

We 'Hope to' vs We 'Can' Make a Difference: The Role of Verbal Framing in Consumers' Evaluation of Companies' Philanthropy.

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Abstract

Companies engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities must demonstrate sincere altruism to gain consumer support. We study how two close expressions, "we can make a difference" and "we hope to make a difference," influence consumers' perceptions of the company. In three studies, we observe that consumers deduce the CSR motivations of the company from the specific verbal framing used in the message, which in turn influences its effectiveness. 'Hope' framing is perceived as more sincere than 'can' framing. Perceived sincerity of the message further results in a higher attribution of altruistic motives and thus increases consumers' intentions to support the CSR activity. Moreover, the fit between the firm's activity and the cause moderates the suggested effect. It is when consumers do not perceive a congruency between the company and the cause (low fit) that verbal framing has the strongest effect. We offer implications for CSR promotion and the literature on semantic meaning.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), ; Verbal framing; firm/cause fit*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics