

# To Punish or Not To Punish, That is the Question: Consumer Reactions to Different Levels of Brand Transgression Severity

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates consumer reactions (punishing behaviour) to corporate brands that engage in various types of transgressions (mild vs. severe) through a scenario-based experiment. The study adopts a 2x2 factorial design that examines the moderating role of the self-reference on the relationship between brand transgression severity and consumers' punishing behaviour. Prior to the main study, the researchers carried out a pilot study to gain insights into the severity levels of various brand transgressions as well as to observe the likelihood of individuals encountering them. The main study confirms the interaction effect between self-referencing and transgression severity on consumer punishing behaviour. More interestingly, this research also highlights the fact that in cases of mild transgressions, having a self-reference to the transgression leads individuals to punish the transgressor more than severe transgressions.

**Keywords:** *Transgression; Self-reference; Punishing*

**Track:** Consumer Behaviour