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The Impact of Fitness between Consumers and Product-harm Crisis on the Online Dysfunctional Customer Behavior

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Abstract With the popularization of the Internet, this technology has changed the form of information dissemination. The information will spread quickly when food product harm crisis happens, and the phenomenon that information of product-harm spills over is very common. This article is based on "Frustration – Misbehaving" research paradigm, combined with the information dissemination motivation theory, discusses that the fitness between the consumers and the crisis will promote consumers' dysfunctional customer behavior. The study found that the fitness between the consumers and the crisis has significant effect on consumers' dysfunctional customer behavior, perceived social damage has a mediator effect between fitness and consumers' misbehavior, and the moderating effect of consumers' aggression tendency is significant, but not the emotional tendency. The theoretical contribution and valuable implications of findings for communication of crisis management are discussed at last.

Key words Product-harm crisis, Fitness, Perceived social harm, Dysfunctional customer behavior

1 Introduction

With the popularization of the Internet, the product-harm crisis information is rapidly spread through the network platform. In 2008, the rumor of maggots in citrus broke out in Sichuan's Guangyuan, and fueled by the spread in the network, the citrus sales in many places were severely affected. Even if the citrus is not from Sichuan, the consumers keep it at a respectful distance.

In 2011, aflatoxin M1 was detected to be impermissibly high in the sampling of milk produced by Mengniu Dairy (Meishan) Co., Ltd., and subsequently some rumors appeared on the network platform. The company was affected by negative reports, and the national sales slumped by nearly 30%. Then it was confirmed that there were some exaggerated or distorted public opinions with respect to this incident. The adverse public opinions have caused serious economic losses to business, and also caused the damage to the vulnerable agriculture in China.

Currently, the literature on the consumers' information dissemination on the network platform has shown a rising trend of development. The domestic scholars mostly carry out the qualitative analysis from the composition of Internet users, information dissemination characteristics and other aspects, recognizing the strong social democracy and extensiveness of online public opinions. The studies often proceed from the expression of online public opinions and process of generation, to summarize and analyze the concepts related to online public opinions, still lacking the empirical surveys and quantification studies.

It is worth noting that the food safety issues are related to people's livelihood, and easily capture the close attention of the

society. Consumers through the network platform are also involved in the dissemination of information, so the impact of events is infinitely magnified, dealing a severe blow to the industry. Discussing the spread of food harm incidents on the network platform is of important practical significance to China's agricultural development.

In contrast to risk management, which involves assessing potential threats and finding the best ways to avoid those threats, crisis management involves dealing with threats before, during, and after they have occurred. It is a discipline within the broader context of management consisting of skills and techniques required to identify, assess, understand, and cope with a serious situation, especially from the moment it first occurs to the point that recovery procedures start.

In this study, based on the theory of information dissemination motivation and dysfunctional customer behavior, we examine the formation mechanism of dysfunctional customer behavior promoted by the fitness between consumers and product-harm crisis, the intermediary role of perceived social harm in this process, and the role of consumers' personality traits in regulating their spread behavior.

2 Literature review

Since the concept of product-harm crisis was first proposed in 1994 by Siomkos, issues concerning the product-harm crisis have always been the research focus of numerous domestic scholars. Fang Zheng (2007) classified the product-harm crisis in different situations; at the same time, Fang Zheng studies the impact of crisis on enterprises, and the impact of enterprises' response on consumers, and proposed that the responding effect of outside of enterprises was better than that of enterprises after the occurrence of product-harm crisis.

Meanwhile, more scholars start from the attribution theory, to discuss the impact of product crisis on the consumer attitude, and

Received: April 3, 2014 Accepted: May 6, 2014

Supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (71073064); Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (2013SC38).

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propose the product crisis management strategy.

The above study conclusions can help to improve the enterprises' crisis management to some extent, but these studies are mostly the exploratory and strategic conclusions, and there are few scholars combining the crisis management with the information dissemination on the network platform in the reality. Compared to domestic research, the foreign studies on the reputation under product-harm crisis and information dissemination are richer, and most of the researches are based on the motivation theory, dissemination process theory, and information processing theory.

