makes me angry, extremely angry." P2*

*"There was still a certain anger that came to my mind at that moment following the conclusions of the investigation and these voluntary and totally criminal errors." P5*

However, the most recurring emotion among participants' responses was rather a feeling of **concern** and **anxiety**, which progressively turned into **mistrust** toward Boeing. For many of them, the crisis created these initial emotions linked to the idea of flying on a Boeing aircraft. This anxiety or concern then became a more lasting form of mistrust, often expressed through doubt, reduced confidence when Boeing was involved. Here some examples which illustrate this dominant emotion:

*"But surprisingly, I did not feel anger, I felt more distrust toward Boeing afterwards." P1*

*"That caused me worry and distrust. Because when you hear that, you wonder if you still want to fly with them" P4*

*"It was more distrust or anger, but yes, more distrust anyway." P7*

### 9.6.2 Behavioral consequences

This distrust was reflected in and shifted toward a form of **behavioral vigilance** toward the company and its different aircraft for many participants. For them, the crisis did not necessarily lead to a complete refusal to fly on Boeing aircraft, but it changed the way they perceived the experience of flying with this manufacturer. This vigilance appeared in a subtle but concrete way like paying more attention to the aircraft model before flying, while others described feeling less comfortable when Boeing was involved or keeping doubts in mind during the flight above all with newer Boeing aircrafts.

*"Now, I pay more attention than before. For example, today, if I learn that a flight is operated with a Boeing MAX, it might make me think a bit, whereas before, I would never have looked at what type of aircraft it was going to be." P12*

*"However, when I had to fly again for the first time on a 737 MAX (...) I was not very comfortable." P2*

*"A kind of distrust, in the sense that when you get on the plane (...) I don't really know how to explain it, but... there is always a small doubt. A small feeling, a small doubt in the back of your mind." P7*

Following this behavioral vigilance logic, a major tendency concerned a **conditional avoidance** of Boeing aircraft. For most participants, Boeing's safety crisis did not necessarily lead to an absolute refusal to fly on Boeing aircraft. However, when a comparable alternative was available, most of all stated that they would be more likely to choose another aircraft manufacturer, especially Airbus. This was conditional because it depended on the existence of an equivalent option in terms of destination, price or schedule. In this sense, Boeing was not always rejected as a travel option, but it became the less preferred choice when participants felt that another similar alternative could provide the same service with a stronger feeling of reassurance.

*"If I have an Airbus alternative, I will prioritize it. So yes, there is still a kind of impact on what we think." P14*

*"If I had the choice between several manufacturers, I would avoid Boeing. (...) Without considering the price issue, I would more easily choose Airbus." P1*

*"If we know that we can have an Airbus instead, we will rather choose Airbus." P11*

However, this conditional avoidance did not generally translate into a complete refusal to fly on Boeing aircraft, as stated previously. Several participants did not show a concrete change in travel behavior, some of them clearly stated that Boeing's safety issues would not affect their flight choices, while others explained that they would still take a Boeing aircraft if no comparable alternative was available. Therefore, the behavioral **impact appeared limited**, Boeing could become a less preferred option, but it was not systematically rejected as a travel choice.

*"I would not go as far as cancelling a ticket just because the airline operates with Boeing." P5*

*"It will not stop me from flying on a Boeing aircraft if I have no choice." P14*

*"There is always a small doubt. A small feeling. A small doubt in the back of your mind, but it will not be a barrier." P7*

### 9.6.3 Airlines Relationship

Finally, the interviews also addressed the relationship between Boeing and airlines through the lens of consumer perceptions and a possible association effect created by Boeing's safety crisis. The findings suggest that the effect was not perceived in a uniform way across participants, rather, two main perceptions emerged.

For part of the participants, the use of Boeing aircraft by an airline could influence their perception of that airline. They described a link between the aircrafts used and the level of trust they felt toward the company. In this view, they highlighted that an airline operating Boeing aircraft could be perceived less favorably, as this could suggest a certain form of consent and acceptance of the risk of being associated with these cases, as illustrated by these two participants:

*"The fact that they deliberately choose to make contracts to buy Boeing aircraft, knowing the problems in Boeing's production chain, automatically means that they also bear part of the responsibility, because for me it means that they are endorsing it." P9*

*"An airline that flies exclusively on Boeing aircraft may be perceived as being exposed to the risk of being associated with Boeing (...) an airline that has the choice between Airbus and Boeing, continuing to choose Boeing today may require more justification toward people." P14*

However, this association between Boeing and airlines was not shared by another part of the participants. Several of them clearly distinguished Boeing as an aircraft manufacturer from the airlines choosing and operating Boeing aircraft, as illustrated by the following examples:

*"For me, the airline has nothing to do with the manufacturer that supplies the aircraft [...] For me, it will always be the manufacturer to blame, not an airline." P1*

*"For me, the two issues are not linked. Just because Boeing has problems does not mean that the airline should have to pay the price." P10*

## 10. DISCUSSION

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This chapter discusses the main findings from the interviews in light of the concepts developed in the literature review. The interviews provided detailed insights into participants' perceptions and feelings regarding Boeing and its recent safety issues. This discussion therefore relates these perceptions to a more precise theoretical framework to tackle the research question. It follows a progressive logic, starting with the evolution of Boeing's image and reputation, then examining participants' interpretation of the crisis, the role of media exposure and crisis communication, the emotional and behavioral consequences, and finally, the extent to which these perceptions go beyond Boeing and affect its relationships with airlines.

### 10.1 Boeing's reputational trajectory

As seen in the results, initially most participants spontaneously associated the company with its history, its size, its status as a global leader in aviation, and qualities such as seriousness, reliability, and innovation. These associations correspond to Persson's (2010) definition of brand image as a network of associations stored in memory and activated when the brand name is evoked. In our findings, the first cognitive contents activated are linked to leadership, expertise, and safety. This also joins Martenson's (2007) idea that brand image is not limited to objective attributes, but relies on perceptions, beliefs, and inferences. Participants therefore deduce reliability from indirect signals such as Boeing's size, long-standing presence, and dominant position, without necessarily knowing its internal processes in detail.

This initial positive image did not, however, appear completely stable. Several participants already associated Boeing both with its history and with its recent crisis, revealing a tension between historical legitimacy and more recent doubts. Still according to Persson (2010), brand image evolves through associations accessible in memory, which influence the interpretation of new information. The results highlight this shift: Boeing remains associated with its past, its pioneering role, and its weight in the industry, but these associations now coexist with more negative ones linked to accidents and failures. It is therefore not a disappearance of the previous positive image, but a transformation of the network of associations activated by the brand, making Boeing's past no longer sufficient to sustain the same level of positive image and trust as before.

As Martenson (2007) highlights, reputation is more cumulative and built over the long term, while image refers more to an immediate perception. The results show that Boeing's current image has clearly deteriorated, which seems to damage its overall reputation, as the judgments expressed do not only concern specific incidents, but what they reveal about Boeing as a whole. This relates to Barnett et al. (2006), who define reputation as an external evaluative judgment, and to Raithel and Schwaiger (2015), who distinguish its cognitive and affective dimensions. Both dimensions are affected: Boeing appears less rigorous, less reliable, less serious and while generating more distrust, caution and concern, which is accompanied by a loss of trust toward the company.

This trajectory can be put into perspective with the halo effect described by Sohn and Lariscy (2014), according to which a pre-existing positive reputation can act as partial protection in a crisis. According to our findings, this effect seems to exist because the reputational capital inherited from the past partly mitigates the loss of credibility. However, this protection tends to weaken, as will be discussed later, which already helps explain why, despite this reputational capital, Boeing appears clearly weakened today.

## 10.2 A preventable, recurring and values-driven crisis

An organizational crisis is defined by Coombs (2007) as a disruptive event, temporally extended, that threatens an organization's functioning and reputation. This corresponds to the results, as participants interpret Boeing's safety issues as a broader and temporally persistent situation affecting its credibility, reputation and ability to manage safety, rather than as an isolated technical incident. A scandal dimension is also present since Piazza & Jourdan (2018) define a scandal as a perceived transgression of social or moral norms made visible through media publicity to make an isolated act into a reputationally damaging scandal. This is highlighted by participants, who pointed to a lack of transparency and profit prioritization over safety, while the media were the main source of information about the incidents.

The SCCT framework, developed by Coombs and Holladay (2002), helps identify the type of crisis through the level of responsibility attributed and therefore explain why this interpretation is particularly damaging for Boeing. According to this theory, the higher the responsibility attributed to an organization, the stronger the reputational threat, especially in preventable crises, which represent the highest level of responsibility and thus the strongest deterioration of brand reputation, as Kim (2019) argues. Our results show that most participants strongly blamed Boeing for the design, validation and internal decisions of its aircraft, describing the events as avoidable and linked to deliberate omissions, neglected warnings and decisions guided by profit rather than safety. The crisis was therefore seen as the result of internal choices and organizational negligence. In this sense, Boeing was seen as both responsible for the crisis and able to prevent it, which supports Coombs and Holladay's negative relationship between perceived crisis responsibility and organizational reputation.

This recurrence also resonates with the creeping crisis perspective developed by Badu et al. (2023), according to which this type of crisis develops gradually through fragmented and often unnoticed precursor signals, becoming severe only once these signals accumulate over time. While a clear triggering event can be identified with the 737 MAX crashes, the subsequent incidents, such as the Alaska Airlines door plug detachment and other 2024 events, were interpreted by participants less as isolated occurrences than as a continuation of the same underlying problem. This is precisely what several participants expressed when describing a "continuity" of incidents accumulating over the years, reinforcing the perception that Boeing's difficulties reflect a deeper and ongoing organizational issue.

These elements also bring the crisis closer to a values-related crisis, as described by Baghi and Gabrielli (2019), because the issue concerns not only technical competence but also behaviors perceived as unethical and morally unacceptable in a sector where ethical standards are expected to be exceptionally high. Indeed, at first, the incidents question Boeing's ability to fulfil its core promise of producing safe and reliable aircraft, which corresponds to a performance failure. However, participants' interpretation went further, as the crisis was above all explained by unethical internal decisions perceived as incompatible with the level of responsibility expected in this sector.

Since most participants interpreted the crisis as values-related, but also as preventable, the negativity bias discussed by Sohn and Lariscy (2014) is particularly relevant. According to them, in morality-related crises, negative information tends to dominate because it is perceived as revealing a deeper lack of integrity. This echoes the results mentioned earlier, where internal choices were interpreted as ethically problematic. In this sense, negative information outweighed Boeing's previous positive associations and weakened the protective role of its past reputation. This confirms that the halo effect, while initially apparent, did not durably protect Boeing's reputation.

### 10.3 Media visibility and inadequate crisis response

Media exposure also appears to have played a significant role in how the crisis was perceived, although it should not be considered the direct cause of the reputational damage. As Fombrun and Shanley (1990) suggest, media visibility makes certain information more accessible and, consequently, more likely to be used in reputational judgments. This is reflected in the results because participants primarily learned of the incidents through the media and repeatedly associated Boeing with accidents, safety flaws and internal failures and perceived these incidents as amplifying pre-existing negative elements by making them more visible and memorable.

Regarding the crisis response, it can be interpreted through the SCCT principle of response adequacy, according to which Coombs (2007) argues that a response must be aligned with the level of responsibility attributed and the type of crisis perceived. Since participants interpreted Boeing's crisis as largely preventable and values-related, a minimizing or defensive response could hardly appear appropriate. For a preventable crisis, the expected response was closer to a rebuild strategy, as classified by Claeys, Cauberghe and Vyncke (2010), based on responsibility acceptance and corrective action. This is precisely what participants expected, to be fully transparent to restore trust and demonstrate concrete measures to prevent similar incidents. However, Boeing's response was perceived as late, limited, partly forced by external pressure and sometimes oriented toward minimizing or shifting responsibility, creating a gap between the expected appropriate response and the perceived response.

This mismatch is important because, as Coombs (2007) explains, an inadequate response to a high-responsibility crisis can further damage stakeholder evaluations, which is consistent with the findings of this study, where crisis response was perceived as a central element of the crisis itself and as a factor that further aggravated the reputational damage. The same logic applies to the values-related dimension, since Baghi and Gabrielli (2019) argue that such crises require acknowledgment of mistakes and a re-centering of ethical issues. The same logic is developed by Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory, which links response appropriateness to perceived responsibility and offensiveness and points to the need for corrective action and mortification for this perceived crisis.

This weakness of Boeing's response can be explained by Badu et al.'s (2023) link between trust and communication in crisis management. Based on the results, the situation comes close to what they describe as uncontrollable crisis management, characterized by low levels of trust and communication. Participants described Boeing's communication as limited and opaque, while expressing persistent doubts about the sincerity of the company's changes. Thus, when trust is already weakened and communication is perceived as insufficient, participants are less likely to accept the organization's explanations or believe that the crisis has truly been resolved, which maintains this distrust and complicates reputational recovery.

### 10.4 Moral outrage and lasting distrust

Baghi and Gabrielli (2019) argue that values-related crises tend to generate stronger emotional reactions and harsher judgments because they are perceived as violations of ethical or social norms. This helps explain why a significant part of participants expressed anger and indignation toward Boeing, interpreted as the result of internal decisions that deliberately moved the company away from its moral and ethical responsibilities, giving the impression that profit was more important than human lives.

This moral dimension can be further understood through Shim et al.'s (2021) Moral Foundations Theory, with individualizing moral foundations, which refer to the protection and well-being of individuals, and the avoidance of harm and are strongly correlated with blame attribution and anger toward a brand or organization. Participants perceived the crisis as having caused severe harm, including the loss of human lives, while violating the fundamental expectation that an aircraft manufacturer should ensure passenger safety and therefore participants attributed a high level of responsibility to Boeing and, for several of them, this blame was accompanied by anger toward the organization. In this sense, anger can be interpreted as a negative moral judgment triggered by the perceived transgression of moral norms, which further reinforces the reputational damage for them.

