

Consumers' inconsistency about hypocrisy: Revisiting the concept of corporate hypocrisy

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Abstract

With increasing CSR engagement from companies, there is also a call for understanding corporate hypocrisy: consumers oftentimes observe inconsistencies between promises and deeds. Combining philosophers' observation that hypocrisy perceptions are aggravated when a person evinces an air of superiority with insights into consumer behavior and organization science, we propose that organizational virtuousness, reflected by companies' moral positioning, aggravates the association between companies' inconsistency and consumers' perceptions of corporate hypocrisy. We tested this proposition in two high-powered studies (MTurk and a representative sample of Dutch consumers), and report first evidence for the predicted effect. The studies converge in the finding that hypocrisy is rooted in inconsistency, but only when inconsistency involves a transgression, and when acting inconsistently involved a moral (vs. competent) company (Study 1) or brand (Study 2). Our analysis offers a strong pointer towards the benefits of combining insights from different disciplines to advance scholarly understanding of corporate hypocrisy.

Keywords: *Corporate Hypocrisy; Inconsistency ; Morality*

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