

Consumers' Moral Response to the Company Response in a Product Harm Crisis: A Role of Gender

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Product harm crises, defined as well-publicized incidences wherein products are found to be defective or dangerous. "Moral response" is a relatively new concept in the marketing literature. As product harm crises are grounded by consumer ethical beliefs, it is perfectly rational to consider consumers' moral thoughts in a product harm crisis ground. Irrespective of the different response strategies adapted by companies to manage product harm crises, product harm crises are increasing at an accelerating rate throughout the world recently. The mounting frequency of product harm crises resulting prolong devastating effect on company's reputation demands an innovative lens to search the effect of crisis response strategies on consumer perception. Therefore, main objective of the current research is to explore how gender shapes consumers' moral perceptions in response to crisis response in a product harm crisis. A self-administrated, pre-tested questionnaire survey was conducted related to fictitious product harm crisis situation. Yogurt was taken as the main stimulus brand. Two main crisis response strategies were considered as Voluntary response and Super effort response. After documenting the product harm crisis scenario related to the yogurt brand, first it described the Voluntary response strategies and questions related to consumer moral reputation towards the crisis company. Then it described Super effort response strategy and same questions related to consumer moral reputation towards the crisis company. The survey instrument included three (3) item constructed measures of consumer moral reputation towards the company, measured with 7- point Likert scales ranging from 1= "strongly disagree" to 7= "strongly agree." Gender was measured as 1=male and 2=female. A sample (n=101) of Sri Lankan young consumers participated the survey. MANOVA (2 gender X 2 response) results revealed a significant effect of gender on consumers' moral reputation toward the troubled company in response to two main crisis response strategies; Voluntary and Super effort. Voluntary response strategy seems fruitful related to male consumers whereas super effort strategy benefits to use with respect to female. Therefore, study shows the importance of using gender specific crisis response strategies in midst of product harm crises. In fact, companies produce gender specific products and study reveals that the effectiveness of response strategies depends on gender. Therefore, study recommends using appropriate response strategies with respect to gender-specific product harm crises. These findings provide useful guidance for crisis managers, marketers, practitioners and for further academic inquiries.

Keywords: Crisis response strategies, Gender, Voluntary, Super effort, Moral reputation, Product Harm Crisis, Sri Lanka