

# The Blame Game – Does ambiguous Brand Responsibility trigger Construal in Brand Transgressions?

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## **The Blame Game – Does ambiguous Brand Responsibility trigger Construal in Brand Transgressions?**

A corporate scandal can severely damage a company's reputation. However, as many businesses today operate within complex value creation networks, it is often difficult for consumers to determine who is responsible for a wrongdoing. Despite this, research has largely focused on ambiguity when it comes to whether or not a transgression has occurred, overlooking the role of ambiguous brand responsibility. Building on the theory of moral licensing, this experimental study reveals that in cases of ambiguous brand responsibility, prior CSR mitigates the negative impact of misbehavior. A strong (vs. a weak) CSR engagement leads consumers to attribute blame to external parties (moral credentials) and, as a result, to forgive a brand. Thus, the research contributes to the understanding of moral licensing in the context of ambiguous brand responsibility and highlights the crucial role of CSR in mitigating the harm of misconduct.

*Key words: Ambiguous brand responsibility, moral licensing, brand transgression*

*Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics*