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Consumer's psychological reactions during a food safety incident and WTP for nano sensors in meat products

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Risk communication disseminated during a food safety incident, which plays an important role in shaping consumer purchasing behaviour. Consumer research shows that immediately after a food safety incident the demand of the indicted products falls rapidly and then starts to increase slowly when consumer confidence is restored. However, very little is known about the cognitive process that consumers undertake when markets are shocked by food scares. In order to fill such a gap this study employs Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) to explore consumers' psychological reactions with and without a food safety incident caused by *E. coli* in chicken products. The cognitive process of protection is mediated by the possibility of consumers buying hypothetical meat products containing Nano-sensors that aims to inform consumers of the presence of bacteria after the purchase. Willingness to Pay (WTP) of meat products containing nano-sensors was elicited by means of a payment card. The survey was conducted in the UK between February and March 2015 and 627 British respondents took part in the survey. A Tobit regression analysis was performed to estimate the impact both of socio-demographic and economic characteristics of respondents and of the cognitive elements of PMT on consumers' WTP for nano-sensors in chicken products during different risk situations. Results indicate that on the average British respondents are WTP more for nano-sensors during a market risk situation. Furthermore, the comparison of PMT elements in different risk situations shows that the cognitive elements of this theoretical framework play a different role in explaining WTP for nano-sensors. In the case of a business, as usual scenario, the demand for increased levels of food safety was more affected by the aspects of coping appraisal, while during a food safety incident, the elements of threat appraisal take over and impact substantially on WTP for nano-sensors in meat products. In addition, results also show that WTP is influenced by gender, age, financial situation of consumers, and knowledge of nanotechnology. Marketing and policy implications of these findings are discussed.

Biography

Junjie Wu (1987) has completed his two master degrees of Food technology and Food economics from University of Reading. He has won the prize of the competition of Entrepreneurship at Reading University in 2010. He is a PhD candidate working on the aspect of consumer behaviour towards food safety.

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