However, this only partly reflects the results, as the dominant emotions were anxiety and concern which progressively turned into persistent distrust toward Boeing. As Kim (2019) explains, SCCT suggests that crises affect reputation indirectly through mechanisms such as responsibility and trust. Here, the high responsibility attributed to Boeing weakened trust, turning into persistent distrust and shaping a post-crisis judgment of Boeing as less reliable, less trustworthy and less able to ensure safety.

## 10.5 Conditional avoidance and vigilance rather than boycott

While individualizing moral foundations are described by Shim et al. (2021) as a driver of boycott intentions, the results do not confirm this pattern. Although these moral foundations were clearly activated, participants attributed high responsibility to Boeing and several expressed genuine anger, no participant reported a systematic refusal to fly on Boeing aircraft. This can be explained by two complementary factors. First, even among those who expressed anger, the absence of personal or close involvement in the accidents appears to have limited the translation of this emotion into active rejection behavior. Second, and more broadly, the dominant emotional response across participants was not anger but anxiety and concern, which, as discussed earlier, tend to generate distrust and vigilance rather than boycott intentions. As a result, the behavioral consequences remained limited, expressed primarily through conditional avoidance and heightened vigilance toward Boeing aircraft rather than a complete rejection of the company.

However, this conditional behavior is aligned with the anti-branding perspective discussed by Hegner et al. (2017), according to which negative brand responses can lead consumers to avoid a brand without necessarily rejecting it completely. Boeing was not systematically excluded by participants, but became less preferred when a comparable alternative, especially Airbus, was available under similar conditions.

## 10.6 Boeing - Airlines relationship: nuanced spillover effect and importance of reputation

The relationship between Boeing and airlines can mainly be interpreted through consumers' perceptions of spillover and contagion effects. As Wang et al. (2025) explain, negative publicity affecting one company can impact linked organizations, even when they are not directly involved, because inter-organizational ties may signal association and shared legitimacy. Indeed, the findings indicate that the transfer of negative perceptions, here, occurs when participants establish a mental association between Boeing and the airlines operating its aircraft and perceive the latter as accepting, endorsing or indirectly sharing the reputational risk linked to the manufacturer by continuing to operate its aircraft. Under these conditions, the damage to Boeing's reputation and trust extended to airline companies. In the same perspective, the contagion effect described by Akyildirim et al. (2025)

helps explain why some participants implicitly extended the consequences of Boeing's crisis to the airlines operating its aircraft.

However, as suggested by the results, these spillover and contagion effects were not shared by all participants. Some of them clearly distinguished the aircraft manufacturer from the airlines operating its aircraft, meaning that, for them, Boeing's crisis did not necessarily extend to airlines. As a result, the reputational damage and loss of trust attributed to Boeing were not automatically transferred.

Suh and Houston (2010) explain that supplier reputation acts as an external benchmark helping buyers reduce uncertainty before or beyond direct experience. In this context, the reputational damage and loss of trust attributed to Boeing by several participants could make its relationship with airlines more vulnerable. Since reputation and trust are central in B2B relationships, as highlighted by Suh and Houston (2010) and Syed Alwi et al. (2016), Boeing's weakened reputation may raise questions about the confidence airlines can place in it as a supplier. This does not prove that airlines have reduced their trust or that the B2B relationship is directly compromised, but suggests that Boeing's damaged reputation, as perceived by consumers, may indirectly fragilize this relationship.

## 11. CONCLUSION

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### 11.1 Short summary

This thesis examined how Boeing's recent safety issues have influenced consumers' perceptions of the company's reputation and its relationships with airline companies. More specifically, it explored how individuals interpret these incidents, attribute responsibility to Boeing, evaluate the company's crisis response and translate these perceptions into emotional and behavioral reactions. Based on fourteen qualitative interviews, the study sought to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which a major safety crisis can reshape corporate reputation and potentially influence consumers' perceptions of airlines operating Boeing aircraft.

The findings show that Boeing's reputation has been considerably damaged. Although the company still benefits from a certain historical legitimacy as a major and innovative player in the aviation industry, this legacy is now largely overshadowed by safety concerns and the 737 MAX crisis, which has become the symbol of Boeing's recent difficulties. Participants did not interpret these incidents as isolated technical failures, but rather as the result of deeper organizational issues, including a deliberate lack of transparency and internal decisions perceived as placing excessive emphasis on profitability at the expense of safety. As a result, the crisis was progressively interpreted as preventable, due to a strong attribution of responsibility, and as gradually unfolding over time, involving broader organizational and ethical failures, reinforcing its values-related dimension, which intensified its reputational damage namely a perception of Boeing as a less reliable, less trustworthy and less rigorous organization than before, while increasingly being viewed as an organization driven primarily by profitability, raising concerns about its integrity and organizational values. These elements translated into a significant erosion of trust, persistent distrust and increased vigilance toward Boeing aircraft, expressed through conditional avoidance whenever a comparable alternative was available.

Regarding airline companies, the findings suggest that Boeing's reputational damage may indirectly affect its relationships with airlines through consumers' perceptions and behaviors. Some participants associated airlines operating Boeing aircraft with the manufacturer's safety issues, generating a spillover effect that, in this case, extended part of the negative perception and loss of trust to these companies. This perception was also reflected in the behaviors described previously, which are mainly expressed through the airlines operating these aircraft, as they constitute the direct interface between the manufacturer and consumers. Consequently, airlines may be exposed to a risk of reputational damage because of their association with Boeing and the consequences that may arise from it, which may indirectly weaken their relationships with the manufacturer. Given that trust and reputation constitute essential resources in business-to-business (B2B) relationships, these reputational concerns may also indirectly reduce the willingness to maintain or develop commercial partnerships with Boeing. However, this contagion effect remained mixed as many participants clearly distinguished the responsibility of the manufacturer from that of the airlines.

### 11.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this thesis suggest that, in a safety-related crisis, managers should not limit their response to the technical incident itself but should first analyze how the crisis is perceived and constructed by consumers. As participants interpreted the recent safety issues as the reflection of deeper organizational problems, with deliberate omission and decisions perceived as prioritizing profitability over safety, managers should first understand the mechanisms that shape this perception and the way they interact in consumers' reasoning. This diagnosis will then enable them to identify

whether the crisis is perceived as accidental, preventable, performance-related or values-related (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019; Coombs & Holladay, 2002) and to adapt their response accordingly. When consumers perceive a crisis as preventable or morally problematic, a purely technical or defensive response is likely to be considered insufficient and to further aggravate reputational damage, as our case illustrates.

A second implication concerns these crisis response and communication. The findings show that Boeing's response was perceived as delayed, limited and insufficiently transparent by many participants. Managers facing similar crises should therefore prioritize clear, rapid and honest communication, especially when consumers attribute a high level of responsibility to the organization. In this context, transparency should not be limited to general statements, but should also explain what happened, which responsibilities are acknowledged, what corrective measures are being taken and how similar incidents will be prevented in the future. This is essential because trust cannot be restored if consumers feel that the company is minimizing the crisis or communicating only under external pressure.

The study also highlights that rebuilding trust requires concrete organizational actions, not only communication. Persistent distrust toward Boeing was expressed, even when technical corrections were assumed to have been made. Managers must therefore demonstrate visible changes in safety culture, internal decision-making, quality control and reporting procedures. In a high-risk sector, consumers need evidence that the company has learned from the crisis and now structurally prioritizes safety over short-term financial objectives. Reputation recovery therefore requires more than communication alone and depends on visible changes implemented throughout the organization.

Finally, the findings suggest that managers should recognize that reputational damage may extend beyond their own organization and indirectly affect relationships with other actors in the aviation ecosystem. Although this spillover effect was not shared by all participants, several associated airlines operating Boeing aircraft with the manufacturer's safety issues, thereby extending part of the negative perception to these companies. For Boeing, this implies that reputation recovery is essential to rebuild consumers' trust, and also to preserve strong relationships with its airline partners. As airlines may themselves become exposed to reputational risks through their association with Boeing, persistent negative consumer perceptions could indirectly weaken these partnerships. Consequently, for participants affected by this perception, reputation recovery should also be considered a strategic priority for maintaining trust, legitimacy and long-term relationships.

### 11.3 Theoretical implications

From a theoretical standpoint, one of the most interesting contributions concerns the distinction between performance-related crises and values-related crises proposed by Baghi & Gabrielli (2019), which appears, in consumers' interpretations, to be more dynamic than what the literature sometimes suggests. In our case, participants did not stop at performance failures as such, their interpretation progressively shifted toward a more ethical reading of the events, associated with transgressions of moral norms deemed unacceptable, rather than with simple isolated incidents, as accidents might have suggested. This finding clearly shows that it is consumers' own interpretations that can shape the nature of a crisis, and with it, its reputational impact.

These findings also help nuance the way reputation formation following a crisis is generally understood. The literature already shows that reputational damage does not stem solely from the incident itself, but is influenced by mechanisms such as responsibility attribution, trust, and crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007; Kim, 2019). However, this study more specifically

highlights how these different mechanisms concretely chain together and articulate within consumers' reasoning: the incidents are interpreted as reflecting organizational dysfunctions, which reinforces responsibility attribution, feeds perceptions of insufficient transparency and an inadequate response, progressively erodes trust and instils a sense of distrust, and ultimately leads to a deterioration of the company's reputation. It is precisely this articulation that helps to better understand how reputational deterioration progressively builds following a crisis, in this type of sector strongly marked by safety concerns.

Finally, this research provides additional insight into spillover effects, showing that the transfer of negative perceptions to partner organizations is in no way automatic but depends primarily on each consumer's own interpretations and associations. While not all participants establish a link between airlines operating Boeing aircraft and the manufacturer's safety issues, several of them nonetheless extend part of this negative perception to these airlines. This invites us to conceive of reputational spillover as a conditional mechanism, dependent on individual perceptions, rather than as a uniform phenomenon occurring among all consumers confronted with a B2B corporate crisis.

#### 11.4 Limitation and suggestions for future research

Although this thesis provides relevant insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations indicate areas where future research could further deepen and extend the analysis.

A first limitation concerns the relatively restricted size of the sample. The fourteen interviews conducted made it possible to collect rich and detailed information on consumers' perceptions, interpretations, and reactions. However, a larger sample would have made it possible to collect a greater diversity of profiles, experiences, and points of view. It could have revealed additional nuances in the way consumers perceive Boeing, and other interpretations.

A second, one of the most important, concerns the underrepresentation of the B2B dimension in the results, due to restricted access to aviation professionals. Although this thesis aims to examine the relationship between Boeing and airlines, the sensitive nature of the topic made it difficult to obtain interviews with professionals from the sector. As a result, the relationship dimension of the research was mainly analyzed through the lens of consumer perceptions, particularly through the spillover effect, rather than through the direct perspective of airline managers, aviation experts, or industry professionals, which was initially intended. This limited the possibility of understanding how the damage to Boeing's reputation is perceived within the sector itself and how it may concretely affect inter-organizational trust, commercial relationships, or fleet-related decisions. Potential future research could therefore explore this still underdeveloped topic further by attempting to reach airline representatives, aviation professionals and industry experts, or by relying on alternative methodological approaches capable of providing deeper insights into the concrete B2B consequences of Boeing's situation.

Additionally, there was a degree of heterogeneity of participants' knowledge of aviation. Although all participants had a minimum level of knowledge, as suggested by the methodology, their level of knowledge remained variable. Some participants had an in-depth understanding of the subject, while others had more general knowledge. This difference may have influenced the depth of the answers and the way participants interpreted Boeing's responsibility, its crisis management, or its relationships with airlines.

Fourth, regarding the interview guide, the relationship between Boeing and airlines could have been explored in more depth. This dimension was addressed and led to results, particularly concerning

contagion effects, but more specific questions would have made it possible to examine participants' feelings more precisely, with questions of this type: *"Do you think Boeing's recent safety issues should be taken into consideration in airlines' decisions regarding aircraft manufacturers and future aircraft purchases?"* or *"Do you think airlines should publicly distance themselves from Boeing following these incidents?"*

Moreover, the interviews were conducted in French in order to maximize participation and allow respondents to express themselves more naturally in their native language. However, all quotations and interview extracts were translated into English to ensure the consistency and readability of this thesis. Although particular care was taken to preserve participants' intended meaning, the translation process may have slightly altered certain nuances or subtleties of expression.

Finally, the interviews were conducted following a series of highly publicized safety incidents involving Boeing, which may have influenced participants' perceptions and amplified certain associations related to the company's reputation. Consumers' attitudes could evolve over time depending on new events or the corrective measures implemented by the company.



## 12. APPENDICES

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### 12.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide

#### Introduction

Avant de commencer, je tiens à vous préciser que cet entretien est réalisé uniquement dans le cadre académique de mon mémoire de Master. Toutes les informations que vous partagerez, ainsi que vos réponses, seront utilisées uniquement à des fins de recherche pour ce mémoire et ne sortiront pas de ce cadre. Votre anonymat sera pleinement respecté, conformément aux principes de confidentialité et de protection des données applicables à HEC Liège et à l'Université de Liège. Aucune mention de votre nom ne figurera dans le mémoire.

Par ailleurs, afin de faciliter la retranscription de l'entretien et de me permettre de rester pleinement attentif(ve) à vos réponses pendant notre échange, j'aimerais vous demander si vous m'autorisez à enregistrer cet entretien ? Bien entendu, vous êtes totalement libre d'accepter ou de refuser, et si vous préférez ne pas être enregistré(e), l'entretien pourra tout de même avoir lieu dans d'autres conditions.

#### Guide of questions :

#### Profil et rapport au transport aérien

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1. Pouvez-vous me parler brièvement de votre rapport au voyage en avion ?
2. À quelle fréquence prenez-vous l'avion environ ?
3. Quand vous choisissez un vol ou une compagnie, quels éléments comptent le plus pour vous ?

##### *Relance possible :*

- Est-ce que certains critères sont plus importants que d'autres pour vous ?

4. Est-ce que la question de la sécurité aérienne est quelque chose à laquelle vous faites attention ?

##### *a. Si oui, pourquoi ?*

##### *Relance possible :*

- Est-ce que cela influence votre façon de voyager ?

#### Perception générale spontanée de Boeing (avant d'aborder le scandale)

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5. Quand vous entendez le nom Boeing, à quoi pensez-vous spontanément ?