On the one hand, from the point of view of disseminators' motivation, product-related motive, self-serving motive, altruistic motive and information-related motive were the four main motives for spread (Dichter, 1966). The information dissemination motivation on the network platform included the event-related factors, motivation related to oneself, motivation related to others, emotional involvement of the product and other factors (Hennig, 2004 & Lau, 2001).

On the other hand, from the perspective of the recipient's information processing, based on the availability-diagnosis model (Feldman, 1988), it is found that if the availability is higher, it means that it will be much easier to extract the preceding information from consumers' memory, and consumers will learn from this previous experience, thereby causing an impact on cognitive judgment. From the information diagnosis, if the diagnosis is higher, it means that the extracted information is easier to solve the task at hand.

Herr (1991) also used the availability-diagnosis theory to discuss the impact of reputation information on consumers' brand attitudes, and the research showed that when making product judgment, the consumers mostly relied on the distinctive reputation information. Whether from the perspective of information disseminators' motivation, or the recipients' information processing, the level of fitness between consumers and events has a great impact on their attitude and behavior.

Currently, most of the fitness studies focus on the advertising marketing and organizational behavior, and there are few studies of the fitness on the dissemination of information. Du Junfei (2003) mentioned that the information fitness was part of information text in line with the audience's "experience range". According to the theory of self-identity, the consumers choose the appropriate information to integrate into the complete and harmonious structure, according to the awareness of current situation, past experience and real situation.

What the fitness described was a state, namely a good interaction state arising from the information expression way or appeal choice in line with the audience's psychology and behavior (Man Ning, 2011). It can be found that the information dissemination effect of product-harm crisis not only hinges in a large measure on the amount of information, but also depends on the level of information fitness.

In real-life situations, the consumers can not only passively

receive the product-harm crisis information on the open network platform, but also freely release the evaluation information on the product-harm crisis. However, since most consumers were limited by the perspective and space, the information spread was not entirely accurate, and what was more, some consumers' word was emotional, and these emotional remarks might developed into a bad opinion due to the response of the crowd (Guo Guanghua, 2004).

At this point, we believe that some consumers still have the dysfunctional customer behavior. The dysfunctional customer behavior was a behavior of individuals who did not comply with the norms, and disturbed the normal public order (Fullerton, 1993). The dysfunctional customer behavior means that in the spread process, according to the already disclosed information, the audiences conjecture, speculate and spread the fabricated unsubstantiated facts, making the information spread greatly deviate from the original information, ultimately bringing adverse effects on others and society.

3 Research framework and hypotheses

The above sections describe the impact of the fitness between consumers and information on the consumers' information dissemination behavior amid the product-harm crisis, and on this basis, discuss the mechanism of action among consumer fitness, perceived social harm, perceived social harm and dysfunctional customer behavior, as well as the regulatory role of consumers' personality traits in the dissemination process. Specifically, the study model in this article is shown in Fig. 1.

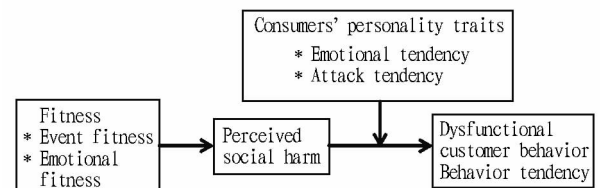


Fig. 1 The study model

3.1 The impact of consumer fitness on the dysfunctional customer behavior

Hennig (2004) found that the main motivation for the spread of reputation on the network platform was associated with the product, self-motivation and others' motivation. Meanwhile, the study of Lau (2001) also showed that the personal subjective factors influencing the disseminators' negative remark included the social level and the emotional involvement in the product or service.

