

The effect of embarrassment on prosocial consumption

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Abstract

Consumers experience embarrassment in various situations, including purchasing products like condoms and being mocked by service providers. Marketing scholarship unanimously shows the undesirable outcomes of embarrassment for customers and firms, overlooking the positive facets. Drawing on the extant literature on embarrassment from the social psychology domain, we show that embarrassment can lead to favorable outcomes for consumers, firms, and the environment. Through two experimental studies, we show that embarrassment enhances preference towards prosocial products, such as green products. The motivation to appear altruistic is the underlying mediating mechanism. We rely on theoretical underpinnings of costly signalling and symbolic and compensatory consumption frameworks to support our assertions. Ours is the first study in the marketing domain to demonstrate the advantageous effects of the deleterious emotional state of embarrassment.

Subject Areas: *Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Services*

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