

Well That's Embarrassing: An Examination of Product Package Differences and the Impact on Embarrassment: An Abstract

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Abstract For the first time, online purchases have outnumbered purchases made in store (excluding groceries) with 51% of purchases being made through web channels. One reason shoppers make certain purchases online is to minimize the embarrassment of being seen with certain products (e.g., condoms, diet-related products, or plus-size clothing). While much research talks about the success of product differentiation, our research conversely shows that for embarrassing products, increasing product anonymity can be a more strategic approach to selling products.

Product anonymity is the degree to which a person feels the product they are purchasing is indistinguishable from other products. Several packaging characteristics can influence product anonymity along four dimensions of product packaging as outlined by Ampuero and Vila (2006). These four dimensions are color, typography, shape, and image. This research posits that differences on these package dimensions cause a change in product anonymity. If a product is not anonymous, a person might receive unwanted attention and embarrassment because of threatened social identity; thus product anonymity has a negative relationship to embarrassment, and embarrassment has a negative relationship to purchase intentions. These relationships were tested through four picture-based experiments.

The findings of the studies show that the color blue for product packaging is the most anonymous with red and yellow being the least. Second, small font size is more anonymous than medium or large font sizes. Additionally, a box is higher in anonymity than a pump bottle or ointment tube. Lastly, the image on the product package was found to indicate that an image on the front is perceived to be more anonymous than no image or an image of a couple on the front. These results suggest that for a product to be most anonymous, it should be a blue box with small lettering and include an image of the product on the front (an interaction effect was not tested but should be in future research). The results showed that anonymity has a negative relationship to embarrassment which also has a negative relationship to purchase intentions. Embarrassment mediated the relationship in all of the studies.

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Companies should consider, specifically, for embarrassing products, to not brand their products with overt, flashy packaging but should instead opt for subtle product packaging cues.

References Available Upon Request