Scholars usually use fitness, matching degree and consistency to describe the association between consumers' perception and reality. According to the types of association between consumers and product-harm crisis, the fitness is divided into event fitness and emotional fitness.

The former refers to the extent of association between consumers and harm event, especially the possibilities of consumers themselves, or family members involved in the harm event; the latter refers to the degree of emotional association between con-

sumers and product-harm crisis, namely the association level of consumers' emotional cognition on or attitudes towards product-harm crisis.

The "frustration-misbehaving" model of Berkowitz (1989) can better explain the formation of dysfunctional customer behavior, and product-harm crisis as a "frustration" event will wake up consumers' negative emotions, resulting in "particular focus of attention" of the frustrated. If individuals choose a misbehaving response way, there will be dysfunctional customer behavior. If the level of fitness between consumers and product-harm crisis is higher, it indicates that the degree of frustration is higher, and it is more prone to retrograde behavior.

In addition, based on the availability-diagnosis model in the information dissemination, if the fitness was higher, it indicated that the information availability was higher, the product-harm crisis would have a greater impact on the consumers' cognitive judgment, and it was easier to promote the change in consumers' attitudes toward the brand (Herr, 1991).

Therefore, we put forth the following hypotheses:

H₁: The higher the event fitness between the consumers and product-harm crisis information, the greater the possibility of dysfunctional customer behavior.

H₂: The higher the emotional fitness between the consumers and product-harm crisis information, the greater the possibility of dysfunctional customer behavior.

3.2 The intermediary impact of perceived social harm on dysfunctional customer behavior Through the empirical research on the factors influencing dysfunctional customer behavior, Fullerton (2004) also maintained that the consumers' emotional and psychological cognition had a direct impact on the dysfunctional customer behavior.

Based on the social exchange theory, the product-harm crisis can be seen as the start of consumers' negative emotion. If consumers' gains exceed the efforts to pay, it will lead to imbalances in the exchange of social resources. They often have the negative emotions such as anger and disappointment while suffering the injury crisis. The study of McDonald (2000) also suggested that if the degree of personal involvement in the product-harm crisis is higher, the anger emotion triggered by the crisis event will be intenser.

Meanwhile, the frequent food safety incidents have become the focus of attention in the society, and one product-harm crisis will not only consumers' anger and other negative emotions, but also easily lead to the perceived social harm. Here the perceived social harm focused on the damage to the interests of society and consumer values in a broader sense (Lianxi, 2011).

In addition, due to the anonymity on the Internet platform, some consumers deliver emotional speech. These remarks were likely to become harmful popular cry when the masses responded to it (Guo Guanghua, 2004).

Therefore, this study generalizes the generation mechanism of dysfunctional customer behavior as "harm crisis-perceived social

harm-misbehaving". The perceived social harm was the consumers' awareness of harm, and it was divided into the material harm and spiritual harm to individuals and society (Lianxi, 2011). The hypothesis is as follows:

H₃: Consumers' perceived social harm plays an intermediary role in the process of consumer fitness promoting the dysfunctional customer behavior.

3.3 The role of consumers' personality traits in regulating the spread behavior The above "frustration-negative emotions-misbehaving" theory on the dysfunctional customer behavior points out that the negative emotions may cause personal misbehavior of the frustrated. However, the fundamental reason for the dysfunctional customer behavior is that the negative psychological effects result in the misbehaving reaction.

The consumers with different personality traits will choose different ways to treat the product-harm crisis, including misbehaving, falling back, escaping and so on. Only when the individual selects the misbehaving reaction will the dysfunctional behavior appear. Harris (2003) presented two dimensions on the personal negative psychological tendency: misbehaving tendency and emotional tendency. The people with higher negative psychological tendency will pay more negative attention to the product-harm crisis, and have higher tendency to conduct negative behavior.

Therefore, this paper selects the two dimensions, consumers' misbehaving tendency and emotional tendency, to measure consumers' personality traits, and puts forth the following hypotheses:

H_{4a}: The higher the consumers' misbehaving tendency, the greater the possibility of dysfunctional customer behavior.

