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Investigating the Influence of a Product-Harm Crisis on Consumer Buying Behaviour: A Focus on the Listeriosis Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Product-harm crises often lead to negative publicity which substantially affects the consumers intention to make a purchase. This study attempts to investigate the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer purchasing behaviour. Consumers are the most essential stakeholders for any organization, their core behavior is very vital for financial affluence and successful marketing. This study aims to investigate the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer purchasing behaviour, with reference to the Listeriosis crisis. Data was collected from 384 randomly selected food retail store shoppers at empangeni and Richards Bay, using a quantitative research approach. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. The findings from this study revealed that there was a positive significant correlation between the level of education and post-purchase behaviour. These findings suggest that consumers that are more educated tend to be more critical in analyzing a crisis. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on brand management by examining the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer purchasing behaviour. The research concludes that brands should always have a positive relationship with consumers. Mainly because this current study has revealed that consumers response to a brand crisis is determined by the relationship they share with the brand along with the prior expectations they had about the brand.

Keywords: Brand Crisis, Product-Harm Crisis, Listeriosis, Consumer Purchasing Behaviour
JEL Classifications: M3, M31

1. INTRODUCTION

Crisis events are characterized as the most important, unexpected situations that threaten the existence of a company (Pangarkar et al., 2022). A Product – harm crisis which is of interest to this study is a performance - related crisis (Mgoduka et al., 2021). Product-harm crises can be recognized as business issues that can cause physical harm to human beings, occur in the output stage of the transformation process, are likely to be highly scrutinized by stakeholders and entail a great likelihood that the company will be regarded as highly responsible (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2011). Mgoduka et al. (2021), alludes that product-harm crises can negatively affect a firm's corporate image, reputation and credibility.

The most well-known examples of product-harm crises include the oil giant BP and oil–spill crisis in the Gulf of Mexico, Tiger Brands and the Enterprise Foods listeriosis scandal, Johnson & Johnson and its Tylenol scandal, Dell and its faulty lithium–ion battery scandal, or Toyota's faulty accelerator pedal recall (Botes, 2022). These brands all experienced a product–harm crisis and faced extreme consumer backlash, most of which could not recover despite numerous rescue attempts. Irrespective of the cause, product-harm crises can cause a significant damage on the firm's market share, revenue and purchase intentions because of the associated negative publicity (Pangarkar et al., 2022). This negative publicity affects consumers attribution of blame, and these negative perceptions can be controlled and minimised through effective crisis communication (Botes, 2022). Consumers responses to a crisis are not only based on the assumption of the rationality of the observer, but also on the impact of the individuals' values, which produce effects of blame, emotion and intention (Fusaro, 2015). Therefore, understanding consumer's responses

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and selecting an appropriate corporate response to a product-harm crisis is essential (Botes, 2022).

The corporates' response to a crisis has a significant impact on the consumers purchase intention. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer purchasing behaviour, with the Listeriosis crisis as an area of focus.

The originality of this study is that this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on brand management by examining the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer purchasing behaviour. This study will also provide insight on how organisations can utilize social media to positively influence consumers response to a crisis. The next section of this study will present the research objectives.

1.1. Research Objectives

- To investigate the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer buying behaviour.
- To investigate the influence of a product-harm crisis on the consumer's decision-making process.

2. CONCEPTUAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Attribution Theory/Attribution of Blame

Attribution theory is often used in product-harm crisis literature to acquire a deeper understanding of how and why consumers respond the way they do (Botes, 2022). According to Mansor and KaderAli (2017), when blame attribute is viewed from the context of consumer behaviour, it is described as the process whereby consumers construct attributions of responsibility to harm the affected brand. During a brand crisis consumers make attributions and casual judgements based on the response of the affected company, information available from the media and other sources (McDonald et al., 2010).

The response of the affected organisation has a major influence on how consumers act or view the crisis. According to McDonald et al. (2010), a company faced with a brand crisis can respond in five ways: no response, denial, excuse, justification and concession. According to McDonald et al. (2010), there are no studies that show significant results for justification. Moreover, the scholars further indicated that confession shows high responsibility acceptance compared to justification, excuse and denial which have the lowest responsibility acceptance. On the other hand, no comment is known for avoiding addressing responsibility. Findings from the studies conducted by McDonald et al. (2010); Lee (2005); Dean (2004); Coombs and Holladay (2009), show that confession and its components which are compassion, apology, compensation have positive effects on consumers and other stakeholders.

