

Communication Preferences When Seeking Medical Care:
Embarrassment Decreases Preferences for Sociable Doctor-Patient
Interactions

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Abstract

What types of interactions do embarrassed patients prefer to have with healthcare providers? Current research guides healthcare providers to socially engage with their customers by approaching them in a friendly, personable, and warm manner. Across eight studies (N = 3,664), we demonstrate that when patients feel embarrassed, their preference for sociable interactions decreases. However, healthcare providers do not fully account for this distaste and offer greater sociability than what patients desire. We identify two countervailing psychological consequences of sociability in doctor-patient interactions. While sociability amplifies patients' embarrassment when revealing symptoms, it also increases their expectations of receiving emotional support during treatment. As embarrassment increases, the former gains in importance relative to the latter, leading to an aversion to sociability. This aversion in face-to-face interactions generalizes to preferences for using communication media for remote consultations. We provide insights into psychological factors that shape communication preferences for in-person and remote doctor-patient interactions.

Subject Areas: *Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Services, Decision-Making, Service Marketing*

Track: Consumer Behaviour