6. Quelle impression générale avez-vous, de Boeing de manière générale ?

##### *Relances possibles :*

- Sur quoi repose cette impression ?

- Est-ce plutôt une impression positive, négative ou neutre ?
7. Diriez-vous que Boeing vous inspire confiance de manière générale ?
    - a. Pourquoi ?
  8. Selon vous, Boeing est-elle perçue comme une entreprise sérieuse et fiable ?
    - a. Pourquoi ?

#### Connaissance et exposition aux récents problèmes de sécurité

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9. Aviez-vous déjà entendu parler des récents problèmes de sécurité liés à Boeing ?
10. Si oui, qu'est-ce que vous avez entendu ou retenu à ce sujet ?  
*Relances possibles :*
  - Y a-t-il un événement en particulier qui vous a marqué ?
  - Avez-vous retenu des faits précis ou plutôt une impression générale ?
11. Par quels moyens en avez-vous entendu parler ?
12. Avez-vous le sentiment que la manière dont ces informations ont été relayées a influencé votre opinion ?  
*Relance possible :*
  - De quelle manière diriez-vous que ces relais ont pu jouer un rôle dans votre vision de la situation ?

#### Perception de Boeing après exposition au sujet

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13. Après tout ce que vous avez entendu sur ces problèmes, quelle impression générale avez-vous aujourd'hui de Boeing ?
14. Quels mots ou quelles idées vous viennent spontanément à l'esprit quand vous pensez à Boeing aujourd'hui ?  
*Relances possibles :*
  - Pourquoi ces mots-là en particulier ?
  - Vous auriez envisagé ces mots là avant ?
15. D'après ce que vous dites, est-ce que votre opinion de Boeing a changé ces dernières années ?
  - a. Si oui, en quoi ?
16. Aujourd'hui, diriez-vous que Boeing vous inspire confiance ?

a. Pourquoi ?

17. Selon vous, Boeing est-elle aujourd'hui perçue comme une entreprise sérieuse et fiable ?

a. Pourquoi ?

#### Interprétation de la crise

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18. Selon vous, ces incidents survenus donnent surtout l'image d'erreurs techniques ponctuelles, ou plutôt de problèmes plus profonds dans l'entreprise ?

a. Pourquoi ?

19. Avez-vous le sentiment que Boeing porte une part importante de responsabilité dans ces incidents ?

a. Pourquoi ?

*Relance possible :*

- Est-ce que vous considérez que ces problèmes auraient, en quelques sorte, pu être évités ?

20. Le fait qu'il y ait eu plusieurs incidents ou controverses change-t-il votre jugement ?

*Relance possible :*

- La répétition rend-elle la situation plus grave à vos yeux ?

#### Réactions émotionnelles et adéquation de la réponse de Boeing

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21. Quand vous avez entendu ou entendez parler de ces problèmes chez Boeing, qu'est-ce que cela provoque ou a provoqué chez vous en termes d'émotion ?

a. Pourquoi ce type d'émotions ?

22. Avez-vous connaissance de la manière dont Boeing a communiqué ou réagi à la suite de ces différents problèmes ?

a. Si vous ne le saviez pas, comment auriez-vous imaginé cette communication ?

b. si vous la connaissez, vous paraît-elle adéquate par rapport à la crise ?

#### Réactions comportementales et impact potentiel sur les compagnies aériennes

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23. Le fait de savoir qu'un vol est opéré avec un avion Boeing pourrait-il influencer votre ressenti ou votre choix ?

*Relance possible :*

- Vous diriez que ça peut être liée aux récents incidents ?

24. Est-ce que cela pourrait influencer votre confiance envers une compagnie aérienne qui utilise des avions Boeing ?
- a. Pourquoi ?
25. Y'a-t-il autre chose que vous aimeriez ajouter sur Boeing, sur la sécurité, ou sur la manière dont cela influence votre perception du secteur aérien ?

### Closure

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et pour vos réponses, les réponses que vous m'avez données vont beaucoup m'aider dans ma collecte de données. N'hésitez pas à partager mon poste et mon nom, dans le cas où vous concasseriez quelqu'un qui serait potentiellement intéressé à répondre à ces questions et qui correspondrait à mes critères de recherche, vous pouvez le rediriger vers moi je serais ravi de l'interviewer.

## 12.2 Appendix 2: Example of two interviews transcripts

### Transcription of participant number 2

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**Noam:** Bonjour, Monsieur, comment allez-vous ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Bonjour, ça va très bien merci

**Noam :** Merci beaucoup à vous d'avoir accepté mon invitation. Avant de commencer cet entretien, j'aimerais préciser que tout ce que vous direz comme réponse sera uniquement utilisé à des fins académiques et pour ce mémoire. Donc voilà, votre anonymat et tout ce qui est question de confidentialité respectent vraiment les politiques de données de l'université et par ailleurs HEC Liège automatiquement.

**Intervenant 2 :** Ok, super.

**Noam :** Et juste avant de commencer, je voudrais bien demander votre autorisation pour pouvoir enregistrer comme but de retranscrire par la suite.

**Intervenant 2 :** Pas de soucis, vous pouvez y aller, oui.

**Noam :** On va pouvoir commencer par les premières questions qui sont plus des questions au niveau du profiling, dans le but d'un peu mieux vous connaître par rapport au secteur aérien. Donc voilà, la première question c'est est-ce que vous pouvez me parler brièvement de votre rapport au voyage en avion de manière assez générale ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Ouf, mon rapport au voyage en avion, moi je pense que j'ai pris la première fois l'avion, j'étais tout petit, ça devait être en 2004, 2005 avec mes parents et j'en ai un vague souvenir et puis après je sais pas pourquoi, mais j'ai commencé un peu à m'intéresser à l'aviation mais via, je me souviens, c'était Doc de Choc le dimanche sur RTL TVI où on voyait beaucoup en fait d'accidents d'avion et donc j'ai commencé à m'intéresser à l'aviation par le prisme en fait des accidents qu'il y avait eu et ça a un peu déclenché sur moi d'ailleurs une certaine peur de l'avion. J'ai plus pris l'avion pendant des années puis après je l'ai repris en 2014 pour repartir en avion avec ma famille et puis après j'ai développé comme une grande passion pour le secteur de l'aviation et j'ai voyagé beaucoup plus souvent seul avec des amis pour partir en vacances, au point où j'ai été il n'y a pas longtemps au salon de l'aviation parce que j'aimerais vraiment passer mon permis d'avion voir peut-être envisager qui c'est une reconversion professionnelle à jour, c'est un rêve, voilà, les études coûtent assez cher.

**Noam :** Et vous diriez que vous prenez à quelle fréquence l'avion plus ou moins par an ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Alors aujourd'hui je peux vous dire que l'avion, mon bilan carbone c'est pas très bon mais je prends je dirais je fais trois allers-retours par an plus ou moins en avion.

**Noam :** Donc trois allers-retours, trois fois par an ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Ouais, trois fois par an donc six fois, six trajets en avion par an.

**Noam :** Est-ce que quand vous choisissez un vol ou une compagnie aérienne, il y a des éléments qui rentrent en compte dans ce processus de sélection ? Il y a des éléments qui comptent plus que d'autres ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Il y a quelques années, globalement il y a encore toujours maintenant, ce que je cherche avant tout c'est le prix donc je prends le vol qui est le moins cher, aussi j'essaie quand même que les horaires ne soient pas trop contraignants, c'est-à-dire partir tôt pour l'aller ça me dérange pas plutôt pour le retour c'est un peu compliqué donc j'essaie d'avoir des horaires qui soient relativement bons, globalement je pars toujours de Charleroi ou de Bruxelles mais oui le premier critère je dirais quand même que c'est le prix mais c'est quand je fais des vols moyens ou court-courrier le prix sinon là par exemple quand je suis parti à New York il y a quelques années là quand même je regardais comme évidemment le prix mais je ne voulais pas partir avec n'importe quelle compagnie pour un vol aussi long .

**Noam :** Donc il y a un aspect prix et aussi un peu connaissance de la compagnie, réputation de la compagnie.

**Intervenant 2 :** c'est ça c'est ça voilà il y a certaines compagnies que je préfère Plutôt que d'autres quoi.

**Noam :** Et est-ce que dans les éléments qui pourraient compter pour vous lorsque vous choisissez à voler une compagnie est-ce que l'élément enfin le facteur de la sécurité la sécurité aérienne est quelque chose à laquelle vous allez faire attention quand même ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Bah forcément quand même,... fin mine de rien je pense qu'on peut prendre l'avion aussi beaucoup beaucoup de fois pendant l'année, vous avez comme toujours ce petit truc en tête de vous dire « oh la la » s'il se passe quelque chose, et voilà après vous n'y pensez pas forcément plus mais oui la sécurité est très importante. Moi par exemple à titre personnel la compagnie avec laquelle je vole le plus c'est Ryanair et je sais que Ryanair est une des compagnies qui est la plus sécurisée au monde parce que c'est le même type d'avion parce que les avions volent beaucoup et donc du coup ils sont très très très régulièrement entretenus donc voilà ? Et puis à qui d'autre j'ai fait confiance ? Brussels Airlines j'avais confiance aussi. Qui est ce que j'ai fait d'autres ? EasyJet j'avais confiance donc oui je ne partirai pas avec une compagnie où j'aurais des soupçons de lacunes en termes de sécurité.

**Noam :** Et quand vous entendez le nom du constructeur aérien Boeing, quel mot vient spontanément à l'esprit ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Américain Américain c'est un c'est le constructeur historique américain qui a racheté énormément de plus petites structures de constructeurs aéronautiques donc oui géant de l'aviation américaine et qui se lance aussi j'ai vu d'ailleurs sans trop de succès dans la conquête spatiale.

**Noam :** Quelle impression je dirais avez-vous de Boeing ? Est-ce qu'elle est plutôt positive négative ou même neutre ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Bah de base je dirais oui plutôt positive avant je dirais, maintenant il y a plusieurs facteurs qui font que l'image est un peu détériorée c'est l'émergence d'Airbus où Airbus vous avez un projet européen qui a été développé par plusieurs pays pour créer en fait un avion qui est 100% européen, et donc voilà moi maintenant j'ai vraiment une préférence pour Airbus que ce soit même en termes de design je trouve que je sais pas je préfère je préfère les Airbus et les développements d'Airbus et puis voilà je préfère consommer européen plutôt qu'américain Mais voilà.

**Noam :** Et est-ce que vous diriez que Boeing vous inspire confiance de manière générale ?

**Intervenant 2 :** C'est un peu compliqué notamment avec les derniers événements qui sont passés ces dernières années, je pense que de ce point de vue là ça a quand même de mon point de vue pas mal détérioré l'image et la perception que j'ai de Boeing.

**Noam :** Et vous considérez que Boeing est perçue comme une entreprise qui est sérieuse et fiable selon vous ? En tant qu'entreprise ?

**Intervenant 2 :** A partir du moment où vous êtes une si grosse entreprise avec une telle réputation c'est quand même Boeing dans l'histoire de l'aviation c'est une entreprise qui est pionnière qui a créé des avions de légende je parle notamment du 737, 747, voilà ce sont des avions de légende et donc du coup de ce point de vue-là, l'entreprise a une bonne image une bonne réputation et c'est une entreprise qui est historique et qui est bien ancrée dans l'histoire de l'aviation.

**Noam :** Et vous en avez un petit peu parlé on va rentrer dans le sujet est ce que vous avez déjà entendu je suppose la réponse est oui des récents problèmes liés à la sécurité chez Boeing ?

**Intervenant 2 :** J'en ai entendu parler oui déjà quand il y a eu les accidents moi je vous le dis je suis toujours intéressé quand il y a eu des accidents d'avions. Donc moi je l'ai j'ai entendu au moment des accidents et en fait je regardais ça un peu de loin mais le moment où je m'en suis vraiment intéressé où ça m'a interpellé c'est quand il y a eu ce fameux reportage sur Netflix qui parle justement de tous les problèmes qu'il y a eu en interne de chez Boeing qui ont été consécutifs notamment aux problèmes, aux 737 MAX suite à une défaillance d'un nouveau système, le système MCAS, je crois. Qui était un système, vous le savez probablement mieux que moi, mais qui aidait à la lutte contre le décrochage parce que les réacteurs étaient beaucoup trop gros par rapport au poids à l'avion et le poids d'équilibre changeait et ouais ça m'a super fort interpellé ça m'a même inquiété je dois dire.

**Noam :** Donc vous diriez que l'événement que vous avez le plus marqué c'est ces deux enchaînements d'accidents du 737 max ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Heu, c'est pas tant l'enchaînement des accidents. En fait à la base oui, deux accidents d'avions, d'un avion aussi récent j'ai trouvé ça choquant mais ce qui m'a choqué encore le plus c'est de voir en fait l'attitude qu'avait eu Boeing par rapport à ces deux accidents là moi vraiment je me suis dit mais comment est-ce que c'est possible justement

qu'une entreprise qui soit qui ait la réputation d'être aussi sérieuse dans un secteur aussi stratégique que l'aviation et qui doit avoir encore plus le sens des responsabilités parce qu'elles ont la vie de millions de personnes entre leurs mains chaque jour ça m'a mis en fait même en colère quoi ! De voir en fait à quel point le business se faire de l'argent ça vaut plus que des vies humaines quand bien même vous en transportez des millions par jour quoi.

**Noam :** Et par quelle moyenne vous avez entendu la première fois ces différents accidents ?

**Intervenant 2 :** La première fois que j'ai entendu c'est simplement via les alertes info les infos le JT

**Noam :** Ok, ok donc médias traditionnels, réseaux sociaux aussi également ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Oui réseaux sociaux enfin je pense que ces accidents-là réseaux sociaux oui et c'était en 2018 non ces accidents ?