2.2. Consumer Buying Behaviour and Product-harm Crisis

Buying behaviour is the decision processes and acts of people involved in buying and using products (Doan, 2021). Usually the buying behaviour takes many forms of consumer's choices that can vary depending on a broad set of factors such as: earnings, demographics, social and cultural factors (Mansoor and Jalal, 2011). Sharma (2014) alludes that there are four types of consumer buying behaviours, there is routine response or programmed behaviour which involves buying low involvement frequently purchased low cost items that need very little search and decision effort, examples include soft drinks, snack foods and milk. Limited decision-making refers to buying products occasionally, this requires a moderate amount of time for information gathering (Haralayya, 2021). Extensive decision making requires high complex involvement because it has high degree of economic, performance and psychological risk, examples include house, cars and education (Sharma, 2014). Lastly impulse buying refers to no conscious planning (Haralayya, 2021). For this current study, the area of interest were the food retail stores shoppers which means that data was collected from buyers of routine response or programmed behaviour.

Mansoor and Jalal (2011) indicate that the needs of consumers can be met through predicting consumer behaviour. Consumer buying behaviour is influenced by a consumer having access to knowledge or information and being orientated with the brands (Reddy, 2016). The information can either be positive or negative. Previous studies have shown the detrimental effect of negative information on consumer perceptions which ends up having a negative influence on consumer behaviour (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Dean, 2004; De Matos and Rossi, 2007).

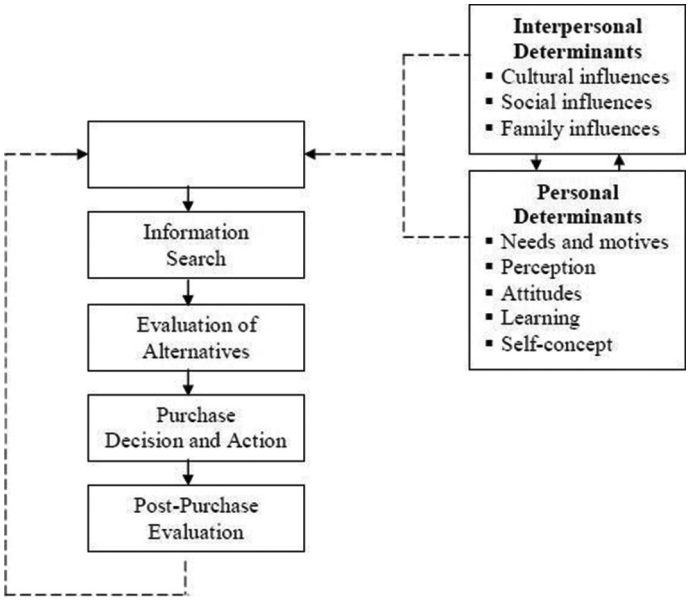
Consumer behaviour is negatively influenced by a brand crisis (Haiying and Gouliang, 2013). The findings from the study by Haas-Kotzegger and Schlegelmilch (2017) revealed that consumer responses differ between the crisis types. Negative information about a brand results in a brand crisis, which ends up having an influence on the consumer's decision making process. The most used tool for sharing information is social media, therefore is it important to recognize the role social media plays with regards to the sharing of information (Botes, 2022). Product-harm crises are considered as well-publicized occurrences, because during these crises consumers often receive negative information about the firm (Mgoduka et al., 2021). Cui et al. (2013) highlights that consumers today are more likely to become aware of such product-harm crises through social media. Consumers are increasingly consulting social media sites during crises for information updates and opinions (Botes, 2022). Therefore, the way in which the communication is framed by brands has an influence on the consumers purchasing behaviour and on how it is interpreted and responded to (Botes, 2022).

2.3. Decision – Making and Product-harm Crisis

Previous studies have revealed that product-harm crises affect consumers attitudes, beliefs and future intentions about products (Haiying and Gouliang, 2013; Cui et al., 2013; Ping et al., 2015; Mgoduka et al., 2021). Product-harm crises have an impact on the decision-making process of consumers (Ping et al., 2015) (Figure 1).

The decision-making model suggests that consumers pass through five stages when making a purchase: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision

Figure 1: The decision making process



Sources: Reddy (2017. p. 16)

and post-purchase (Panwar et al., 2019). However, in more routine purchases, customers often skip or reverse some of the stages (Panwar et al., 2019). For instance, a university student buying a favorite soft drink would recognize the need which is thirst and go right to the purchase decision, skipping information search and evaluation. However, the model is very useful when it comes to understanding any purchase that requires some thought and deliberation (Panwar et al., 2019).

