

Expectations, Blame and Betrayal: Exploring the Dichotomous Impact of Brand Purpose on Consumer Forgiveness in Times of Criticism

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Abstract

Brand purpose has emerged as a key differentiator that not only shapes internal alignment but also profoundly influences consumer intentions. This study investigates the impact of brand purpose on consumers' intention to forgive a brand facing criticism, shifting research from an internal to an external perspective. Our pilot study found that strong-purpose brands receive more positive sentiments, and two experiments confirmed greater forgiveness intentions towards strong-purpose brands post-criticism. Introducing different mediators, the results suggest a two-sided effect. While the positive Halo of a strong purpose might reduce blame attribution after criticism, the strong purpose raises high expectations among consumers. Missing these expectations increases the feelings of betrayal and blame attribution, making the way to forgiveness more arduous. While showing the benefits of a strong brand purpose, these findings also reveal its drawbacks and the need for expectation management.

Keywords: Brand Purpose, Consumer Forgiveness, Brand Criticism

Track: Product and Brand Management