**Noam :** C'était 2019, je crois.

**Intervenant 2 :** Ouais donc oui certainement réseaux sociaux et médias traditionnels

**Noam :** Est-ce que vous avez le sentiment que la manière dont ces informations ont pu être relayées a pu justement influencer un peu votre opinion sur le sujet ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Euh Non parce que quand il y a eu le premier enfin ça m'a en fait oui les articles étaient rédigés dans si je me souviens bien les articles étaient rédigés un peu en mode incident d'avion il mettait directement le doigt sur le fait que c'était bizarre parce que c'était un avion qui était super récent et donc du coup directement on s'est dit oh c'est bizarre il y a un truc qui n'est pas normal et puis quand il y a eu le deuxième accident ben là justement cet angle-là qui était de ce n'est pas normal enfin un accident d'avion c'est toujours dramatique et c'est d'autant plus incompréhensible que ce sont deux nouveaux deux avions relativement nouveaux ou quoi

**Noam :** Et après tout ce que vous avez entendu sur ces accidents est-ce que vous diriez que votre impression sur Boeing a quand même changé aujourd'hui ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Franchement je dois dire que je dois dire que oui . Quand j'ai vu le reportage sur Netflix en fait et que j'ai vu la manière dont Boeing avait réagi en fait à ces à ces accidents, c'est à dire en faisant de la rétention d'informations ils n'ont pas donné toutes les pièces qu'ils devaient donner, le congrès américain avait lancé une procédure une commission d'enquête parlementaire et Boeing n'a pas donné tous les documents. Quand on voit les témoignages en fait les témoignages des travailleurs de Boeing qui font état en fait de plein de dysfonctionnement en étant de l'entreprise et que ces gens-là en fait ont été juste écartés de l'entreprise, quand on voit ça j'ai appris aussi l'attitude de Boeing qui a été de se dédouaner de toute responsabilité d'essayer de chercher des responsabilités ailleurs et notamment dans le chef des pilotes ,j'ai trouvé ça mais tellement scandaleux quoi. Et de se dire qu'en fait, moi je me mets à la place d'une entreprise qui travaille dans le secteur aéronautique et qui transporte des millions de personnes si on voit à un moment donné que

l'avion que tu as produit pose problème tu ne sais pas d'où vient le problème tu prends toi-même la décision en responsabilité de dire j'arrête les vols je les suspends le temps qu'on règle le problème. Là Boeing, ce qu'ils ont fait c'est continuer absolument à faire voler ses avions pour sauver la réputation essayer de trouver une autre cause au problème en mettant en fait la vie de millions de personnes quand même encore en jeu enfin. Je trouve ça mais tellement tellement scandaleux quoi !

**Noam :** Vous abordez justement , le point de la réaction de Boeing face à cette crise, est-ce que pour vous la réaction de Boeing, enfin je pose j'ai un peu la réponse, mais est-ce que pour vous c'était en adéquation avec la crise avec laquelle elle faisait face ?

**Intervenant 2 :** En fait il faut savoir aussi pourquoi est-ce que Boeing a réagi de la sorte et comment est-ce que Boeing a réagi. Moi je vois deux choses il y a comment Boeing a réagi c'est en essayant de cacher des informations et de mettre la poussière sous le tapis pour se protéger . Ça c'est la première réaction de Boeing, qui a été une réaction complètement scandaleuse quoi alors qu'il savait très bien d'où venait le problème Il savait d'où venait le problème parce que déjà l'ingénieur en interne de Boeing avait alerté justement sur ces problèmes-là donc ça c'est la première réaction qu'ils ont eu c'est essayer de cacher le problème. La deuxième réaction qu'ils ont eu, elle a été contrainte en fait par les autorités américaines de l'aviation et les autorités européennes de l'aviation qui ont décidé de clouer l'avion au sol mais sinon ce qui est scandaleux c'est que Boeing de lui-même n'aurait jamais cloué ses avions au sol il a fallu attendre que les autorités publiques, qu'on remet toujours en question les autorités publiques d'ailleurs enfin bref parenthèse, mais que les autorités publiques prennent des décisions pour clouer les avions au sol pour que Boeing prenne conscience de la gravité de la situation pour ensuite et seulement à ce moment-là tenter de régler le problème, c'est à dire tenter de régler le problème c'est premièrement ça a été de former les pilotes puis après ça a été de peut-être faire des réglages, je suis pas un spécialiste aéronautique non plus, mais faire des réglages certainement sur l'ensemble des avions et des soucis de paramétrage donc pour moi la réaction de Boeing qui est pour moi scandaleuse, c'est à dire que ça a été caché, étouffé la vérité, la mise en danger de millions de personnes et que la deuxième réaction de Boeing en fait n'est pas une réaction qui pour moi est spontanée ni peut être prise en considération parce que c'est une réaction qui a été contrainte par les autorités publiques, par l'avis du grand public, et par en fait une soif de davantage de sauver sa réputation plutôt que de permettre à des passagers de voyager en sécurité.

**Noam :** Donc si je comprends bien, pour vous, s'il n'y avait pas eu une révolte un peu on va dire de l'opinion publique Boeing n'aurait jamais en tout cas d'elle-même fixé ses avions au sol et paralyser ses avions au sol.

**Intervenant 2 :** Jamais jamais c'est j'en suis persuadé. C'est le propre de la société capitaliste tant que vous faites des thunes vous ne vous posez pas d'autres questions donc pour moi effectivement s'il n'y avait pas eu la pression des médias, la pression des autorités publiques, la pression du public et de la société civile en règle générale je pense que Boeing aurait certainement peut-être qu'ils auraient réglé la situation mais en tout cas en off et en se protégeant bien derrière.

**Noam :** En connaissant maintenant voilà vous l'avez cité la manière dont Boeing a réagi, s'il n'avait pas eu cette réaction-là, comment vous auriez voulu vous que Boeing réagisse à cette crise ? Qu'est-ce que vous attendriez d'une entreprise comme ça qui se retrouverait à une situation aussi grave ?

**Intervenant 2 :** S'il y a eu une crise c'est parce que Boeing a mal réagi dès le départ. Si à un moment donné Boeing avait travaillé sur cet avion de manière consciencieuse, parce qu'en fait Boeing aussi dans le développement de cet avion-là, il devait absolument développer un nouvel avion pour faire de la concurrence avec Airbus. Et donc du coup, ils ont pris un autre avion déjà existant qui était le 737, ils ont mis des plus gros moteurs dessus, ils ont fait des adaptations sans prendre en considération que voilà le poids et le sort de gravité allait changer, qu'il allait avoir des systèmes MCAS etc. Et donc en fait c'est l'appât du gain qui a poussé Boeing à développer un avion beaucoup trop rapidement pour faire de la concurrence Airbus donc la première chose pour moi que Boeing aurait dû faire c'était au vu de sa réputation justement et son importance dans le secteur aérien c'est de développer un avion conforme, enfin avec comme première préoccupation, un avion qui soit sûr pour l'ensemble de ses passagers en amont. Et au moment de la crise, au premier crash Boeing aurait dû dire il y a un problème avec cet avion, cet avion est nouveau on sait déjà qu'il y a eu des problèmes avec le MCAS parce que nos ingénieurs nous ont prévenu, « boum » on immobilise tous les avions, on informe les pilotes etc. Alors oui il y aurait une crise parce que ce qui s'est passé en amont c'est comme passé ils ont comme essayé de cacher des choses mais derrière vous auriez quand même évité la situation et Boeing aurait montré qu'ils étaient responsables quand il y a eu le deuxième crash là pour moi c'était trop tard et après tout ce qu'a fait Boeing après ils ont été contraints par ce que je vous disais avant les autorités publiques etc.

**Noam :** Et pour vous maintenant après tout ça quel mot vous vient spontanément à l'esprit quand vous pensez à Boeing ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Difficultés.

**Noam :** Est-ce que Boeing vous inspire toujours confiance maintenant après tout ce que vous venez de me dire

**Intervenant 2 :** Ben c'est ça le problème, c'est que ben je sais que je vole encore dans des Boeing. Je vole encore dans des Boeing 737 max. Je vous avoue que ça m'a fait, en fait je me suis rendu compte que ça me posait peut-être un souci quand je me suis rendu quand j'ai pris un Airbus et que j'étais beaucoup plus à l'aise dans l'Airbus que dans le Boeing 737. Je ne peux pas m'empêcher des fois d'y penser un peu. Mais je me rassure dans le fait qu'il n'y a plus jamais eu d'accident et que Boeing a pris des mesures pour former les pilotes pour changer les systèmes maintenant c'est un problème qui se sait qui a été résolu. La seule chose qui m'angoisse un peu c'est de savoir que cette crise est le résultat d'un processus et d'une culture de l'entreprise Boeing. Qui me dit que demain, il n'y aura pas un souci sur un autre élément qui nous sera encore caché ?

**Noam :** Donc oui, une autre de mes questions est que est-ce que selon vous, ces différents problèmes ne donnent pas l'image d'erreurs techniques mais plutôt un problème plus profond l'entreprise plus interne ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Ce sont des erreurs techniques mais qui ont été engendrées par une culture d'entreprise qui a été mauvaise l'appât du gain à tout prix, le développement d'un avion inadapté et qui ne répond pas à des besoins de sécurité. Tous les problèmes techniques viennent de quelque part. Un problème technique isolé pour moi ça n'existe pas et donc le problème vient clairement de la culture d'entreprise de Boeing dès le départ.

**Noam :** Et vous diriez donc que Boeing porte une part vraiment importante de responsabilité dans ces problèmes donc qu'elle aurait dû éviter ces différents événements ?

**Intervenant 2 :** je pourrais vous faire une réponse physiologique en disant c'est la société capitaliste et la course au gain qui a mené à cette situation, mais on va dire que pragmatiquement oui. Boeing est totalement responsable des incidents et de la manière dont en fait la crise s'est déroulée parce que c'est l'attitude de Boeing qui a mené à cette crise, les crashes d'avions certes mais la grosse crise pour moi c'est la réaction de Boeing face à des crashes d'avions qui je le rappelle ont quand même tué des centaines de personnes qui pensaient simplement voyager ou aller voir leur famille, donc oui.

**Noam :** On a parlé principalement des crashes des 737 max il y a eu voilà plusieurs autres controverses par exemple une porte qui s'envole qui s'arrache en plein vol etc, est-ce que le fait qu'il y a eu plusieurs incidents ça rend la situation vraiment plus grave à vos yeux ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Après le problème c'est que pour les autres petits incidents ça je peux pas dire forcément que c'est de la faute de Boeing enfin je veux dire une porte qui se ferme mal c'est peut-être aussi un technicien au sol qui a mal fermé la porte donc moi je crois que c'est une mauvaise série je me dis que Boeing est dans une très mauvaise place pour le moment c'est peut-être leur karma justement qui il y ait eu tous ces petits soucis encore qui arrivent par la suite, il y a aussi eu des problèmes avec leur capsule spatiale qui a dû partir de la station spatiale internationale parce qu'ils ne savaient pas ramener les astronautes. Je dirais que c'est un peu le karma je suis pas assez technicien pour dire que c'est de leur faute ou non mais je me dis que rien n'arrive jamais par hasard ou tout seul, avec ce nombres d'incidents, ça vient forcément de de quelque chose. Ça doit pas améliorer leur bidon

**Noam :** Et vous diriez toujours que Boeing est perçu comme une entreprise fiable et sérieuse maintenant ?

**Intervenant 2 :** En tant qu'entreprise, j'ai un peu du mal ça le je pense qu'ils se font prendre de court de toute façon maintenant par Airbus. Airbus qui a une réputation de fiabilité maintenant qui est beaucoup plus affirmée que Boeing. Et pour moi oui. La question de base c'était ?

**Noam :** c'était est-ce que vous la considérez toujours Boeing comme entreprise comme sérieuse et fiable ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Plus tellement, mais après je me dis là maintenant ils n'ont plus le droit à l'erreur et donc après toute cette séquence du 737 max et tous les petits accidents effectivement qu'il y a eu après je me dis j'espère que Boeing là a compris qu'ils n'ont plus le droit à l'erreur et donc qu'ils ne commettront plus jamais ces erreurs-là. Donc est-ce qu'ils le sont ? Est-ce que je les considère comme tels ? je ne sais pas, mais je pense en tout cas avec le temps Il faudra qu'ils le prouvent.

**Noam :** Vous avez parlé tout à l'heure, de ce que cela avait provoqué chez vous en termes d'émotion, avec une certaine colère envers Boeing, et donc il y'a vraiment eu ce sentiment qui a été très présent lorsque vous avez entendu ces différents incidents ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Évidemment, évidemment. Enfin je veux dire un avion ça transporte des centaines de passagers à partir d'un moment quand on ne fait pas son job on porte quand même la responsabilité de millions de millions de passagers de la vie de passagers à un incident d'avion enfin on sait quand même les dégâts que ça peut causer si un pilote à un moment donné fait mal son boulot ou je ne sais pas imaginons il boit avant de prendre un avion et de transporter des passagers mais je serais excessivement en colère et pour moi la réaction de Boeing face à la crise du 737 c'est exactement la même chose c'est un manque de considération terrible pour l'être humain parce que les profits sont plus intéressants parce qu'il ne faut pas perdre d'argent et ça ça me met dans une colère dans une colère monstre comment est-ce qu'ils ont pu se permettre ça d'autant plus par la position qu'ils avaient Boeing c'était le fleuron c'était l'entreprise qui fait voler les gens comment est-ce que c'est possible?

**Noam :** Et maintenant le fait de savoir qu'un vol est opéré par Boeing est-ce que c'est une situation qui vous met un peu mal à l'aise qui peut potentiellement vous gêner?

**Intervenant 2 :** Au début oui ça me gênait fort moi j'ai l'application Flight radar 24 et je me souviens au tout début je regarde je regarde toujours l'avion dans lequel je vais voler et je vous avoue que quand je regardais mon vol je voyais que c'était un Boeing 737 je voyais que c'était un vieux 737 j'étais content parce que voilà le vieux 737 totalement confiance en revanche quand j'ai dû revoler pour la première fois avec un 737 max où j'ai vu que c'était un max produit dans la même période quelques temps après enfin depuis ça avait été solutionné il disait que ça avait été solutionné J'étais pas très très à l'aise.

**Noam :** Donc on va dire que vous avez en tout cas de ce que je comprends une certaine méfiance des nouveaux appareils qui sont mis en circulation par Boeing et plus on va dire confiance aux anciens appareils qui ont été faits des années avant ces différents accidents.

