

CSR, Price Positioning, and the Halo–Liability Trade–Off for Perceived Product Quality

Tarje Gaustad

BI Norwegian Business School

Jakob Utgård

Oslo Metropolitan University

Cite as:

Gaustad Tarje, Utgård Jakob (2026), CSR, Price Positioning, and the Halo–Liability Trade–Off for Perceived Product Quality. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (132593)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



CSR, Price Positioning, and the Halo–Liability Trade–Off for Perceived Product Quality

Abstract

Consumers often infer product quality from a firm's corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR can create a halo that enhances perceived quality but can also be a liability when consumers assume social initiatives come at the expense of performance. We propose that brand price positioning acts as a boundary condition selecting between these routes. Across two experiments in retail and product contexts ($n = 927$), CSR increased perceived quality for discount brands but decreased it for premium brands. Mediation analyses show a two-route process: CSR boosts halo inferences for both brand tiers but heightens liability inferences selectively for premium brands. For premium brands, the negative liability path outweighs the smaller positive halo path, yielding a net negative effect on quality perceptions.

Track: Social Responsibility & Ethics