Product-harms crises have a negative impact on the consumers intention to make a purchase (Yang, 2013). Moreover, Mgoduka et al. (2021), insinuates that product-harm crises can turn into a disaster if they are not handled properly. However, Ping et al. (2015) alludes that a good reputation shields a firm during a product-harm crisis. In this connection, a previous study by Siomkos (1999), puts forward that firms having bad reputations are mostly held responsible for a crisis. Conversely, customers believe products of reputed firms are less dangerous and attribute less blame to highly reputed brands in case of a product-harm crisis (Ping et al., 2015). It therefore becomes vital for every organisation to have a positive relationship with consumers because crises are unexpected and there is no organisation immune to a brand crisis (Mgoduka et al., 2021).

2.4. The Listeriosis Crisis (A Product-harm Crisis) in South Africa

The Listeriosis crisis is a product-harm crisis (Mgoduka et al., 2021). Listeriosis is caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium called Listeria Monocytogene (Boatemaa et al., 2019). The National Institute for Communicable Diseases confirmed the South African outbreak on the 25th of October in 2017 (Van der Vyver, 2018). Between January 2017 and March 2018, there were 978 laboratory listeriosis cases with 674 illnesses confirmed in South Africa (Boatemaa et al., 2019). According to the WHO (World Health Organization), about 30% of these patients died (WHO, 2018b).

According to the media statement that was issued by the Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, on the 3rd of September 2018, the Listeriosis disease was triggered by Listeria (Health24; 2018). A listeria bacterium was found at two Enterprise processed meat factories and one Rainbow chicken polony factory. As a result of the listeriosis outbreak, all major retailers withdrew Enterprise and Rainbow products from their shelves (Van der Vyver, 2018). In addition to grave health implications and fatalities, the listeriosis outbreak had widespread economic and political repercussions (Lamprecht et al., 2022). The listeriosis outbreak resulted in a lot of people dying, some lost their jobs, emotions were stirred, and justice was demanded (Lamprecht et al., 2022). All of these aspects were intensively reported in the media. According to DoH (2018), the listeriosis crisis had the implicated manufacturers recall more than 5,812 tons of potentially affected food products and that caused severe economic repercussions. Lamprecht et al. (2022), adds that the broader South African pork industry was also affected as consumers resorted to self-protective behaviour by avoiding all pork products, raw or cooked.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method, where data was collected from 384 randomly selected food retail store shoppers at Empangeni and Richards Bay. The researcher used questionnaires for data collection because the nature of the study required data to be collected from the malls.

Data was collected from the shoppers that frequently visit Shoprite, Checkers and Pick n pay at Empangeni (Sanlam centre) and Richards Bay (Boardwalk) respectively. The Richards Bay Boardwalk management insinuates that the number of customers that frequent boardwalk on a rational monthly basis is roughly 1.2 million. The Sanlam Centre management on the other hand insinuates that 700,000 customers frequent Sanlam Centre on a rational monthly basis. A convenience sampling approach was employed because the nature of the study required data to be collected from shoppers at malls, and there was no way each and every member that visited the mall was going to have a known chance of being selected. In this connection, a previous study by Archarya et al. (2013) indicates that convenience sampling approach respondents are selected because they are at the right place at the right time.

With reference to Uma Sekaran's sampling table, if the population size is more than 75,000, the sample size should be 384 (Sekaran, 2003). According to the store managers at Empangeni, the population of customers that frequent Shoprite, Pick 'n Pay and Checkers is 138,000, 27,129 and 106,454 respectively. At Richards Bay, Shoprite has 82,660 while Pick 'n Pay has 36,400 and lastly Checkers has 15,208 customers that frequent their stores every month. Consequently, the sample size for this study was 384, as the population size was >75,000.

The researcher made use of the statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 24 to analyse the data. The researcher also employed the descriptive and some inferential stats. The findings were coded on SPSS and they were then presented through the use

of bar graphs, pie charts, percentages and cross-tabulations. The researcher also used statistical mean, mode and median in the data analysis. Furthermore, the researcher also employed Correlation analysis to determine the significant correlation and the significant difference between the variables.

4. FINDINGS

- Research Objective: To investigate the influence of brand crisis on consumer purchasing behavior.