**Intervenant 2 :** En fait c'est tout l'incohérence je trouve un peu dans le dans l'industrie aéronautique c'est qu'on adore la nouveauté mais à la fois plus ils rajoutent de nouveaux systèmes et plus c'est potentiellement des futurs défaillances dans les avions mais par exemple c'est vrai que si je voyageais demain en A350 d'Airbus j'aurais totalement confiance. Je sais pas vous dire pourquoi mais je me sentirais trop bien, j'aurais totalement confiance. Si demain, Boeing sort une nouvelle version du 777, je ne volerai pas avec cet avion dans la première année par exemple ça j'aurais vraiment beaucoup plus de mal. Le 737 max je vole dedans en étant relativement à l'aise mais en y pensant toujours, parce qu'il y a

eu cette crise parce qu'on a vu quel était le problème parce qu'on était informé en fait c'est ça c'est de l'information parce qu'on était informé qu'il y avait un souci et parce que Boeing est censé l'avoir résolu. Or demain s'ils sortent un nouvel avion tout nouveau avec des nouveaux systèmes je sais pas si j'aurai vraiment totalement confiance. Je pense que je serai quand même assez inquiet

**Noam :** Et est-ce que, vu qu'on parlait justement tout à l'heure des compagnies comme Ryanair, compagnie qui comme vous le savez est composée uniquement d'une flotte de Boeing, est-ce que ça pourrait influencer la confiance que vous avez envers une compagnie aérienne que cette compagnie aérienne décide d'opérer avec des avions Boeing qui ont peut-être déjà eu des antécédents accidentels ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Ça c'est compliqué à dire. Ryanair je sais qu'eux n'ont entre guillemets pas le choix d'acheter des Boeing 737 parce que le modèle du low cost veut que pour la réduction des coûts ils achètent tout le temps le même modèle d'avion pour faire des économies d'échelle sur tout ce qui pourrait être fait sur toute la chaîne en fait de l'entretien des avions, l'achat des pièces etc. Donc ils sont tenus par ça d'ailleurs ils tiennent un peu excusez-moi de la vulgarité mais Boeing par les couilles, parce que c'est un des plus gros clients, Ryanair c'est pas le plus gros client En revanche des compagnies européennes, d'autres compagnies européennes je pense à Brussels Airlines, Air France à Corsair, à Transavia qui pourraient faire l'acquisition de Boeing je trouvais ça bizarre à partir du moment où vous avez un avion européen quoi, c'est Airbus. Pour moi voilà il faut absolument privilégier l'industrie européenne et donc Airbus est beaucoup plus pertinent que Boeing je mettrais pas la faute sur la compagnie aérienne, si la compagnie aérienne fait l'acquisition de ses avions c'est qu'elles ont confiance et je pense que là maintenant vu ce qui s'est passé elles seront d'autant plus vigilantes si elles doivent faire l'acquisition de nouveaux Boeing, comme Boeing devra être d'autant plus vigilants quand il mettra en service un nouvel avion donc je suis assez partagé sur cette question.

**Noam :** Je crois qu'on a fait le tour des questions que j'avais à vous posez, est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose d'autre que vous aimeriez rajouter sur Boeing, la sécurité ou quoi que ce soit ?

**Intervenant 2 :** Euuh, Je vais rajouter le fil conducteur vraiment de ce que j'ai essayé d'amener pendant cet entretien c'est que un secteur aussi stratégique Le transport aéronautique ça nécessite quand même une conscience je veux dire. On est pas sur un produit classique, on ne vend pas des biques je veux dire on vend quand même un moyen de transport dans lequel les gens doivent avoir une confiance absolue, les gens quand ils montent dans un avion mettent quand même leur vie entre la main des pilotes des techniciens qui font les entretiens des avions et aussi des constructeurs qui ont développé l'avion du début à la fin et donc ça nécessite absolument d'avoir cette conscience professionnelle, cette conscience de la sécurité est mille fois plus importante que l'appât du gain et des profits

**Noam :** Super, Je vous remercie beaucoup pour tous les réponses que vous m'avez donné ! Ça été super intéressant de mon côté, n'hésitez pas à partager mon contact si vous avez d'autres personnes qui serait potentiellement intéressé de répondre à ces questions

**Intervenant 2 :** Pas de soucis, je le ferai sans soucis

**Noam :** Merci beaucoup !

**Intervenant 2 :** Merci à vous !

**Noam** : Tout d'abord merci d'avoir accepté ma proposition.

**Intervenant 12** : C'est avec plaisir.

**Noam** : Avant de commencer, je tiens à préciser que cet entretien est réalisé dans le cadre d'un mémoire universitaire et donc que toutes les réponses que vous me donnerez resteront strictement dans ce cadre justement universitaire et que la politique de données est appliquée par HEC Liège et par l'Université de Liège et donc tout ce qui concerne votre anonymat, votre nom, sera bien entendu respecté.

**Intervenant 12** : D'accord, ça va.

**Noam** : Et j'avais une question, est-ce que vous m'autorisez à enregistrer cet entretien pour que je puisse le retranscrire par la suite ? Ça me permettra de rester plus attentif à vos réponses et de pas trop m'éparpiller dans une prise de notes.

**Intervenant 12** : Oui, bien sûr.

**Noam** : On va pouvoir commencer. Les premières questions, on va dire, c'est plus des questions d'introduction et de profilage. La première, la voici, c'est, pouvez-vous me parler brièvement de votre rapport au voyage en avion, s'il vous plaît ?

**Intervenant 12** : Oui, bien sûr. Moi, mon rapport avec le voyage en avion, il a commencé très jeune. J'ai commencé à prendre l'avion à neuf mois et depuis, je le prends chaque année ou au moins deux fois par an. L'avion ne me fait pas forcément peur par rapport à d'autres personnes. Je suis assez relaxe en avion. J'aime bien l'ambiance qu'il y a avant de prendre l'avion, par exemple à l'aéroport ou même dans l'avion. Je trouve ça très fascinant, surtout comment ils gèrent autant d'avions dans le monde. J'adore regarder les avions atterrir et décoller et c'est vraiment un domaine qui me fascine depuis que je suis toute petite.

**Noam** : Et vous direz qu'à quelle fréquence vous prenez l'avion annuellement, comme vous l'avez dit, deux fois par an ?

**Intervenant 12** : Oui, je prends l'avion au moins deux fois par an, par exemple, je prends pour aller en vacances ou assez jour à l'étranger et l'avion n'est pas du tout quelque chose qui me freine pour partir en voyage.

**Noam** : Et quand vous choisissez un vol ou une compagnie aérienne, est-ce qu'il y a des éléments qui rentrent plus en compte pour vous ?

**Intervenant 12** : Quand je choisis un vol ou une compagnie, déjà ce qui compte en premier, c'est où est-ce que je vais aller, donc la destination. C'est très important parce que toutes les compagnies et même tous les aéroports ne le font pas. Donc déjà ça dépend de ça. Parce que par exemple, si je veux partir dans ma destination où je partais tout le temps quand j'étais petite, qui est en Espagne, il y a des vols depuis Charleroi et depuis Bruxelles, mais pas avec les mêmes compagnies. Donc là vraiment, ce qui va se jouer aussi, c'est le prix des

billets. Parce qu'au final, je vais à la même destination que ce soit de Charleroi ou de Bruxelles. Mais si c'est pour payer deux ou trois fois le prix, je trouve que ça ne sert à rien pour un court courrier. Par contre, ce qui compte aussi vachement dans les longs courriers, c'est le temps de vol. Par exemple, on peut choisir plusieurs compagnies et parfois les billets sont moins chers. Alors il faut faire parfois des escales ou des correspondances dans d'autres villes, ce qui fait que le temps de vol est beaucoup plus long. Je ne suis pas très fan de ça, surtout quand il y a des possibilités d'y aller avec un vol direct, par exemple.

**Noam :** Ok, ok et est-ce que la question de la sécurité aérienne, c'est quelque chose à laquelle vous faites attention?

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, évidemment, la question de la sécurité aérienne est importante pour moi, comme je pense qu'elle est importante pour tout le monde. Par contre, je n'ai pas vraiment fait d'études là-dessus, donc je ne m'y connais pas suffisamment pour pouvoir dire que telle compagnie est meilleure que telle compagnie. Mais par exemple, si je dois faire un long courrier, je préfère prendre une compagnie d'un pays européen, on va dire, qu'une compagnie d'un autre pays et je ne mets pas du tout en cause leur sécurité aérienne, mais j'ai plus confiance dans celle que je connais. Du coup, ça influence beaucoup ma façon de voyager, car je ne regarde pas forcément sur toutes les compagnies aériennes avant de réserver un vol. Je regarde principalement sur celles que moi, je connais.

**Noam :** Donc c'est quelque chose qui est important pour vous, la sécurité aérienne?

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, bien sûr.

**Noam :** Une autre question, c'est quand vous entendez le nom du constructeur aérien Boeing, à quoi vous allez penser spontanément?

**Intervenant 12 :** Quand j'entends le nom Boeing, la première chose qui me vient en tête, c'est qu'il est l'un des leaders mondiaux dans la construction d'avions avec Airbus. Et que du coup, je le prends souvent. C'est vrai que récemment, j'ai entendu parler de plusieurs problèmes avec les Boeing, principalement avec le nouveau modèle MAX. Donc ma première impression est que j'ai confiance en eux, vu que c'est quand même un des leaders mondiaux. Mais il y a quand même une petite crainte qui vient avec tous les problèmes que j'ai entendus récemment. Donc là, je suis un peu perplexe. Je ne sais plus trop si je dois vraiment leur faire confiance ou pas.

**Noam :** Et vous avez mentionné différents événements que Boeing a pu subir. Vous diriez que vous avez quelle impression générale de Boeing ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Globalement, j'ai une impression un peu mitigée aujourd'hui de Boeing. Pendant longtemps, pour moi, Boeing faisait partie des entreprises de référence dans l'aviation avec Airbus. C'était une entreprise qui inspirait naturellement confiance parce qu'on entendait son nom partout et qu'elle existe depuis très longtemps. Donc, avant tous les récents problèmes, je n'aurais jamais spécialement remis en question leur sérieux ou leur sécurité. Mais aujourd'hui, je trouve que mon impression a changé à cause de tous les incidents dont on a entendu parler récemment. Ce n'est pas forcément que je pense que

tous les avions Boeing sont dangereux, mais le fait qu'il y a eu autant de problèmes rapprochés a créé une forme de doute. Même quand les incidents ne sont pas extrêmement graves, le fait qu'ils se répètent donne l'impression qu'il y a peut-être un problème plus profond dans l'entreprise ou dans la gestion de la sécurité. Donc, je dirais qu'avant, j'avais une image très positive et rassurante de Boeing, alors qu'aujourd'hui, c'est devenu plus partagé entre confiance et inquiétude. Mon impression, je dirais qu'elle est devenue plutôt mitigée, avec une tendance plus négative qu'avant. Je garde quand même l'idée que Boeing reste une énorme entreprise avec beaucoup d'expérience et qu'ils ne peuvent pas se permettre de négliger complètement la sécurité. Mais les récents événements ont quand même beaucoup abîmé leur image à mes yeux. Avant, quand j'entendais Boeing, je pensais surtout à une grande entreprise innovante et fiable. Maintenant, j'associe aussi directement Boeing aux problèmes de sécurité, aux accidents et aux polémiques, donc forcément, ça influence mon opinion, même si je continue quand même à prendre l'avion sans énorme peur.

**Noam :** Ok, ok donc, comme vous l'avez mentionné, vous direz que Boeing ne vous inspire pas trop confiance maintenant ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, voilà. Comme je viens de dire, Boeing m'inspire. Non, elle m'inspire quand même un peu confiance, car c'est quand même une entreprise sérieuse qui est connue depuis très longtemps et qui a de très bons résultats. C'est juste que ces derniers temps, on a entendu des problèmes et donc ça peut laisser certaines peurs chez les gens, y compris chez moi.

**Noam :** Vous avez parlé que c'est quand même une entreprise sérieuse. Elle reste toujours sérieuse et fiable pour vous, Boeing ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Globalement, je pense que oui, on peut considérer Boeing comme une entreprise sérieuse et fiable. Mais les accidents qu'il y a eu récemment peuvent laisser penser que l'entreprise devient moins sérieuse et moins fiable, surtout peut-être dû à une mauvaise gestion ou un changement dans l'organisation. Je ne sais pas. Il faudrait voir si c'est qu'une passe ou si l'entreprise a vraiment changé. Et dans ce cas-là, non, elle ne serait plus sérieuse et elle ne serait plus fiable.

**Noam :** OK, très bien. Vous avez mentionné les différents problèmes que Boeing a eu ces dernières années au niveau de la sécurité. Est-ce qu'il y a un événement qui vous a retenu un sujet, qui vous a marqué, on va dire ?

**Intervenant 12 :** C'est vrai qu'il y en a eu beaucoup quand même, dans une courte période, qui pourrait laisser croire que Boeing n'est plus ce que c'était avant. J'ai entendu des problèmes liés à des portes qui s'envolent, des moteurs qui prennent feu en plein vol, plein de petits problèmes comme ça. Il y a également beaucoup de reportages qui ont été faits à ce sujet, sur les problèmes que Boeing a vécu récemment. Donc, même si on n'est pas des habitués de l'avion, on en a forcément entendu parler. Et moi, j'en ai beaucoup entendu parler en tout cas.

**Noam :** Et par quel moyen, justement, vous avez pu entendre ces différents incidents ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Je les ai entendus un peu partout. Je les ai entendus surtout sur les réseaux sociaux, à la télé, au journal, dans les médias et aussi par le bouche-à-oreille également. Mais je pense que c'est surtout chez moi, les réseaux sociaux qui ont le plus relayé ces informations. C'est vraiment là que j'ai pu voir la peur chez les gens. Et du coup, moi aussi, ça m'a créé une petite peur par rapport à ça, alors que de base, je n'en avais pas forcément une parce que je ne voyais pas l'ampleur que ça avait.

