

When do words make a difference? The role of verbal framing in consumers' perception of CSR activities.

Maria Lagomarsino
University of Geneva
Linda Lemarié
Audencia Business School

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Abstract

A growing body of literature is investigating the role of communication in the field of CSR as the words used by the company have been found to determine consumers' appreciation and responsiveness to CSR activities. In this paper, we compare the popular expression "we can make a difference" to "we hope to make a difference" in affecting consumers' intention to support such activities. We observe that consumers deduce the company's CSR motivations from the specific verbal framing used in the message, which in turn influences its effectiveness. 'Hope' framing by acknowledging the uncertainty regarding goal achievement, strengthens the emphasis on the company's commitment, and seems overall to perform better than the certain 'can' framing (Study 1a&b and Study 2). This only turns out to be wrong in cases where the supported cause has a very strong fit with the company's core business and therefore the motives behind the implementation of CSR cannot be questioned (Study 2). Our conclusions offer implications for CSR and the literature on verbal framing.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Cause/firm fit; Framing*

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics