

Preface

When the Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011, I was working in an office located in Hayama, Kanagawa Prefecture. Although my office was more than 400 km apart from the epicenter of the earthquake, the quake was at a level that I have never experienced before. When I checked the news about the earthquake I learned that more than a 15 m high tsunami was approaching the coast of Tohoku regions but I first could not believe that this was really happening. I realized that the disaster was a reality after seeing entire communities swept away by these tsunamis and people desperately trying to evacuate from them on TV. However, towns and farmlands destroyed by the tsunamis were only the beginning of the disaster. The tsunamis had triggered another calamity. The No.1 reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant had exploded after hit by these massive waves. After this first accident was reported, the situation at the Fukushima plant grew gravely worse ultimately leading to a nuclear meltdown that emitted large quantities of radioactive material into atmosphere.

After the Fukushima disaster, the house and the town I lived at that time suffered from only a power outage, but this was nothing compared to the devastation that occurred in the Tohoku and other regions near the FDNPP. This destruction was beyond anyone's comprehension. In fact, even after six years of this catastrophe, there are still thousands from these regions who cannot return to their homes due to radioactive contamination.

The reason I started to work on the issue of reputation damage in regions suffering near the FDNPP is because I wanted to use my expertise to help these regions recover from this disaster. However, soon after I started the research, I realized the difficulty of the topic I was dealing with. Reputation damage is a problem that occurs because the individual's decision is often affected by the opinions of other individuals and it is easy to be influenced by false information. Furthermore, as the issue of radioactive contamination of food involves uncertainties, it was expected that there would be many people who will utterly avoid any products with bad reputation because they do not want to spend time searching about how safe the products are. Thus, whether the level is large or small, I noticed from the beginning that there would be reputation damage.

However, I did not want to connect all the avoiding behaviors of the consumers to reputation damage. This is why I tried to rely on the data to explain my views and tried not to argue the problem only from the perspective of reputation damage. This is the reason that the book resulted in having a mixed conclusion that the consumers' avoiding behavior toward the agricultural products of regions near the FDNPP is partly affected by false reputation and partly caused by factors not directly related to reputation. However, it was meaningful to reveal through the book what types of consumers are eager to buy products from these regions and to identify the factors affecting the consumers' reaction toward products from these regions.

In particular, it was interesting to find that consumers with high interest in environmental problems and helping the disaster-affected regions to restore from their damage have the tendency to buy products from regions near the FDNPP. It was apparent from this finding that altruistic consumers are more serious about helping the disaster-affected regions to recover their economy to the pre-crisis level.

If altruism is the important factor for the consumers to have a positive reaction toward products from regions near the FDNPP it might be that increasing the number of people that care about other people will be the solution for reputation damage. However, as investigating how altruism affects consumer behavior is beyond the scope of my specialty (economics), it might be useful to incorporate the methods used in psychology for further study.

The survey data used in this book was first intended to survey 6,000 people. Yet, when I announced to the registered members of the internet survey company about the survey, I was able to gather more than 8,000 respondents. Hence, I realized how interested people were about this issue.

Part of the outcomes of the book were presented at the 2015 conference of the International Association for Energy Economics held in Antalya, Turkey, 2015 conference of the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society in Canberra, Australia, and 2016 conference of the European Association of Environmental and Natural Resource Economists in Zurich, Switzerland. Here too, I found that many people were interested in how consumers were reacting to the agricultural products from regions near the FDNPP after the Fukushima disaster.

Saitama, Japan

Kentaka Aruga

Consumer Reaction, Food Production and the
Fukushima Disaster
Assessing Reputation Damage Due to Potential
Radiation Contamination
Aruga, K.
2017, XII, 159 p. 77 illus., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-59848-2