**Noam :** Et donc, vous direz que ça a créé une sorte de peur chez vous, donc vous direz que la manière dont ces informations ont été relayées a pu influencer alors votre opinion ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, c'est très possible parce que vu que tout le monde a commencé un peu à avoir peur, je pense que ça a fait un effet boule de neige et que ça a pris des proportions énormes, même si l'effet, il reste très, très grave. En tout cas, moi, pour ma part, c'est aussi également le fait de voir de la peur chez les autres et voir peut-être une perte de confiance venant des professionnels eux-mêmes, que je me suis dit que c'était sérieux quand même comme problème.

**Noam :** Et donc, après tout ce que vous avez entendu sur ces problèmes que vous avez mentionnés, votre impression générale de Boeing, c'est laquelle maintenant ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Aujourd'hui, j'ai l'impression que Boeing traverse une vraie crise de confiance. Ce n'est pas seulement un problème isolé, mais plutôt une accumulation de problèmes qui donne une mauvaise image et perception de l'entreprise. J'ai l'impression que même les personnes qui ne connaissent rien à l'aviation ont entendu parler de Boeing récemment et de leurs problèmes, ce qui montre à quel point l'affaire a pris de l'ampleur mais perso, je continue à penser que Boeing reste un acteur important et sérieux dans l'aviation. Mais j'ai quand même perdu une partie de la confiance que j'avais avant. Quand y'a des problèmes de portes qui s'envolent, de problèmes techniques ou d'enquêtes, et que les médias re font circuler ça, bah ça donne l'impression que certaines choses n'ont pas été assez contrôlées.

**Noam :** Et vous direz quel mot ou quelle idée vous vient à l'esprit quand vous pensez à Boeing aujourd'hui ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Les premiers mots qui me viennent aujourd'hui après sont sécurité, accident, et Boeing Max, le modèle qui a eu beaucoup de soucis. Je pense aussi à l'idée de crise, parce que j'ai l'impression que Boeing est dans une période compliquée depuis plusieurs années. Mais malgré tout, je pense aussi encore à un leader mondial, à une grande entreprise, parce que Boeing reste quand même une marque extrêmement connue et importante dans l'aviation donc bah... dans ma tête, il y a vraiment deux idées qui coexistent. D'un côté, une entreprise historique et puissante, et de l'autre, une entreprise qui a récemment beaucoup abîmé sa réputation.

**Noam :** Et donc vous diriez, je pense que vous l'avez dit précédemment, que votre impression sur votre opinion sur Boeing a changé ces dernières années.

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, oui clairement. Avant, je n'avais pratiquement aucune pensée négative sur Boeing. Pour moi, c'était simplement un constructeur d'avions connu, comme Airbus. Et je ne me posais même pas la question quand je prenais l'avion. Mais avec tous les événements récents, les reportages, les vidéos sur les réseaux sociaux, les discussions autour de Boeing, mon opinion a forcément changé. Aujourd'hui, quand j'entends le nom Boeing, je pense directement aux problèmes de sécurité récents, alors qu'avant, ce n'était pas du tout le cas. Je pense surtout que ce qui a changé, c'est que maintenant, je fais plus attention qu'avant. Par exemple, aujourd'hui, si j'apprends que vol est opéré avec un Boeing comme le Max, ça peut me faire réfléchir un peu, alors qu'avant, je n'aurais jamais regardé le type d'avion que ça allait être.

**Noam :** Et donc vous direz que Boeing vous inspire confiance maintenant ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Je dirais que Boeing m'inspire encore une certaine confiance, mais clairement moins qu'avant. Je ne suis pas au point de me dire que je refuserais automatiquement de monter dans un avion Boeing, parce que ça reste une entreprise énorme, connue mondialement, avec beaucoup d'expérience dans l'aviation. Mais je me dis aussi que les avions sont contrôlés, que les compagnies aériennes ont aussi des obligations de sécurité, et que l'avion reste globalement un moyen de transport très encadré. Malgré ça, ma confiance a été quand même impactée, le fait d'avoir entendu parler de plusieurs problèmes rapprochés, surtout sur les Boeing Max, fait que je ne peux plus voir Boeing exactement comme avant. Aujourd'hui, si je vois que mon vol est opéré par Boeing, ça ne m'empêcherait pas forcément de partir... Ça fait réfléchir quand même aussi. Je pense que j'aurais quand même une petite inquiétude en plus, surtout si c'est un modèle qui a été beaucoup cité dans les médias. Donc, je dirais que Boeing m'inspire encore confiance sur le principe, mais avec une réserve. Je dirais que j'ai encore confiance aujourd'hui dans l'aviation en général, mais plus une confiance totale et aveugle envers Boeing, comme ça aurait pu être le cas auparavant.

**Noam :** Et selon vous, Boeing est toujours perçue comme une entreprise sérieuse et fiable ? C'est une question de tout à l'heure, mais juste après les accidents.

**Intervenant 12 :** Je pense qu'aujourd'hui, Boeing reste perçue comme une entreprise très importante et historique dans l'aviation, en tout cas pour ma part. Donc, il y a encore des personnes qui lui font une certaine confiance, y compris moi, parce que son nom reste associé à des décennies d'expérience et à des leaders mondiaux du secteur de l'aviation. Mais honnêtement, je pense que sa réputation de fiabilité a été fortement abîmée ces dernières années, avec tout ce qu'on entend sur les incidents et aussi les témoignages d'anciens employés et d'ingénieurs et tout quoi fin... ça donne l'impression qu'il y a peut-être un problème plus profond dans l'entreprise et pas seulement quelques erreurs isolées. Ce qui me dérange le plus, c'est l'impression que la sécurité n'est peut-être plus la priorité absolue chez Boeing, comme ça aurait dû l'être dans ce domaine aussi sensible que l'aviation. Quand t'entends parler de problèmes répétés, de volonté d'aller plus vite ou de concurrence avec Airbus, ça peut donner l'impression que certaines décisions ont été prises davantage pour des raisons économiques que des raisons de sécurité. Du coup, aujourd'hui, même si Boeing reste une entreprise majeure, je pense qu'elle inspire quand même moins confiance qu'avant et qu'elle est moins perçue comme totalement... Oh !

**Intervenant 12 :** Désolée pour cet incident.

**Noam :** Pas de soucis, merci.

**Intervenant 12 :** Du coup, je disais qu'aujourd'hui, même si Boeing reste une entreprise majeure dans l'aviation, je pense qu'elle inspire quand même moins confiance qu'avant et qu'elle est moins perçue comme totalement fiable.

**Noam :** Et selon vous, ces problèmes donnent surtout l'erreur technique ponctuelle ou plus un problème un peu plus profond dans votre entreprise ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Au début, je pensais plutôt que c'étaient des incidents normaux on va dire ou des erreurs ponctuelles qui peuvent arriver dans n'importe quelle industrie. Mais le fait qu'il y ait eu autant de problèmes rapprochés donne maintenant l'impression qu'il y a peut-être quelque chose de plus profond derrière. Comme ce sont des incidents qui reviennent souvent dans les médias, ça donne l'impression qu'il pourrait y avoir des problèmes dans la gestion, dans les contrôles de sécurité ou même aussi comment ils sont organisés aujourd'hui en tant que entreprise je veux dire... au niveau de l'organisation. Après, comme je ne suis pas une spécialiste du domaine, je ne peux pas dire exactement d'où viennent les problèmes, mais en tant que personne extérieure, la répétition des incidents donne quand même une mauvaise impression. Pour moi, ça ne donne pas l'impression que de simple incident isolé, mais plutôt du résultat d'un ensemble de problèmes accumulés progressivement, si je peux dire, dans l'entreprise.

**Noam :** Et vous avez le sentiment que Boeing porte une part importante de responsabilité dans ces problèmes-là ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, je pense quand même que Boeing porte une part importante de responsabilité parce qu'au final, c'est eux qui fabriquent les avions et qui sont responsables de la sécurité de leur appareil. Quand on est une entreprise aussi importante dans un domaine aussi sensible que l'aviation, je pense qu'il y a une énorme responsabilité. Après, je pense aussi qu'il peut y avoir d'autres facteurs comme les compagnies aériennes, la maintenance ou certaines erreurs humaines. Je ne pense pas forcément que tout soit uniquement la faute de Boeing, mais comme leur nom revient tout le temps dans les incidents, forcément l'image de responsabilité leur est beaucoup associée et le fait que certains anciens employés, fin ancien employés ou ingénieurs aient alerté sur des problèmes de qualité ou de sécurité, bah ça renforce davantage mon impression de responsabilité de Boeing.

**Noam :** Et donc vous diriez que ce problème aurait pu être évité par Boeing ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Oui, clairement, cela aurait pu être évité car s'ils avaient plus mis d'intérêt sur la sécurité de leur appareil plutôt qu'essayer d'aller trop vite et ne pas réfléchir comme une entreprise en tant qu'entreprise en elle-même et chercher à faire du profit. Si vraiment l'objectif de Boeing avait été respectée à la base qui est d'assurer la sécurité, même si, tous les incidents qui sont revenus ne sont pas tous de la faute entière à Boeing. Mais c'est vrai

que sur des incidents, il y a clairement des éléments qui font penser, de ce que j'ai entendu, que Boeing est en grande partie responsable car il y a eu des choses qui ont été cachées ou alors on a voulu aller trop vite dans le processus de fabrication pour pouvoir économiser de l'argent. Et ça, c'est au détriment de la sécurité et on en revient justement à cette notion de responsabilité qui est quasi totale pour l'entreprise Boeing.

**Noam :** Ok,ok et vous en avez parlé tout à l'heure du fait qu'il y a eu plusieurs incidents. Est-ce que le fait qu'il y ait eu plusieurs incidents ou controverses, ça change-t-il votre jugement ? Est-ce que ça rend la situation plus grave ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Bah oui, énormément. Je pense que s'il y avait eu un seul incident isolé, j'aurais probablement oublié plus vite ou considéré que ça peut arriver exceptionnellement. Mais le fait qu'il y ait eu plusieurs événements rapprochés, ça a vraiment créé une impression de répétition et donc une perte de confiance. Je pense aussi que la répétition, ça rend les médias et les réseaux sociaux beaucoup plus puissants pour moi, parce que chaque nouvel incident rappelle automatiquement les précédents Ça entretient constamment une image négative autour de Boeing.

**Noam :** Et comme vous avez entendu parler de ces problèmes de sécurité chez Boeing, qu'est-ce que ça a provoqué chez vous en termes d'émotion ?

**Intervenant 12 :** Je pense surtout que ça m'a provoqué de l'inquiétude et un peu de stress parce que l'avion fait quelque chose où les gens doivent avoir totalement confiance dans la sécurité. Quand on entend parler de problèmes techniques en plein vol, forcément ça peut faire peur même aux personnes qui prennent souvent l'avion comme moi. Je pense aussi qu'il y a une forme d'incompréhension parce que je me dis qu'une entreprise aussi grande et expérimentée ne devrait normalement pas avoir autant de problèmes visibles en peu de temps. Donc ça crée un mélange entre peur, surprise et perte de confiance. Ça provoque aussi chez moi une certaine incompréhension comme j'ai dit et même, fin c'est peut-être un grand mot mais un peu de colère parce que je me dis qu'une entreprise aussi grande, expérimentée et importante dans l'aviation ne devrait normalement pas laisser arriver ce genre de situation.

**Noam :** Oui c'est sûr. Et est-ce que vous savez la manière dont Boeing a communiqué ou réagit suite à ces différents événements ? Ça peut être générale, fin de manière vague aussi.

**Intervenant 12 :** oui d'accord, bah je n'ai pas suivi tous les détails de leur communication officielle, mais de l'extérieur j'ai quand même eu l'impression que Boeing a parfois réagi trop tard et pas de manière assez transparente par rapport à la gravité de la situation. J'ai surtout eu le sentiment qu'au début ils essayaient davantage de limiter les conséquences pour leur image plutôt que de rassurer directement les passagers et de reconnaître clairement leurs responsabilités. Et forcément quand une entreprise ne communique pas rapidement dans une crise aussi importante, ça peut donner l'impression qu'elle cache certaines choses ou qu'elle ne contrôle pas totalement la situation. Alors personnellement je pense qu'ils auraient dû être beaucoup plus directs, transparents et rassurants dès le début, surtout dans un domaine comme l'aviation où la confiance et la sécurité sont essentielles.

**Noam** : Vous donnez déjà un élément de réponse. Est-ce que pour vous cette communication, en tout cas ces réactions, étaient adéquates par rapport à la crise à laquelle Boeing faisait face ?

**Intervenant 12** : Comme je disais maintenant, je pense que je me serais attendue à une communication beaucoup plus transparente et rassurante, j'aurais imaginé des prises de parole très fortes pour expliquer précisément les problèmes, montrer les solutions mises en place et surtout rassurer les passagers. Je pense aussi qu'aujourd'hui avec les réseaux sociaux et la vitesse à laquelle les informations circulent, c'est obligé de réagir très vite sinon les gens ont l'impression qu'on leur cache des choses.

**Noam** : Et le fait de savoir qu'un vol va être opéré par Boeing, est-ce que cela pourrait influencer votre ressenti ou même votre choix ?

**Intervenant 12** : Oui un peu. Même si ce ne serait probablement pas le seul critère, si deux vols étaient exactement au même prix avec les mêmes horaires et les mêmes conditions, je pense que je choiserais plus facilement un Airbus aujourd'hui plutôt qu'un Boeing. Mais en même temps, je ne pense pas que j'annulerais complètement un voyage uniquement parce que c'est un Boeing. Donc c'est plus une hésitation ou une préférence qu'un refus.

**Noam** : Et dans ce sens, est-ce que cela pourrait influencer votre confiance envers une compagnie aérienne qui utilise des avions Boeing par exemple ?

**Intervenant 12** : Oui je pense un peu, même si je sais que les compagnies aériennes ne fabriquent pas elles-mêmes les avions. Mais inconsciemment, c'est une compagnie qui utilise beaucoup de Boeing et qu'on entend constamment parler de problèmes liés à Boeing, bah la compagnie peut elle aussi être liée. Après je pense aussi que les gens regardent la réputation globale de la compagnie aérienne et la manière dont elle entretient ses avions. Donc pour moi, il pourrait probablement avoir une responsabilité de partager entre Boeing et les compagnies.