To address this objective a 5-point likert scale was used, and the items were grouped according to the steps in the decision-making process (information gathering, evaluation of alternatives and post- purchase behavior).

4.1. Information Gathering

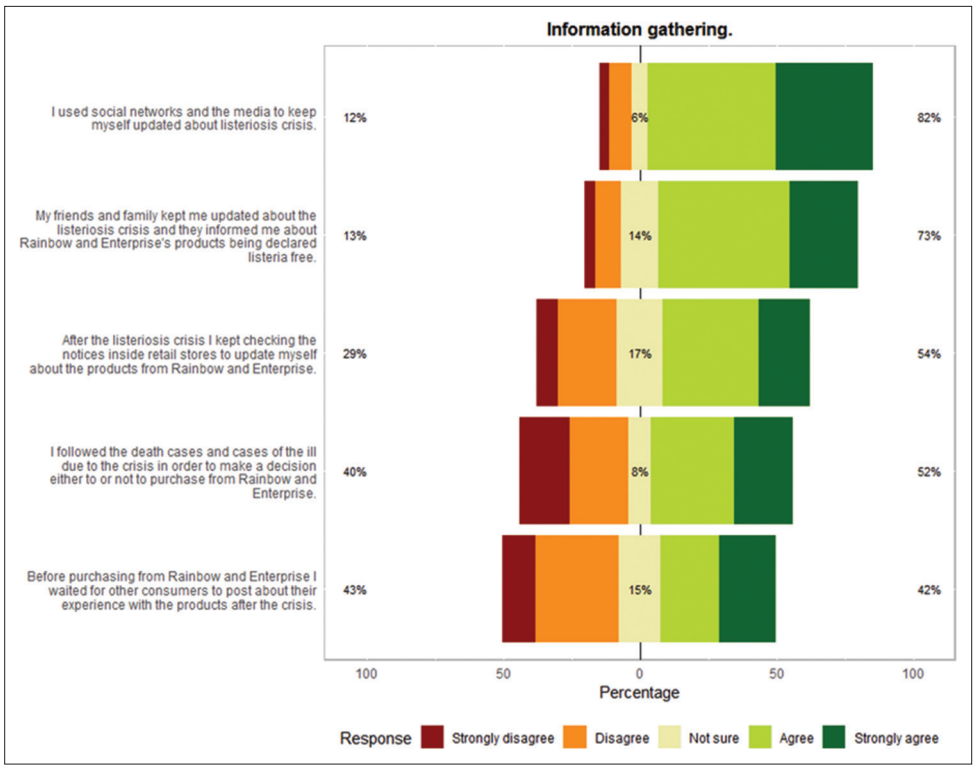
From Figure 2, it can be observed that 315 consumers (82%) indicated that they used the social networks and the media to update themselves about the Listeriosis crisis, 23 (6%) were not sure and about 46 (12%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. These findings corroborate the notion that Millennials spend most of their time consuming information from social media platforms (Golway, 2017). Also, 315 respondents indicated they used social networks and the media to update themselves about the crisis. Meanwhile, 280 consumers (73%) indicated that their friends and family members kept them updated about the Listeriosis crisis, 50 consumers (13%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. It can also be observed from Figure 2 that about 207 consumers (54%) indicated that they kept checking the notices inside retail stores to update themselves about the products from Rainbow and Enterprise, while 111 (29%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. About 199 consumers (52%) confirmed that they followed the death cases of the ill due to the Listeriosis crisis in order to make a decision either to or not to purchase from Rainbow and Enterprise, 153 consumers (40%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. Lastly, 161 consumers (42%) were between agree and strongly agree to the statement which indicated that before purchasing from Rainbow and Enterprise they waited for other consumers to post about their experience with the products after the crisis, while 165 consumers (43%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. However, about 58 consumers (15 %) indicated they were not sure. These findings suggest that majority of the consumer relied on social media to provide them with information regarding the Listeriosis crisis.

4.2. Evaluation of Alternatives

According to Figure 3, it can be observed that 250 consumers (65%) indicated that the crisis resulted in them switching from polony and viennas to other substitute products when making their lunchboxes. Only 115 consumers (30%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. However, the findings also reveal that 238 consumers (62%) indicated that after the Listeriosis crisis they continued to purchase from Rainbow and Enterprise.

