The Impact of Perceived Severity of an Outcome Upon Purchase Intention from the Perspective of Attribution

Yaxiong Wu, SouthWest Jiaotong University, and Shijiazhuang University, China
Bing Zhao, Hebei University of Technology, and Shijiazhuang University, China

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors study the impact of perceived severity of an outcome in different types of product harm crisis from the angel of consumer attribution-blame. By experimenting the authors found that when the responsibility of product harm crisis is not clear, the higher degree of perceived injury, the more responsibility customer attribute to enterprise; and when the responsibility is clear, the customers won't have the attribution bias; perceived severity of an outcome to customer blame was regulated by responsibility attribution and intention attribution.

Keywords: Attribution, Customer Blame, Harm Crisis, Perceived Severity of an Outcome, Product Harm Crisis

1. INTRODUCTION

Product harm crisis is a sort of product crisis. In recent years, as regulations become more stringent, products become more complex, customers become more demanding and the media becomes more sensitive, product harm crisis has been showing multiple features. Siomkos and Kurzbard (1994) proposed that product harm crisis is occasional occurrence and widely publicized on a product that is defective or dangerous to consumers. The root causes of product harm crisis are the product, which is flawed or may be defective and put consumers at risk, subsequently the information is disseminated.

The current study on product harm crisis can be divided into three parts: First, the study on coping strategies and responses of the enterprise after crisis; second, the study on consumer attribution, including the antecedent variables affecting attribution and the outcome variables affected by attribution after crisis; third, product harm crisis directly affects the outcome variables (e.g., brand equity, purchase intention, brand attitude and so on). Product harm crisis

DOI: 10.4018/japuc.2012010103
is different from the general product crisis. In general product crisis, a defective product may be inconvenient for consumers, or can not meet consumer expectations for the product. However, the product harm crisis can result in harm to the health of consumers, even death. Therefore, perceived severity of an outcome is a very important variable to perceived risk, brand attitude after crisis, and purchase intention in future. But these researches have rarely been reported in the available literatures. Based on Mexican culture, in the product harm crisis with ambiguous responsibility, Laufer, David, and Mayer (2005) had found that perceived severity of an outcome has a positive impact on consumer attribution. According to Laufer’s findings, we further explore that how the perceived severity of an outcome affects consumer attribution in the clear responsibility of product harm crisis; will it lead to attribution bias? In the two types of product harm crisis, how perceived severity of an outcome affects consumer willingness to buy? For explaining the above problems, we build the mechanism model of consumers purchase intention in the two types of crisis from the perspective of consumer attribution-blame.

2. THE CONSUMER ATTRIBUTION AND THE TYPE OF PRODUCT HARM CRISIS

A. The Consumer Attribution

The attribution is people’s perception and judgments for themselves’ or others’ behavior. (Weiner, 1995) A combination research of attribution theory and crisis is in line with the thinking logic. After the product harm crisis occurs, consumers will attribute actively: What is the reason for injury? What is the matter with the product? What kind of response should we make? In crisis studies, Weiner’s attribution theory has been widely used. Weiner thinks that the structural characteristic of cause is divided into three aspects: focus of causality, control ability of causality and stability of causality. In which, control ability of causality and stability of causality constitutes the consumer responsibility attribution about crisis. (Tsiros, 2004; Weiner, 1988)

Control ability of causality mainly reflects if the actors can control the crisis consequences, but cannot reflect their intention. Liu (1998), a China scholar, considers that intention attribution can be independent from controllable attribution. Intention attribution is if the enterprise intentionally cause harm and concerned about the interests of consumers. It is a values analysis of enterprise and occurs after the responsibility attribution. We borrow from the interpretation of criminal intent in the law. From cognitive perspective, the perpetrator clearly realizes that enterprise intentional behavior results in harm to society and actively pursues the occurrence of harm or takes a laissez-faire attitude to the hazard results. In some cases of product harm crisis, in order to pursue the high economic interests, companies ignore the national product safety law, which is a form of intentional behavior. In the law, unintentional act refers to negligence. The companies are aware that their behavior may lead to harm, but they take it for granted that the harm can be avoided; or enterprises should anticipate their actions may lead to harm, but their negligence led to product harm crisis. The difference between intentional act and negligent act is that whether the company would prevent harm from happening and subjectively want to hurt the consumer. For example, Human error and lax monitoring of product quality all belong to negligence. Therefore, intention attribution can be divided into intentional and negligent (unintentional) types.

Combined with the product harm crisis situation, responsibility attribution is an analysis of whether the enterprise has fault, but it can not reflect corporate values. Therefore, in this study, the attribution are divided into responsibility attribution and intention attribution, which provides a reasonable explanation for consumer attribution process and analyzes perceived
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