

# Examining the 'Honest' vs. 'Common' Way of CSR Communication: The Effect of Normative Justifications in Greenwashing Perceptions and Brand Attitudes

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# **Examining the 'Honest' vs. 'Common' Way of CSR Communication: The Effect of Normative Justifications in Greenwashing Perceptions and Brand Attitudes**

CSR initiatives have become central in corporate strategies, but how they are communicated can critically influence consumer perceptions of honesty and brand outcomes. This research investigates the impact of two contrasting approaches to CSR communication: the “common way,” where initiatives are justified by intrinsic motivations aligned with corporate values, and the “honest way,” where initiatives are extrinsically justified through injunctive or descriptive norms. Across three studies, we explore how these justification strategies shape consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing and subsequent brand attitudes. Contrary to the often-positing honesty in CSR communication, we find that the “honest way”, significantly increases greenwashing perceptions and lowers brand attitudes compared to the “common way”. Zooming in on the “honest way”, we find that injunctive norms heighten greenwashing perceptions and negatively impact brand attitudes, compared to descriptive norms.

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