H_{4b}: The higher the consumers' emotional tendency, the greater the possibility of dysfunctional customer behavior.

4 Empirical study

4.1 Questionnaire design Based on the summarization of the public opinion spread on liquor plasticizer storm and Shuanghui clenbuterol event in recent years, we design a stimulus material spread online that strong carcinogen of flavacol was identified in A Milk during the food safety sampling. Likert scale is used, and the fitness measurement is divided into two parts (event fitness and emotional fitness). The measurement of perceived social harm is based on the scale developed by Lianxi Zhou (2011).

As for the measurement of dysfunctional customer behavior, on the basis of dysfunctional customer behavior concept, we summarize the consumers' remark in the forum, microblog and other online community tools after the product-harm incident, and sum up three items for measurement: forwarding the known negative information; posting the negative messages intermingled with imagination or one's own feelings; willingness to forward the negative messages involving the industry reputation evaluation. The scale of consumers' personality traits is based on the revision of the scale designed by Wu Jintao (2011), and this scale includes two dimensions (consumers' misbehaving tendency and emotional tend-

ency).

4.2 Description of the survey samples The research uses the questionnaire way, and the samples are 240 students from Hua-zhong Agricultural University. 232 copies of questionnaires are called back, and 226 copies of questionnaires are valid after excluding the incomplete invalid questionnaires, with the response rate of 94.14%. Male respondents account for 52.65%, female respondents account for 47.35%, and the all respondents are aged between 17–26 years.

According to CNNIC report released in 2013, young people (aged 10–19, 20–29 years) are the main users of the Internet, accounting for more than 50%. Meanwhile, college students are active users of online community tools, with good representation.

In the survey of Internet use, over 90% of respondents say that they use microblog, WeChat, forums and other online community tools; the majority of respondents say that they have used the online community tools for more than 3 years, and 75% of respondents use these online community tools for more than 30 minutes every day. It indicates that the vast majority of respondents, are very familiar with the Internet and online community tools, and have a full understanding of the issues involved in this study. Sample statistics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The sample structure of the respondents

Sample characteristics		Frequency	Valid percent
Sex	Male	119	52.65%
	Female	107	47.35%
The length of Internet use time	> 3 years	211	93.36%
Use of online community tools	Use	217	96.02%
	Use time > 3 years	190	84.07%
	Daily use > 30 minutes	177	78.32%

4.3 Data analysis

4.3.1 Data reliability analysis. The scale of consumers’ perceived social harm contains 3 items, and the Cronbach’s coefficient is 0.8; the scale of consumers’ dysfunctional customer behavior tendency contains 3 items, and the Cronbach’s coefficient is 0.66; the scale of misbehaving tendency in the consumers’ personality traits contains 4 items, and the Cronbach’s coefficient is 0.75; the scale of emotional tendency contains 3 items, and the Cronbach’s coefficient is 0.73. Conspicuously, the reliability of the above scales is within the acceptable range.

4.3.2 The impact of fitness between consumers and product-harm crisis on the dysfunctional customer behavior tendency. To explore the impact of consumers’ event fitness and emotional fitness on the dysfunctional customer behavior tendency, we carry

out the multiple linear regression with event fitness and emotional fitness as the independent variables, and dysfunctional customer behavior as the dependent variable.

The goodness of fit of the regression model (R^2) is 0.213, and the adjusted R^2 is 0.206; F value is 30.233, and the model significance level (Sig) is smaller than 0.000. The model meets the statistical requirements. The standard regression coefficients of consumers’ event fitness and emotional fitness are significant in the regression equation, indicating that H_1 and H_2 are verified. The specific statistical parameter results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Fitness-dysfunctional customer behavior tendency

Variable	Standard regression coefficient	Standard error	t-value	Significance level
Event fitness	0.323	0.053	4.474	0.000
Emotional fitness	0.195	0.053	2.703	0.007

4.3.3 The intermediary role of consumers’ perceived social harm.

(i) With the dysfunctional customer behavior as dependent variable, and the consumers’ event fitness and emotional fitness as independent variables, we carry out the linear regression, and the results show that the impact of independent variables is very significant.