**Noam** : Ok très bien, est-ce qu'il y a autre chose que vous aimeriez rajouter sur Boeing, la sécurité ou la manière dont cela a un peu influencé votre perception ?

**Intervenant 12** : Bah juste dire que avant, j'avais tendance à penser que dans un domaine aussi encadré que l'aviation, tout était forcément extrêmement contrôlé et sécurisé. Aujourd'hui, je me rends compte que même des entreprises très connues et très importantes peuvent traverser des problèmes internes. Ça m'empêche pas de continuer à voyager ni d'avoir confiance dans l'aviation mais je pense que maintenant, j'ai fait plus attention qu'avant aux informations liées aux compagnies aériennes et aux constructeurs.

**Noam** : Bah Merci je crois qu'on a fait le tour, merci beaucoup encore d'avoir accepté mon invitation, d'avoir répondu à toutes ces questions et des réponses qui étaient super intéressantes, je vous remercie. N'hésitez pas aussi si vous connaissez du monde ou quoi qui pourrait être intéressé par ce types de question à lui donner mes coordonnées je serai ravi de l'accueillir.

**Intervenant 12 :** Merci à vous c'était avec plaisir et oui sans soucis ,j'y penserai si j'ai quelqu'un.

**Noam :** Un grand merci, une bonne fin de journée.

**Intervenant 12 :** Également merci.



### 12.3 Appendix 3: Extracts of thematic analysis from Excel

The following extracts are provided as examples to illustrate the thematic analysis process from the interviews.

| <b>Participant</b><br><i>To keep the participants anonymity, using P1,P2,P3,...</i> | <b>Topic</b><br><i>Main topic discussed</i>                        | <b>Citation/Extract</b><br><i>Important quotes taken directly from the interview</i>                                                                                      | <b>Initial code</b><br><i>Short analytical label</i> | <b>Potential Trend</b><br><i>Broader category regrouping similar code</i> | <b>Light Description</b><br><i>First description before going deeper in details</i>                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1                                                                                  | Initial perception of Boeing                                       | "C'est peut-être triste, mais le premier mot qui me vient à l'esprit, c'est les scandales qu'il y a eu avec Boeing ces dernières années."                                 | Incidents associations                               | Immediate association of Boeing with recent safety issues                 | Boeing is spontaneously associated with scandals, showing that the crises strongly shape the brand's immediate image.                                                                                                         |
| P1                                                                                  | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "Je pourrais dire, le constructeur dans lequel j'ai peut-être le moins confiance."                                                                                        | Low trust in Boeing in the aviation sector           | From historical legitimacy to weakened image, reputation and trust        | Among aircraft manufacturers, Boeing is the one that inspires the least confidence in him, and even without a negative personal flight experience, Boeing is perceived as less trustworthy than other aircraft manufacturers. |
| P1                                                                                  | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "Boeing, avant tout, reste une entreprise qui veut faire du profit (...) on a l'impression que Boeing est vraiment orienté profit max, quitte à lésiner sur la sécurité." | Profit orientation                                   | Profit-driven corporate culture over safety                               | The participant interprets Boeing's behavior through a profit-driven logic, which weakens corporate trust.                                                                                                                    |

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| P2 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "Qui me dit que demain, il n'y aura pas un souci sur un autre élément qui nous sera encore caché ? "                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Fear of hidden future issues    | Persistent distrust toward Boeing                          | Even if the MCAS issue is considered solved, the participant remains worried about future undisclosed problems.                        |
| P2 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "La seule chose qui m'angoisse un peu c'est de savoir que cette crise est le résultat d'un processus et d'une culture de l'entreprise Boeing"/Ce sont des erreurs techniques mais qui ont été engendrées par une culture d'entreprise qui a été mauvaise, l'appât du gain à tout prix (...) Tous les problèmes techniques viennent de quelque part et donc le problème vient clairement de la culture d'entreprise de Boeing" |                                 | Technical failures as symptoms of deeper internal problems | The participant interprets technical failures as symptoms of deeper organizational and cultural problems ie. the dedication to profit. |
| P2 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "Boeing est totalement responsable des incidents et de la manière dont en fait la crise s'est déroulée "/"qu'il savait très bien d'où venait le problème Il savait d'où venait le problème parce que déjà l'ingénieur en interne de Boeing avait alerté justement sur ces problèmes-là"                                                                                                                                       | Full responsibility attribution | Blame attribution to Boeing                                | Responsibility is attributed not only to the technical incidents, but also to the way Boeing managed the crisis.                       |
| P2 | Emotional reaction and impact                                      | "un manque de considération terrible pour l'être humain parce que les profits sont plus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Anger towards Boeing            | Anger as moral reaction                                    | The dominant emotional reaction here is a strong anger, linked and due to perceived negligence and lack of                             |

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|  |  | intéressants parce qu'il ne faut pas perdre d'argent et ça, ça me met dans une colère dans une colère monstre" |  |  | human consideration and this pursuit of profit at all costs. |
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| P3 | Transparency and crisis response | "la réponse n'a pas toujours été à la hauteur des attentes, soit des familles, des actionnaires ou du public en général, ce qui a renforcer la méfiance d'à peu près tout le monde"                                                                                                                | The disconnect with the crisis reinforces mistrust | Crisis response as aggravating factor / Persistent distrust toward Boeing | The response to the crisis is not considered to meet expectations and therefore reinforces the feeling of distrust towards Boeing. |
| P3 | Behavioral consequences          | "mais tu prends un 737 Max, j'aurais été un peu plus méfiant peut-être mais ça n'aurait pas changé mon choix."                                                                                                                                                                                     | Mistrust with Boeing aircraft but no actions       | Behavioral vigilance /Limited behavioral impact                           | The incidents create additional caution, but they do not strongly alter the participant's actual flight choices.                   |
| P3 | Airline Relationship             | "Non, je ne crois pas que ça (utilisation d'avion Boeing par une airline) pourrait influencer"                                                                                                                                                                                                     | No airline trust transfer                          | Limited and non-automatic spillover to airlines                           | Distrust toward Boeing does not directly transfer to airlines operating Boeing aircraft.                                           |
| P4 | Initial perception of Boeing     | "Je vais penser à américain, défaillance technique et profit au-dessus de sécurité." /"ils s'en foutent parce qu'ils ont fait l'argent qu'ils devaient faire, et la sécurité c'est vraiment devenu un facteurs secondaire chez eux "/ "Je pense que Boeing essaye de réduire les coûts au maximum, | Profit over safety association                     | Profit-driven corporate culture over safety                               | Boeing is immediately associated with technical failure and the prioritization of profit over passenger safety.                    |

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|    |                                                                    | même s'il faut délaissier la sécurité des passagers"                                                                                                                                                                                      |                             |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                 |
| P4 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "mais en globalité, j'aurais plutôt une opinion négative. Avec tout ce qui s'est passé ici récemment au niveau des avions Boeing." / mon impression a changé, quand tu entends tout ce qui se passe"                                      | Negative Boeing opinion     | From historical legitimacy to weakened image, reputation and trust                    | The participant's overall perception of Boeing is now predominantly negative due to recent events.                              |
| P4 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "au vu des évènements qui se sont produits ici dernièrement, ça ne m'inspire plus trop confiance." / "Boeing m'aspire de moins en moins confiance ces dernières années automatiquement."                                                  | Reduced trust in Boeing     | From historical legitimacy to weakened image, reputation and trust - Erosion of trust | Boeing's recent incidents have directly weakened the participant's trust in the manufacturer.                                   |
| P5 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "La responsabilité de Boeing, elle est absolument totale"/ "il y' a quand même une certaine colère qui a pu me passer à l'esprit à ce moment à la suite aux conclusions de l'enquête et ces erreurs volontaires et totalement criminelle" | Total Boeing responsibility | Blame attribution/ Anger as moral reaction                                            | Responsibility is strongly attributed to Boeing, while still acknowledging that accidents are rarely caused by a single factor. |
| P5 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "ça faisait partie des remparts de sécurité et parmi les plus importants, et ils ont sciemment                                                                                                                                            |                             | Profit-driven corporate culture over safety                                           | There is a deliberate neglect of safety at Boeing, which is intentional in order to maximize profits                            |

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|    |                              | fait en sorte de ne pas les honorer pour une logique de profit, quoi                       |                                                    |                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| P5 | Interpretation of the crisis | "je dirais que c'est structurel, de facto, même si ça pourrait n'avoir l'air que ponctuel" | It may appear to be a one-off event on the surface | Technical failures as symptoms of deeper internal problems | The incidents that occurred might give the impression that they were isolated and one-off. However, according to the participant, they are in fact the result of structural decisions |

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| P6 | Initial perception of Boeing                                       | "Moi, c'est Boeing 737 Max. Ça m'a traumatisée. "                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 737 MAX trauma                                                 | 737 MAX as central memory              | The 737 MAX is the dominant association with Boeing and is described as emotionally traumatic.                                                                                                                                   |
| P6 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "Mais encore aujourd'hui, je pense, 7 ans après, si je vois un 737 Max, ça va me stresser parce que j'ai vraiment associé ce modèle à piquer vers l'avant et à se crasher."                                                                           | Lasting reputational damage                                    | Persistent distrust toward Boeing      | The participant has formed a lasting mental association between the 737 MAX and a crash scenario.                                                                                                                                |
| P6 | Media exposure and influence                                       | "Un accident d'avion ça marque plus, c'est plus impressionnant et ça les médias en jouent. "                                                                                                                                                          | Media dramatization                                            | Media amplification of Boeing's crisis | Recognition that aviation accidents are inherently shocking, but also believes media coverage amplifies their emotional impact.                                                                                                  |
| P6 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "je pense qu'il y a quand même une volonté de bien faire de la part des employés de chez Boeing mais peut-être moins du côté de la direction et des preneurs de décisions"/"je pense que le constructeur est forcément responsable." / "là c'est 100% | Management level concern and strong full Boeing responsibility | Blame attribution to Boeing            | Distinction employees from decision-makers, suggesting responsibility may lie more with management and Boeing is considered fully responsible when insufficient training or cost-driven decisions contribute to safety failures. |

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|  |  | responsable de la part Boeing." / "je pense que dans ce cas-là, ça aurait pu et dû être évité car c'est une faute grave." |  |  |  |
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| P7 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "Oui, il y'a une petite érosion de la confiance, c'est sûr. Après, je pense qu'avec le temps, ils vont devoir prouver qu'ils se sont revenu au top. Mais oui, bien sûr, tout ce qui s'est passé, ça a changé. Ce n'est pas rien ce qui s'est passé quand même." | Slight trust erosion      | From historical legitimacy to weakened image, reputation and trust - Erosion of trust | Boeing's trust has declined, but the deterioration remains moderate rather than total.                                                                                                    |
| P7 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "Fiable, non. Pour le coup, je pense que tous les éléments qui sont passés prouvent qu'il y a eu des gros soucis de fiabilité "                                                                                                                                 | Serious but less reliable | Change in Boeing perception                                                           | The company is perceived as serious due in particular to its past heritage but its reliability is sincerely and logically called into question for the participant in view of the events. |
| P7 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "mais c'est clairement parce qu'ils ont voulu gagner du temps et ils ont sauté des étapes. Non, je crois que c'est un problème structurel et qu'ils vont devoir trouver les bonnes solutions"                                                                   | Skipped safety steps      | Technical failures as symptoms of deeper internal problems                            | Boeing's problems are interpreted as resulting from internal shortcuts rather than purely technical accidents.                                                                            |

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| P8 | Media exposure and influence     | "Oui, oui, je pense, oui les médias ont toujours une influence sur notre façon de penser. (...)la vigilance et se dire que ce n'est pas parce que c'est Boeing que c'est forcément totalement 100% fiable ou de confiance. Il faut quand même avoir une analyse plus fine par rapport au modèle. " | increased vigilance                       | Media as a trigger for critical information search  | According to the participant, the media helps to awaken a certain critical spirit and a certain vigilance towards the brand and to be able to question initial thoughts.                                                           |
| P8 | Interpretation of the crisis     | "elle a quand même une responsabilité dans ces incidents parce que ce sont eux qui sont en charge de la conception des modèles qui ont pu poser problème.                                                                                                                                          | Boeing responsibility but unintentionally | Blame attribution to Boeing                         | Boeing's responsibility is not questioned, but the nuance is that they are responsible for their aircraft and therefore for what follows from them, but there is no voluntary aspect or great responsibility attributed to Boeing. |
| P8 | Emotional reaction and impact    | "Peut-être que ça m'inquiète je dirais. C'est plus lié au fait qu'avec l'expérience et les années, comment est-ce qu'on peut encore, justement maintenant, alors que les technologies sont bien plus poussées, bien plus avancées, faire le choix ou commettre des erreurs plus techniques."       | mild concern and misunderstanding         | Concern and anxiety                                 | The main feeling is one of concern and incomprehension that such accidents can happen in such a technological world and sector.                                                                                                    |
| P9 | Transparency and crisis response | "ils auraient dû assumer à 100% la responsabilité et leur implication dans ces différents crashes, être totalement transparent "                                                                                                                                                                   | Full responsibility recognition           | Expected transparency and responsibility acceptance | The desired response would have been a 100% acknowledgment of responsibility and complete transparency.                                                                                                                            |

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|    |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | and full transparency                             |                                          |                                                                                                                             |
| P9 | Behavioral consequences | "si par la suite je suis dans une situation financière un peu plus aisée et que j'ai le choix de payer un peu plus cher pour voler dans un Airbus à la place de Boeing."                                                                                                                                                                           | Preference for Airbus regardless the price        | Conditional avoidance of Boeing aircraft | If financial constraints were removed, the participant would prefer Airbus over new-generation Boeing aircraft.             |
| P9 | Airline Relationship    | "le fait qu'ils choisissent délibérément de faire des contrats pour acheter des avions Boeing, en sachant les problèmes de la chaîne de production de Boeing, automatiquement ils vont porter aussi une part des responsabilités car ça veut dire pour moi qu'ils cautionnent ça (...)ça influence la confiance que j'ai d'une compagnie aérienne. | Airlines partly responsible through Boeing choice | Spillover effect toward airlines         | The participant transfers part of the responsibility to airlines that continue buying Boeing aircraft despite known issues. |

