

WILL CONSUMERS GIVE US ANOTHER CHANCE TO BOUNCE BACK?

In a crisis, can a company's commitment to social issues add resilience to its brand?

This study investigates a critical question: which area of corporate responsibility better protects a brand's resilience during a crisis, values- or performance-based? Traditionally, brands have prioritized product responsibility (quality, durability, value) as the primary driver of trust, while social responsibility has often been treated as secondary or nonessential. However, the results of this study challenge this long-standing view, particularly in light of shifting consumer expectations among Millennials and Gen Z.

The findings show that social responsibility commitments - such as reducing environmental impact, ensuring ethical labor practices, and supporting education - play a stronger role in protecting brand resilience across both performance- and values-based crises. Brands with a visible, consistent history of contributing to social values are more likely to be forgiven and given a "second chance" when crises occur.

In contrast, heavy reliance on product responsibility alone can backfire. When performance issues arise, consumers often hold these brands more accountable because the failure violates expectations tied directly to their core promise. Thus, while product quality remains fundamental, social responsibility serves as a broader "insurance policy" against reputational damage.

For industry leaders, the results highlight a strategic shift: commitment to social responsibility is no longer a nice-to-have, it is a competitive necessity for long-term brand resilience.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

- **Social responsibility protects across crisis types.** While theory suggests product strength should buffer values crises and commitment to social responsibility should buffer performance crises, this study found that commitment to social responsibility provides stronger protection in all cases.
- **Guidance for brand managers.** The findings give clear evidence to justify greater commitment to social responsibility investment, inform communication strategies, and help brands prepare proactively for crises before they occur.
- **Category matters.** This study focused on athletic footwear; future research should test whether commitment to social responsibility's protective effects hold equally strong in other industries such as electronics, motor vehicles, or hospitality.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW:

- Marketing professionals
- Brand Managers
- Policy makers
- Organizational Leaders

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- Will Consumers give us another chance to bounce back? Effects of precrisis commitments to social and product responsibility on brand resilience