(ii) With the level of perceived social harm as dependent variable, and the event fitness and emotional fitness as independent variables, we carry out the linear regression, and the results show that the impact of independent variables is also very significant.

(iii) With the dysfunctional customer behavior as dependent variable, the event fitness, emotional fitness and the level of perceived social harm as independent variables, we carry out the linear regression, and the results show that the impact of event fitness is very significant, the impact of emotional fitness is not significant, and the impact of the level of perceived social harm is very significant.

In summary, consumers’ perceived social harm plays a partial intermediary role in the process of "event fitness-dysfunctional customer behavior tendency", while consumers’ perceived social harm plays a full intermediary role in the process of "emotional fitness-dysfunctional customer behavior tendency", indicating that H_3 is verified. The regression analysis results are shown in Table 3.

4.3.4 The role of consumers’ personality traits in regulating the dysfunctional customer behavior.

(i) With the perceived social harm as independent variable, and dysfunctional customer behavior as dependent variable, we carry out the simple linear regression analysis. The goodness of fit of the regression model (R^2) is 0.226, the adjusted R^2 is 0.223, and the model significance level (Sig) is lower than 0.000.

The model meets the statistical requirements, and the standard regression coefficient of the variable of perceived social harm in the regression equation is very significant.

(ii) The regulated variable, and the product of regulated variable and perceived social harm are added to the original independent variable, and the dependent variable is still the dysfunctional customer behavior. The goodness of fit of the regression model (R^2) is 0.328, the adjusted R^2 is 0.312, and the model significance level (Sig) is lower than 0.000.

Table 3 The intermediary role of perceived social harm

Variable		Model 1 Fitness-dysfunctional customer behavior	Model 2 Fitness-perceived social harm	Model 3 Fitness, perceived social harm- dysfunctional customer behavior
Standard regression coefficient	Event fitness	0.323 ***	0.212 **	0.250 ***
	Emotional fitness	0.195 **	0.271 ***	0.102
	Perceived social harm			0.345 ***
Adjusted R^2	0.206	0.176	0.301	
F value	30.232	24.963	33.321	

Note: * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, and *** $P < 0.001$.

Table 4 The regulating role of consumers' personality traits

Independent variable		Standard regression coefficient	Standard error	t-value	Significance level
Main effect test	Perceived social harm	0.476	0.054	8.092	0.000
Regulating role test	Perceived social harm	0.645	0.308	1.927	0.055
	Misbehaving tendency	0.382	0.319	.782	0.435
	Emotional tendency	-0.216	0.308	-0.584	0.560
	Perceived social harm * misbehaving tendency	0.752	0.054	2.448	0.015
	Perceived social harm * emotional tendency	-0.668	0.059	-1.528	0.128

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions The purpose of this study is to explore the mechanism of fitness between consumers and product-harm crisis promoting the consumers to generate dysfunctional customer behavior in the context of food product-harm crisis. Based on the study results, we draw the following conclusions:

(i) After the product-harm crisis, if the event fitness and emotional fitness between consumers and product-harm crisis are higher, the level of consumers' perceived harm will be higher, and the likelihood of the occurrence of dysfunctional customer behavior will also be higher.

(ii) The level of consumers' perceived social harm during product-harm crisis plays an intermediary role in their spread behavior. For the consumers with high fitness with product-harm crisis, the product-harm crisis first stirs their perception of the harm, awakens their negative emotion, and raises the level of their perceived social harm, thereby causing the dysfunctional customer behavior.

(iii) The consumer's personality traits play a partial regulating role in the dysfunctional customer behavior. The consumers' misbehaving tendency plays a significant positive regulating role, while the regulating role of emotional tendency is not obvious.