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| P10 | Interpretation of the crisis | "On dit généralement la sécurité avant tout, mais juste après l'argent. Parce que oui, ils sont là, à dire « ouais la sécurité, faut qu'on s'assure » mais en fait faut surtout faire rentrer de l'argent. " /"Mais ça reste une entreprise, il faut que ça rapporte. Il ne faut pas être naïf." | Money as the primary motivation | Profit-driven corporate culture over safety | The participant highlights that the real objective of the company is not safety at all costs but rather to make money, which implies that safety is important but sometimes put aside for money. |
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| P10 | Emotional reaction and impact    | "Oui, c'est inévitable qu'il continue à y avoir des soucis. Si jamais il n'y a pas des choses qui sont mises en place du côté de chez Boeing." / "S'il y a les nouveaux 777 qui vont sortir, je me dis, est-ce qu'il n'y a pas un souci qui pend au-dessus d'eux ?"                                                                                 | The problem will continue if nothing changes.                   | Persistent distrust toward Boeing                   | It is inevitable that the known problems will persist if there is no reaction or change at Boeing, suggesting the possibility of further accidents of this kind. |
| P11 | Interpretation of the crisis     | "Là, deux coups sur coup, et pour le même problème, alors c'est un réel problème de chez Boeing. Et donc, de qualité, de sécurité, de contrôle. Donc là, c'est vraiment un problème structurel d'entreprise." / "la répétition fait qu'il y a un problème. On voit qu'il y a vraiment des problèmes structurels qui ne se sont pas remis en cause." | Repeated same-cause crashes                                     | Repetition as evidence of systemic failure          | The repetition of similar crashes in a short period makes the issue appear systemic and directly linked to Boeing.                                               |
| P11 | Transparency and crisis response | "Sa communication a été très mauvaise et ils ont tardé à faire le mea-culpa réel, et donc là, c'était vraiment... ça ternit encore plus l'image"                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Bad communication that further damages the image and reputation | Crisis response as aggravating factor               | Boeing's communication is perceived as slow and insufficient, which further damages its reputation and image.                                                    |
| P11 | Transparency and crisis response | "Vraiment une communication beaucoup plus transparente, et assumer les responsabilités. C'est là qu'ils ont foiré, parce que c'est venu vraiment très tard."                                                                                                                                                                                        | Awaiting a more transparent response                            | Expected transparency and responsibility acceptance | Boeing's communication was deemed insufficient, and the participant would have liked the company to be much more                                                 |

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|     |                                                                    |                                                                                                                 |                           |                                   | transparent about its actions and responsibilities.                                                                                                                                  |
| P11 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "Vu les erreurs qu'elle a faites par le passé, il n'y a rien qui peut me dire que ça s'est vraiment amélioré. " | Doubts about improvements | Persistent distrust toward Boeing | Knowing everything that has happened, there is no reason for the participant to believe that things have actually changed and therefore there is still mistrust about the situation. |

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| P12 | Reputational and brand image shift after Boeing's safety incidents | "D'un côté, une entreprise historique et puissante, et de l'autre, une entreprise qui a récemment beaucoup abîmé sa réputation. "                                                                                                                                        | Two perceptions that coexist                                  | Tension between historical legacy and recent crisis        | Two opposing ideas are in the participant's mind: a reputation linked to its glorious past and the image it projected, and the current perception linked to the incidents.                            |
| P12 | Behavioral consequences                                            | "ce qui a changé, c'est que maintenant, je fais plus attention qu'avant. Par exemple, aujourd'hui, si j'apprends que vol est opéré avec un Boeing Max, ça peut me faire réfléchir un peu, alors qu'avant, je n'aurais jamais regardé le type d'avion que ça allait être. | Change in behavior, greater vigilance in choosing an aircraft | Behavioral vigilance toward Boeing aircraft                | There is now a vigilance and mistrust that has taken hold in the mind of the participant when it comes to taking a Boeing plane that has already had problems, whereas before there were none at all. |
| P12 | Interpretation of the crisis                                       | "ça donne l'impression qu'il y a peut-être un problème plus profond dans l'entreprise et pas seulement quelques erreurs isolées. "                                                                                                                                       | The problems give the impression of internal issues.          | Technical failures as symptoms of deeper internal problems | The participant moves from seeing incidents as isolated to considering them signs of deeper organizational issues.                                                                                    |

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| P13 | Transparency and crisis response | "Le fait de virer les grosses pointures et les chefs, je pense pas que c'est ça qui arrange les choses."                                                                                                                                                                 | Symbolic leadership change            | Inadequate crisis response                                         | Leadership changes are perceived as insufficient if they do not address the deeper organizational causes.                                                             |
| P13 | Behavioral consequences          | "Est-ce que maintenant, je vais plus investiguer pour savoir l'avion que je vais prendre ? Est-ce que je vais plus refuser si c'est possible ? Franchement, je crois que oui, je pense que je dirais non, je suis avec mes enfants, je ne voudrais pas."                 | Refusal to take a Boeing if possible  | Conditional avoidance of Boeing aircraft                           | The participant clearly believes that taking a Boeing plane would be complicated for him now if he had the choice and would even refuse.                              |
| P13 | Airline Relationship             | "Est-ce qu'il y aura des compagnies à bas coût qui s'achèteront en masse pour faire un cours des voyages et gagner encore plus d'argent ? Il y a certaines compagnies, je ne suis pas trop favorable à reprendre cette compagnie. Je parle de la compagnie Irlandaise. " | Lower trust in Boeing-linked airlines | Spillover effect toward airlines                                   | Boeing's problems may also affect confidence in low-cost airlines that continue using Boeing aircraft.                                                                |
| P14 | Initial perception of Boeing     | "Avant, j'avais presque une sorte d'admiration pour Boeing. Maintenant, je suis devenu méfiant. "                                                                                                                                                                        | From admiration to distrust           | From historical legitimacy to weakened image, reputation and trust | There's a shift in perception, before, Boeing inspired admiration, and now it inspires more mistrust.                                                                 |
| P14 | Initial perception of Boeing     | "Il y a toujours du respect pour l'histoire, mais il y a beaucoup moins de respect pour l'entreprise et les décisions récente."                                                                                                                                          | Respect for the past                  | Tension between historical legacy and recent crisis                | Boeing still commands a certain amount of respect for what it was in the past, but now that opinion is much more divided because of the incidents that have occurred. |

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| P14 | Interpretation of the crisis | "c'est clairement... Les erreurs techniques ponctuelles existent, mais ici elles sont dans un contexte d'entreprise précis quoi. " / "C'est la décision de Boeing d'avoir décidé d'avantager l'argent sur la sécurité et c'est ça qui a causés plusieurs de leur accidents, parce que la qualité de production y était plus" | The technical errors stem from somewhere deeper. | Technical failures as symptoms of deeper internal problems | Boeing's crisis is interpreted as reflecting a deeper loss of internal culture and values, not only technical failures. |
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## 12.4 Appendix 4: Participant profile

| Participant | Gender | Age | Relationship with aviation                                                            | Flight frequency                                               | Key flight-selection factors                                             | Relationship with safety                                                                |
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| P1          | Male   | 23  | Frequent flyers, recent return to flying; paradoxical feeling of insecurity and trust | Around 2 trips/year                                            | Price first, prestigious company if slightly higher                      | Pays attention to safety, trusts European regulation, more cautious outside Europe      |
| P2          | Male   | 26  | Former fear of flying, now strong aviation interest and passion                       | Around 3 return trips/year                                     | Price, schedules, airport, known/reputable company for long-haul         | Safety very important, avoids companies with suspected safety weaknesses                |
| P3          | Male   | 24  | Familiar with aviation through family; positive relationship with flying              | Around 1–2 trips/year                                          | Price, cabin baggage, service quality, later reliability and service     | Safety as prerequisite, aircraft must meet standards and be maintained                  |
| P4          | Male   | 29  | Enjoys travelling and flying; small stress before take-off                            | Around 3–4 return trips/year                                   | Trusted company, service, comfort, food and preference for Emirates/A380 | Chooses trusted companies and proven aircraft models, preference for Airbus             |
| P5          | Male   | 32  | Operational interest in aviation rather than holiday use                              | Around 3 return trips/year                                     | Price, company reputation, values, and working conditions                | Safety assumed in Europe/US due strict regulation, maintenance, and air traffic control |
| P6          | Female | 25  | Frequent but fearful/stressed flyer; travels mainly for family and holidays           | Around 5–6 return trips/year                                   | Known company, reputation, word-of-mouth, price second                   | Thinks about safety but avoids details, prefers not to know too much to reduce stress   |
| P7          | Male   | 31  | Practical view of flying; interested in aircraft, layout and flight time              | Around 6–10 flights/year                                       | Direct flight/no stopover, destination, price and schedules              | Trusts European regulation, and would check safety more outside Europe                  |
| P8          | Female | 43  | Likes flying and airports, travel also linked to previous professional missions       | 2–3 trips/year now; about double before for work               | Belgian national company first, reputation, reviews and rankings         | Very attentive to safety, mechanical quality and fleet age, influences choice           |
| P9          | Male   | 23  | Aviation enthusiast, enjoys flying and follows aircraft/airline information           | Minimum 2 return trips/year, sometimes more than 5             | Price, destination, known companies, values and safety reputation        | Important, checks safety history, trusts strict European regulation, not very anxious   |
| P10         | Male   | 42  | Professional aviation link, loadmaster/cargo work on Boeing 747-8                     | Around 200–300 professional flights/year, few personal flights | Price and class, comfort for long-haul, known wide-body companies        | Safety is central to his job: weight balance, dangerous goods, IATA rules               |

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| P11 | Male   | 54 | Frequent traveler, used to fly much more frequently                     | 2–3 trips/year now, formerly around 10/year | Price, destination, comfort for long-haul, city-trip schedules                 | Pays attention, but price remains priority, Boeing/Airbus acceptable, unlike less trusted aircraft |
| P12 | Male   | 25 | Relaxed and fascinated by aviation since childhood                      | At least 2 trips/year                       | Destination, price, directness and total travel time                           | Important, prefers known or European companies, especially for long-haul                           |
| P13 | Male   | 50 | Interested and fascinated in the sector                                 | 2–3 trips/year, at least 2                  | Price, few/no stopovers, airport and airline                                   | Follows safety and airline reliability through reports, security can influence travel              |
| P14 | Female | 37 | Frequent flyer and aviation enthusiast with some flying-club experience | Around 20–30 flights/year                   | Operational reliability, punctuality, realistic connections, fleet type, price | Not anxious, reassured by aviation logic, but sensitive to safety culture and regulation           |



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## 14. AI USE STATEMENT

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This final section concerns the use of artificial intelligence in this thesis.

The AI software namely: ChatGPT and Claude were used as supporting tools throughout this study. A first use concerned the literature review, by suggesting relevant keywords in line with the previously defined structure. These suggestions then helped guide the searches carried out on online libraries, mainly the University library, in order to identify relevant scientific articles.

The main use of these tools concerned improving the academic writing of the thesis, helping rephrase certain sentences to make the text more fluent, clearer, and more coherent and at the same time helping to correct grammar, spelling, and language mistakes.

They were also mobilized as a translation tool for certain passages between French and English, as well as to facilitate the understanding of some more complex sections of scientific articles written in English.

These tools also helped improve the understanding of certain academic writing conventions, for example how to properly introduce an author or a scientific article within the text. Nevertheless, all suggestions provided were systematically verified before being incorporated into the thesis and were critically assessed regarding their accuracy and relevance.

This is in line with HEC Liège's recommendations regarding the use of AI, artificial intelligence tools were used solely as supporting tools to improve the quality of the academic writing and to facilitate certain tasks related to understanding or wording. At no point did they replace the reflection, choices, data analysis, interpretation of the results, conclusions, or reasoning developed in this study. The entire intellectual work carried out within the framework of this thesis remains exclusively that of the author.



## 15. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically associated with expertise, innovation and reliability, Boeing saw its reputation challenged by the 737 MAX crashes and subsequent incidents, which raised concerns about its safety culture and credibility. As organizational crises can threaten reputation through stakeholder evaluations and responsibility attributions (Coombs, 2007), Boeing provides a relevant context for examining their impact on corporate reputation and airline relationships. Based on fourteen semi-structured interviews analyzed through thematic analysis, this study explores how consumers interpreted Boeing's recent safety incidents, attributed responsibility, evaluated the company's response and how these mechanisms together shaped reputational and relationship impacts.

The findings reveal a deterioration of Boeing's reputation. Although the company retains historical legitimacy, participants increasingly associated Boeing with safety concerns, and broader organizational shortcomings. The incidents were widely perceived as recurrent, preventable, linked to unethical decisions, insufficient transparency and profitability prioritization over safety. Combined with a response often perceived as inadequate, these increased reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Baghi & Gabrielli, 2019). Consequently, Boeing was increasingly judged as less reliable, less trustworthy and less committed to safety. The study identifies a mitigated spillover effect (Wang et al., 2025). While some participants distinguished airlines from Boeing, others transferred negative perceptions to airlines operating Boeing aircraft, exposing them to potential reputational repercussions. Beyond this effect, Boeing's reputational deterioration may also indirectly weaken its relationships with airlines, as trust and reputation are central in B2B relationships and may influence the willingness to maintain partnerships.

The findings highlight the importance of understanding how a crisis is perceived before responding to it. In crises viewed as preventable and linked to deeper organizational shortcomings, transparency, accountability and visible corrective actions appear essential to limit reputational damage and rebuild trust. They also suggest that reputational consequences may extend beyond the focal organization and affect associated partners across the broader ecosystem.

**KEYWORDS:** Corporate reputation; reputational crisis; brand image; trust erosion; consumer perception; aviation industry; Boeing; crisis responsibility attribution

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