A large portion of the consumers (207 consumers = 54%) indicated that during the Listeriosis crisis they switched to other competitive brands. On the other hand, 146 consumers (38%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. About 176 consumers (46%) indicated that the Listeriosis crisis had a huge influence on them deciding to buy from private label brands because they felt they were safe, however, 153 consumers (40%) were between disagree and strongly disagree. These findings suggest that during the

Figure 2: Information gathering



Listeriosis crisis, consumers purchasing behaviour was negatively affected however, the negative effects due to the crisis were reduced after the Listeriosis crisis. Suffice to state that majority of the consumers indicated that they continued to purchase from Rainbow and Enterprise after the crisis.

A further analysis on the evaluation of alternatives is presented in the Table 1.

According to the grading table (Table 1), it can be observed that the consumers‘ responses to statements ―After the listeriosis crisis I continued to purchase from Rainbow and Enterprise‖ and ―during the listeriosis crisis I switched to other competitive brands‖ had mean scores which reflect that they agreed or strongly agreed with these statements (with mean scores of 3.64 and 3.62 respectively). Moreover, consumers responses to statements “Before the crisis I used polony and viennas to make a lunch box but now I have switched to other substitute products” and ―The listeriosis crisis had a huge influence on me deciding to buy from private label brands because I feel they are safe brands‖ had a mean score which reflects that they were indifferent (with mean score of 3.53 and 3.12 respectively). These findings suggest that the negative effects caused by the Listeriosis crisis on the consumers purchasing behaviour were reduced after the crisis because consumers continued purchasing from the brands when they were declared listeria free.

Based on Table 1 it can be observed that the standard deviation of item 2 and 3 are close to the mean, while item 1 (1.399) and 4 (1.426) were differed from the mean score.

4.3. Post-purchase Decision

According to Figure 4, it can be observed that 251 consumers (66%) indicated that the crisis resulted in them boiling not only products from Rainbow and Enterprise but also other brands just to be on the safe side. Meanwhile, 103 consumers (27%) were between disagree and strongly disagree and 30 consumers (8%) were not sure. About 250 consumers (65%) agreed to the statement that after observing the dangers of Listeriosis they now fry polony before eating, 46 consumers (12%) were between disagree and strongly disagree and 88 consumers (23%) were not sure. However, majority of the consumers (234 consumers = 61%) indicated that the products from Rainbow and Enterprise tasted the same even after the Listeriosis crisis, only 54 consumers (14%) disagreed with the statement.

A further analysis on post-purchase decision is presented in the Table 2.