5.2 Recommendations According to the research findings, we put forth the following recommendations:

(i) After the food product-harm crisis, the enterprises should take positive remedial measures. For the consumers who buy food with quality problems, the enterprises need to give them subsidies as material compensation and offer spiritual comfort. For

The regression analysis results show that the regression coefficient of consumers' perceived social harm and misbehaving tendency is significant, and so H_{4a} is verified; the regression coefficient of consumers' perceived social harm and emotional tendency is not significant, and so H_{4b} is not verified. The specific statistical parameter results are shown in Table 4.

the potential consumer groups, the enterprises also need to offer the spiritual comfort.

(ii) For the malicious slander rumors on the network platform, the enterprises need to refute rumors immediately. Meanwhile, the enterprises' handling of harm events needs to be open and transparent, and it is necessary to create rational public opinion atmosphere and prevent the diffusion of emotional remarks.

(iii) The enterprises can publish the information of remedial measures through the official and authoritative sources channels to carry out good information exchange with consumers, especially the consumers with higher misbehaving tendency (younger groups, implicated groups, etc.) to prevent the spread of adverse information.

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with regional features starting from existing resources based on resources constantly, to meet tourists' personality psychological needs such as "novelty, curiosity and particularity". And the rural areas of Southern Jiangxi Province should take full advantage of natural resources and human resources, highlight ecological, folk custom and education features to realize the connection of "red", "ancient" and "green" culture and create rural sports tourism products with regional features of Southern Jiangxi Province.

4.3 Improving soft power of rural sports tourism by taking talent cultivation as foundation Having congregated talents and stable talent reserve are critical for the stable development of sports tourism^[6]. As an emerging industry, rural sports tourism is in urgent need of a batch of professional talents who know sports professional knowledge and have tourism, economy and management subject background. Taking tour guide as example, in addition to have professional quality of general tour guide, the rural sports tourism guide should also master and be able to conduct all kinds of outdoor activities, have professional qualification of water life saving, outdoor sports guideline and the first aid, so as to ensure personal safety of tourists in the process of sports tourism^[7]. However, rural sports tour guides are mainly composed of general tour guides currently who are lack of professional sports knowledge. In addition to the tour guide, there is also a shortage of specialized talents in Southern Jiangxi Province rural sports tourism, including marketing personnel, management personnel, researchers and inheritors of folk sports project, influencing the rapid development of rural sports tourism. Therefore, the government, relevant departments and industries should strengthen the cooperation with colleges, professional schools and institute of physical education located in Southern Jiangxi Province, cultivate relevant personnel for rural sports tourism and provide high quality human resources support for the promotion of rural sports tourism.

4.4 Bringing connected effect of rural sports tourism into play by taking regional cooperation as shortcut Based on the particularity and cross-regional nature of its market demand, sports tourism resources determine that the development of sports tourism must take the path of regional cooperation^[8]. To achieve big development of regional sports tourism in Southern Jiangxi Province, it is required to explore and establish collaboration mechanism and expand multi-level, multi-form and multi-field

collaboration. Firstly, it is recommended to develop the six elements involved in tourism (restaurant, accommodation, transportation, travelling, purchases and entertainment) in overall, strengthen the relationship of sports tourism with other industries. Secondly, it is required to rely on natural resources and human resources, take current well-developed red tourism as guide and conduct joint development of Hakka culture tour, landscape sight-seeing tour and leisure vacation tour to develop rural sports tourism in Southern Jiangxi Province region, so as to improve the overall power of rural sports tourism in Southern Jiangxi Province region. Thirdly, it is proposed to strengthen cross-regional joint cooperation, make use of location advantages of Southern Jiangxi Province that is located in the border of Hunan, Guangdong, Fujian and Jiangxi, conduct joint cooperation by the methods of joint development of cross-regional sports tourism route, co-marketing of tourism products and overall planning of regional sports tourism and bring connected effect of rural sports tourism into play, thus maximizing the benefits of rural sports tourism resources.

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