

Punish or Permit? Predictors of Consumers' Reactions to Purity Violations

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Abstract

Violations of moral purity are not limited to the interpersonal domain: brands and employees, from CEOs to frontline workers, are also guilty of some pretty gross behaviors. Yet, we know surprisingly little about how consumers react to marketplace purity violations. In the current work, we propose that condemnation of purity violations is shaped by the combination of pathogen threat and childhood socioeconomic status. We test this prediction using both experimental manipulations of pathogen threat and measured differences in the perceived threat of COVID-19 during May 2020. We find that when pathogen threat is salient, people who grew up wealthy show a greater increase in condemnation of purity violations than people who grew up poor. Altogether, these findings facilitate the integration of the literatures on consumer morality, pathogen threat, and childhood SES while underscoring the importance of considering the moral nature of marketplace moral mishaps.

Keywords: *Purity; Pathogens; SES*

Track: Consumer Behaviour