Figure 3: Evaluation of alternative

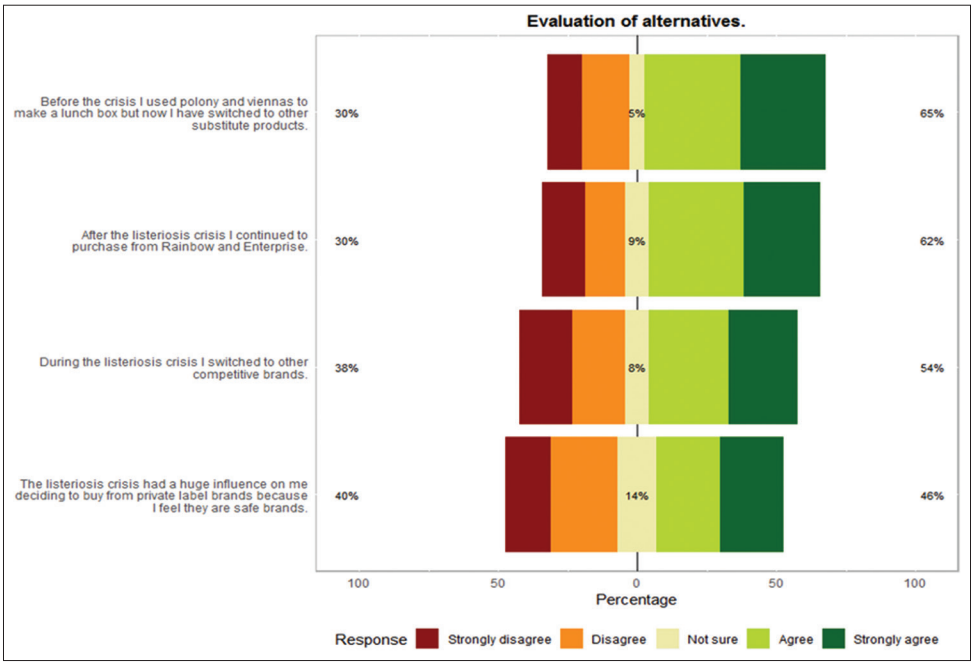


Table 1: Evaluation of alternative

Items	Label	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Mean	Standard deviation
Item 1	Before the crisis I used polony and viennas to make a lunch box but now I have switched to other substitute products	30	5	65	3.53	1.399
Item 2	After the listeriosis crisis I continued to purchase from Rainbow and Enterprise.	30	9	62	3.64	1.221
Item 3	During the listeriosis crisis I switched to other competitive brands.	38	8	54	3.62	1.282
Item 4	The listeriosis crisis had a huge influence on me deciding to buy from private label brands because I feel they are safe brands.	40	14	46	3.12	1.426

According to the grading (Table 2), if consumers obtained a mean score of 2.5 and less, it indicates that consumers were between disagree and strongly disagree to the items measuring post-purchase decision. However, 2.6 to 3.5 indicates they were neutral, while 3.6 and more indicates customers were between agree and strongly agree to the items measuring post-purchase decision. Consumer‘s responses to the statement “The crisis resulted in me boiling not only products from Rainbow and Enterprise but also other brands just to be on the safe side” had a mean score of 3.63 which reflects that consumers felt that boiling products before eating them was going to keep safe from Listeriosis. The statement “after observing the dangers of listeriosis I now fry polony before eating it” had a mean score of 3.60 which also suggests consumers felt that frying polony before eating it was a safer option against Listeriosis. The statement After the Rainbow and Enterprise products were detected listeria free, I bought them again and the result was dissatisfaction‖ had a mean score of 3.56 which indicates that consumers were indifferent regarding the statement. The statement After the crisis I did not trust the products from Rainbow and Enterprise so I ate them first before giving it to my kids to eat‖ had a mean score of 2.98 which also suggests that consumers were indifferent. These findings suggest that although consumers were affected by the crisis which is reflected by them boiling food before eating, they are still loyal to these brands because they defended them. Moreover, based on Table 2 it can be observed that majority of the standard deviation scores were close to the mean. However, item 1 (1.418) and 5 (1.339) are more spread out.

The Tables 3 present the correlation of consumer behaviour (Information gathering, evaluation of alternatives and post-purchase decision) against level of education, occupational status and the level of income.

Table 3 is an indication of the correlation for consumer purchasing behaviour against the level of education. In order for the researcher to examine the level of correlation between consumer purchasing behaviour and the level of education, One-way ANOVA was used so as to assess the differences between consumers in terms of consumer purchasing behaviour against the level of education, Correlation was employed to check if there was a significant correlation between the groups; ANOVA and correlation were combined. The ANOVA P-values were extracted and are presented as Sig. (F) in Table 3 Where the level of significance assigned was $\alpha \leq 0.05$. Correlation is presented as sig. Based on Table 3, it can be observed that there was a positive (rho = 0.101) significant correlation of (0.048) between the level of education and evaluation of alternatives. These findings suggest that the more educated consumers get means they will be aware of the fact that there are more alternatives to choose from if the brand they are used to is affected by a crisis.

Moreover, it can be observed that there was a significant difference ($P = 0.045$) between the level of education and evaluation of alternatives. This was used to determine the influence of brand crisis on consumers‘ purchasing behaviour at a $P \leq 0.05$ level of

Table 2: Post-purchase decision

Items	Label	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	Mean	Standard deviation
Item 1	The crisis resulted in me boiling not only products from Rainbow and Enterprise but also other brands just to be on the safe side.	27	8	66	3.63	1.418
Item 2	After observing the dangers of listeriosis I now fry polony before eating it.	23	12	65	3.60	1.292
Item 3	The products from Rainbow and Enterprise tasted the same even after the listeriosis crisis.	14	25	61	3.66	1.096
Item 4	After the Rainbow and Enterprise products were detected listeria free, I bought them again and the result was dissatisfaction.	18	26	56	3.56	1.233
Item 5	After the crisis I did not trust the products from Rainbow and Enterprise so I ate them first before giving it to my kids to eat.	40	16	44	2.98	1.339

Table 3: ANOVA and correlation of consumer purchasing behavior against the level of income

