

How embarrassing! What can I do about it? Experiencing Embarrassment as a Public vs. Private Emotion and Symbolic Coping Behavior

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Abstract

Consumer embarrassment is quite pervasive in consumers' life. For instance, consumers buy embarrassing products and have embarrassing social interactions with salespersons. In dealing with embarrassment, consumers can engage in symbolic coping strategies (e.g., hiding one's face by wearing sunglasses). However, previous research predominantly investigated these strategies in a public embarrassment context (e.g., others present). There is emerging evidence that shows embarrassment can also be a private emotion (e.g., no others present). This study investigates whether consumers experiencing public vs. private embarrassment engage in symbolic coping behaviors differently. Participants experienced public vs. private embarrassment and were presented with different products relating to symbolic coping. We find (a) public (vs. private) embarrassment is perceived to be more embarrassing, (b) publicly and privately embarrassed consumers are more likely to choose face-hiding products compared to a control condition, and (c) publicly (vs. privately) embarrassed consumers prefer face restoring products.

Keywords: *Consumer Behavior; Consumer Embarrassment; Coping*

Track: Consumer Behaviour