



Consumer Reactions to Socially Irresponsible Brand Behavior: A Systematic Literature Review

Md Sanuwar Rashid and Wi-Suk Kwon, Auburn University, USA

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Although scholars have devoted considerable effort to researching socially irresponsible decisions made by brands, there is no comprehensive interdisciplinary review of the relevant literature to comprehend consumers' heterogeneous reactions towards alleged brands. The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review to (1) identify the consumer response variables examined in the literature on socially irresponsible brand behavior, (2) classify antecedents to consumer responses examined in the literature into personal, brand, and market factors, (3) identify research gaps, and (4) provide future research recommendations.

Method

For this systematic literature review, academic journal articles published in 2006-2016 were collected through the search of four research databases: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO. The selected articles met the following criteria: (1) They must report empirical research and (2) their abstracts must contain at least one of the following words: anti-branding, product-wrongdoing, product failure, service failure, product recall, allegation, exploitation, irresponsibility, backfire, backlash, negative word of mouth, blame. Thirty-four journal articles emerged as a final sample for this review.

Consumer response variables

All of the selected articles have investigated either passive or active forms of consumer response variables. Nine articles addressed consumers' active reaction in online settings including creating an anti-brand community platform (Ward & Ostrom, 2006; Spinello, 2006, Lee & Cranage, 2012; Liu & Keng; 2014; Kim, Wang, Maslowska, & Malthouse, 2016), for the consumers who have transactional, ideological and market dissatisfaction (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009), leading to the co-creation of a negative brand meaning (Yazicioglu & Borak, 2012; Kucuk, 2015) and/or brand switching (Verhagen, Nauta, & Feldberg; 2013).

Twelve articles investigated consumers' active reaction in offline settings including negative emotion (Bolkan, Goodboy, & Bachman, 2012; Chang, Tsai, Wong, Wang, & Cho, 2015; Kaltcheva, Winsor, & Parasuraman, 2013; Romani & Dalli, 2009; Tsai, Liao, & Hsieh, 2014), anger and contempt (Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi; 2013), trash talking and schadenfreude, and threat and vandalism (Japutra, Ekinci, Simkin, & Nguyen, 2014; ; Johnson, Matear, & Thompson, 2011; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009), purchase likelihood (Berger, Sorensen, and Rasmussen, 2010), brand switching (Bailey & Bonifield, 2010), and blame (Gao, Knight, Zhang, Mther, & Tan, 2012).

Personal factors influencing consumer response

Eight articles addressed personal variables that may affect consumers' reaction to brands' wrongdoing. These variables included susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Podnar & Javernik, 2012), implicit theory of personality (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013), holistic versus analytical thinking style (Yoon, 2013), altruistic value (Romani et al., 2013), moral

avoidance of brand because of ideological dissatisfaction (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009), and forgiving traits (Casidy & Shin 2015).

Brand factors influencing consumer response

Eleven articles addressed consumers' prior brand relationship characteristics that may moderate their reaction to social irresponsible brand behaviors. Consumers' anti-brand retaliatory behavior was found to be higher for brands with higher self-relevance (Johnson, Matear, & Thomson; 2011), more valued brands (Kucuk, 2008; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2010), and transnational brands (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). Attachment-aversion relationship engendered from brand-self distance and brand prominence (Park, Eisingerich, and Park, 2013), anxiety and avoidance due to incongruity between brand and personal values (Japutra, et al., 2014), and intimate-encounter type versus pseudo relationship with the brand (Tsai et al., 2014) play roles in shaping a negotiation process to develop alternative brand meaning (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). The extent of communal sharing and market pricing simultaneously form personality-relatedness and reciprocity with service marketers (Cleeren Heerde, & Dekimpe, 2013; Kaltcheva, et al., 2013; Kaltcheva & Parasuraman, 2009)

Market factors influencing consumer response

Following a product-harm crisis, consumers' switching tendency to other brands depend on some market factors including category usage, price premium, private label versus national brand, competition density and number of affected brands in that industry (Berger et al., 2010; Cleeren, et al., 2013; Kucuk, 2010). A brand's positioning relative to its industry with respect to two continuums: (i) communal sharing vs asocial and (ii) equality matching vs market pricing determines consumers' switching tendency to other brands (Bolkan et al., 2012; Cleeren et al., 2013; Kaltcheva et al., 2013). A brand's wrongdoing in parallel to its industry wrongdoing may help the firm to detour consumers' dissatisfaction to other firms (Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, & Shapiro, 2012), and the first exposed brand in the context to industry wrongdoing has to take the disproportionate blame (Gao et al., 2012)

Research gap and future recommendation

In a virtual anti-brand community, members who create anti-brand websites, ones who post anti-brand content in those websites or social media in varying frequencies, and ones who read these postings may have different extents of reaction to alleged brands, and thus a need exists to constructing social taxonomy based on their extent of online activity. Future research may also compare whether consumers' reactions to the irresponsible behavior for a national and private-label brand differ, and if any personal variable makes the differences. Socially irresponsible brand behaviors that risk consumer health and safety may be different from those that do not engender such risk. There is a need to investigate consumer reaction to different types of socially irresponsible brand behavior. In case of consumer brand relationship, there is a strong need to understand the personality factors and different levels of socially irresponsible behavior that may contribute to different form of reactions ranging from brand avoidance to anti-brand activism.

References are available upon request.