						Correlation		
	Level of education	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Sig. (F)	rho	Sig.
Information gathering	Primary school	1.78	2.0	1	0.833		−0.004	0.94
	High school	2.30	2.0	3	0.738			
	Diploma	2.58	3.0	3	0.691	0.989		
	Bachelor degree	2.32	3.0	3	0.809			
	Postgraduate	2.25	3.0	3	0.853			
Evaluation of alternative	Primary school	2.22	2.0	2	0.667		0.101	0.048*
	High school	1.96	2.0	2	0.682			
	Diploma	2.34	2.0	3	0.696	0.045*		
	Bachelor degree	2.18	2.0	2	0.732			
	Postgraduate	2.26	2.0	2	0.711			
Post-purchase behaviour	Primary school	2.67	3.0	3	0.500		0.134	0.009***
	High school	2.19	2.0	2	0.714			
	Diploma	2.34	2.0	2	0.638	0.015**		
	Bachelor degree	2.36	2.5	3	0.715			
	Postgraduate	2.57	3.0	3	0.605			

significance. It can also be observed in Table 3 that there was a positive significant correlation (rho = 0.134) between the level of education and post-purchase behaviour. These findings suggest that the more educated consumers get, the more critical they will be in analysing the crisis. Moreover, there was a significant difference (P = 0.015) between the level of education and post-purchase behaviour.

4.4. ANOVA and Correlation of Consumer Purchasing Behaviour Against Level of Income

Table 4 is an indication of the correlation for consumer purchasing behaviour against the level of income. Based on Table 4, it can be observed that there was a positive (rho = 0.12) significant correlation of (0.025) between the level of income and the evaluation of alternatives. These findings suggest that the increase in income results to an increase in other alternatives that consumers may have as a way of saving themselves from the Listeriosis crisis. Moreover, there was also a significant difference (P = 0.021) between the level of income and the evaluation of alternatives.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

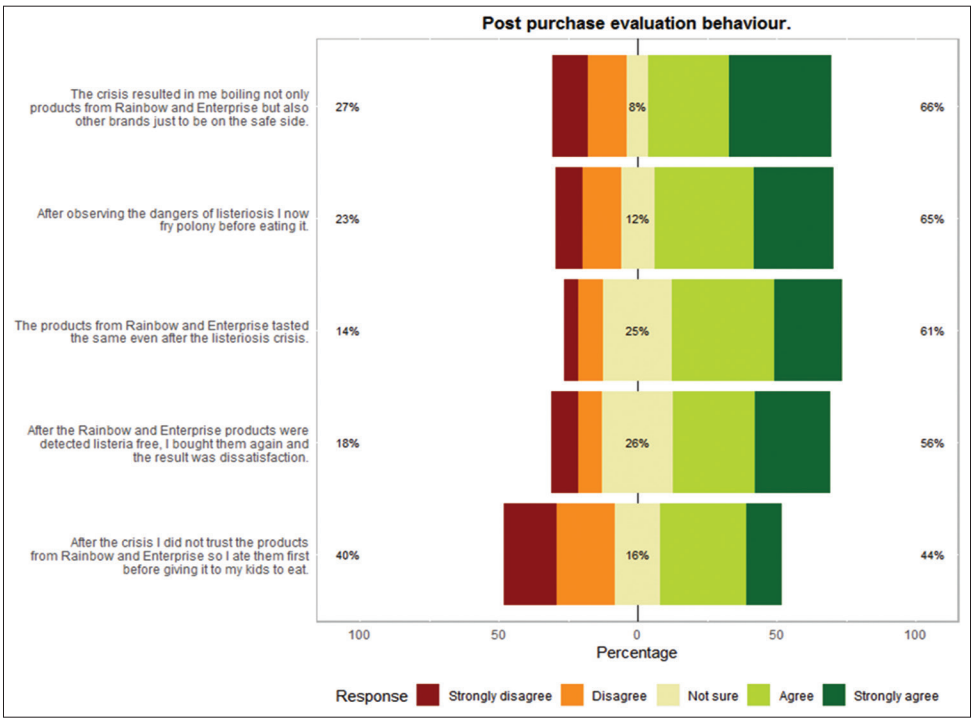
5.1. Information Gathering

Earlier in the chapter, the findings revealed that consumers were fully aware of the Listeriosis crisis. In this present study it was also observed that consumers used social media to keep themselves updated about the Listeriosis crisis. It was also observed that consumers waited for other consumers to post about their experience with the affected brands after the crisis before they could purchase from them (Figure 2). Earlier in this chapter it was also observed that majority of the respondents were

