

I am One of the Good Ones, Forgive Me! The Impact of CSR on Brand Forgiveness

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Cite as:

Ohlwein Martin, Bruno Pascal (2022), I am One of the Good Ones, Forgive Me! The Impact of CSR on Brand Forgiveness . *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 51st, (107547)

Paper from the 51st Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 24-27, 2022



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Abstract

From manipulated emission levels to exploding phone batteries, brand transgressions in form of self-inflicted scandals seem to be commonplace these days. Once transgressions have occurred, companies strive to restore customer relations and achieve brand forgiveness. Besides reactive ways to reach this goal, e.g., via crisis communication, firms can proactively build a reputation via CSR that serves as an “insurance” in case of transgressions. This study experimentally shows that a high (vs. low) level of proactive CSR increases the likelihood that a brand will be forgiven more than a reactive apology (vs. justification). Analyses on the underlying process reveal that a high level of CSR leads customers to attribute responsibility for transgressions to external factors, which enhances attitude toward the brand and brand forgiveness. These findings imply, e.g., that proactive CSR allows firms to simply justify transgressions rather than to issue lawsuit-triggering apologies.

Keywords: *Brand Forgiveness; Corporate Social Responsibility; Attitude toward the Brand*

Track: Product and Brand Management