Table 4: Influence of brand crisis on consumers purchasing behaviour by level of income

	Correlation							
	Level of income	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Sig. (F)	rho	Sig.
Information gathering	R0-R7200	2.33	3.00	3.00	0.794	0.188	0.01	0.871
	R7201-R16500	2.49	3.00	3.00	0.738			
	R16501-R33400	2.19	2.00	3.00	0.811			
	R33401-R57400	2.63	2.00	3.00	0.518			
	R57400 and above	3.00	3.00	3.00				
Evaluation of alternative	R0-R7200	2.12	2.00	2.00	0.719	0.021**	0.12	0.025**
	R7201-R16500	2.22	2.00	2.00	0.659			
	R16501-R33400	2.32	2.00	2.00	0.760			
	R33401-R57400	2.38	2.50	3.00	0.744			
	R57400 and above	3.00	3.00	3.00				
Post-purchase behaviour	R0-R7200	2.32	2.00	2.00	0.668	0.134	0.10	0.062
	R7201-R16500	2.35	3.00	3.00	0.744			
	R16501-R33400	2.53	3.00	3.00	0.658			
	R33401-R57400	2.13	2.50	3.00	0.991			
	R57400 and above	3.00	3.00	3.00				

Figure 4: Post-purchase decision



Millennials, therefore the findings from this present study revealed that consumers use social media as their source for gathering and sharing information. The findings from this current study are in accordance with the findings of Paulin, Ferguson, Jost and Fallu (2014) which revealed that Millennials are also referred to as the ―Net Generation or Generation Y‖ because they are the first generation to adopt social media as their primary mode used for acquiring and sharing information. This shows that consumers rely on social media for information; therefore brands faced with crises can use these platforms to communicate with their consumers.

5.2. Evaluation of Alternatives

The findings from this study revealed that during the Listeriosis outbreak, consumers switched to other competitive brands. However, it was also found that after the Listeriosis crisis, consumers continued to purchase from the affected brands (Figure 3). The findings from this current study suggest that consumers are familiar with Rainbow and Enterprise as it was observed earlier in this chapter when it was found that these are the brands they frequently purchase; hence, they continued to purchase from them after the Listeriosis crisis. The findings of this current study substantiate the findings from a study undertaken by Haas-Kotzegger and Schlegelmilch (2017) which aimed to provide a holistic picture of consumers‘ experience of product-harm crises, and revealed that well-known brands are able to get the benefit of doubt and consumers perceive the mistake as less hazardous.

The findings of this current study also suggest that the respondents were strongly attached to these brands. The findings from this current study substantiate the findings of Lisjak et al. (2012) which revealed that the personal connections that the consumers have with the brand result in forgiveness and the consumer ends up overlooking things. Hence, majority of the consumers purchased from the affected brands after the Listeriosis crisis because they forgave them. The findings from this current study also corroborate the findings from a study conducted in the UK by Veloutsou (2015), which revealed that the strength of the consumer brand relationship is a very strong predictor of brand loyalty. Therefore this current study is consistent with that of Veloutsou (2015). The findings from this study also revealed that there was a positive significant correlation between the level of education and evaluation of alternatives. These findings suggest that the more educated consumers get means they will be aware of the fact that there are more alternatives to choose from if the brand they are used to is affected by a crisis.

5.3. Post – purchase Decision

In this present study, it was observed that consumers highlighted that the products from Rainbow and Enterprise tasted the same even after the Listeriosis crisis. These findings suggest that consumers have forgiven these brands and moved on from the Listeriosis crisis. The findings from this study are in accordance with the findings from the study undertaken by Vassilikopoulou et al. (2011) which revealed that the effects of a crisis are minimized a few months after the crisis occurred. This is due to the fact that consumers tend to forget about the crisis and its negative effects especially if the company took responsibility during the outbreak. The findings from this study also revealed that there was a positive significant correlation between the level of education and post-purchase behaviour. These findings suggest that the more educated consumers get means they will be more critical in analysing the crisis.

This study aimed to examine the influence of a product-harm crisis on consumer buying behavior. The findings revealed that there was a positive significant correlation between the level of education and post purchase behavior. These findings suggest that consumers that are more educated tend to be more critical in analyzing a product-harm crisis. Moreover, the findings also revealed that a good reputation Shields a firm during a product-harm crisis. The researcher therefore concludes that organizations should always have a positive relationship with consumers because crises are unexpected and there is no organization immune to a brand crisis.

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