Evaluating Anthropomorphized Products Less Positively: “Shame on Me!”

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Four studies demonstrate that experiencing shame (vs. fear, sadness, or neutral emotion) decreases consumers’ preference for anthropomorphized products. The effect is driven by a heightened desire to avoid social contact, and is stronger for consumers with interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal and for products consumed in private (vs. public).

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Anthropomorphism and Consumer Behaviors:
Exploring the New Processes and Implications

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Paper #1: I Need My Own Substance! Effects of Anthropomorphic Product Presentations on Brand Choice of Complementary Accessories
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Paper #2: The Influence of Product Anthropomorphism on Comparative Judgment Strategy
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Paper #3: Money Helps When Money Feels: Money Anthropomorphism Increases Charitable Giving
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SESSION OVERVIEW
Anthropomorphism refers to the tendency to imbue nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, or emotions (Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2007). As a common phenomenon in consumption environments, anthropomorphism has drawn wide attentions from both social psychology and consumer researchers (Aggarwal and McGill 2012). Previous consumer research has largely focused on how imbuing products with general humanlike features affects liking of products (e.g., Aggarwal and McGill 2007). However, relatively fewer studies have attempted to identify the specific humanlike features that drive the effects. The four papers in this session identify important cognitive and emotional processes associated with such specific humanlike features, and explore new implications for consumer behaviors.

In particular, the first two papers in the session focus on consumers’ perceptions of anthropomorphized products. The paper by Jia et al. explores the effect of “bodily consideration” activated by anthropomorphic product presentations on preferences for complementary accessories. Huang, Wong and Wan’s research suggests that consumers tend to treat an anthropomorphized product as an integrated entity, and explores the implications for comparative judgment strategies. The remaining two papers link anthropomorphism research with feelings or emotions. The paper by Wang, Zhou, and Kim introduces the role of perceived warmth of anthropomorphized money in a charitable giving context. Dong and Aggarwal demonstrate shame as a novel emotional antecedent on consumers’ evaluation of anthropomorphized products.

The first paper shows in four studies that anthropomorphic presentations of a base product (e.g., making a Canon printer “talk” in a video advertisement) increase consumers’ choice share of complementary accessories from the same brand that provides the base product (e.g., Canon ink cartridges) over accessories from a different brand (e.g., Staples ink cartridges). This effect occurs because anthropomorphism activates a “bodily consideration” and consumers are biologically aversive to foreign body-related substances.

In the second paper, five experiments show that anthropomorphism of product alternatives increases the chance that consumers use an absolute judgment strategy (vs. dimension-by-dimension strategy) in comparative judgment. This effect is mediated by consumers’ perception of each anthropomorphized alternative as an integrated entity (vs. a bundle of attributes).

The third paper explores what happens when people think of money as a human. This research systematically examines in six studies the effect of money anthropomorphism on charitable giving, and finds that money anthropomorphism leads people to consider money to be warmer and thus makes people more inclined to donate.

Finally in the fourth paper, four studies demonstrate that experiencing shame (vs. fear, sadness, or neutral emotion) decreases consumers’ preference for anthropomorphized products. The effect is driven by a heightened desire to avoid social contact, and is stronger for consumers with interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal and for products consumed in private (vs. public).

Taken together, these papers present new insights and directions in anthropomorphism research. Given the growing impact of anthropomorphism in consumer research and its marketing implications, we expect this session to generate high interest among ACR attendees and spark future research, as well as engage the audience to discuss the interpretation of many consequences of anthropomorphism. (498 words)

I Need My Own Substance! Effects of Anthropomorphic Product Presentations on Brand Choice of Complementary Accessories

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Many firms across various industries adopt a “razor-and-blade” business model, in which these firms attract consumers by offering a base product (e.g., a razor) at a low price and then earn their real profit from consumers’ repeated purchases of complementary accessories (e.g., replaceable blades) for the base product (Teece 2010). Oftentimes, this business model faces threats from competing generic brands that offer cheaper alternative accessories to consumers.

In this research, we examine whether marketers can subtly vary the way they present a base product to change consumers’ subjective perception of the product, as a solution for protecting their market share in the accessory market. Specifically, we focus on anthropomorphized product presentations, that is, making a base product look, move, or talk as a human being in ads, product appearances, or consumer-product interfaces (Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Kim and McGill 2011).

We propose that anthropomorphic presentations of a base product (e.g., a Canon printer) will increase consumers’ choice share of...
complementary accessories provided by the same brand that offers the base product (e.g., Canon ink cartridges) over accessories from a different brand (e.g., Staples ink cartridges). This is because there is a “whole-part” relationship between a base product and its complementary accessories, so that anthropomorphic presentations of the base product will activate a “bodily consideration” — consumers are biologically averse to foreign body-related substances (Tybur, Lieberman, and Griskevicius 2009), and they also project such an aversion onto accessories from a different brand, which represent “foreign body substances” to the anthropomorphized base product.

In Study 1, we assigned 156 undergraduates to two conditions. In the anthropomorphic condition, participants watched a video in which a Canon printer appeared to introduce itself from a first-person perspective (it also moved its “lips” when “talking”); in the non-anthropomorphic condition, the same Canon printer was introduced from a third-person perspective (see Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto 2013 for similar manipulations). Then, participants made a choice between a Canon ink cartridge and a low-cost alternative provided by Staples. We found that participants were more likely to choose the Canon ink cartridge for the Canon printer in the anthropomorphic condition (50.0%) than in the non-anthropomorphic condition (34.2%; Wald = 3.94, p < .05).

In Study 2, we presented a Samsung laptop computer to participants with a video manipulation similar to that used in Study 1. After participants (N = 201) watched the video, they were instructed to imagine that they had just purchased the Samsung laptop computer, and to further choose between a Samsung hard drive and a Toshiba hard drive for their Samsung laptop computer. Then, participants rated the perceived compatibility between the Samsung laptop computer and the Toshiba hard drive (“be compatible with/work well with,” α = .97). Replicating the results of Study 1, we found that participants were more likely to choose the Samsung hard drive for their Samsung laptop computer in the anthropomorphic condition than in the non-anthropomorphic condition (79.0% vs. 62.4%; Wald = 6.55, p < .01). Furthermore, anthropomorphic product presentation decreased the perceived compatibility between the Samsung laptop computer and the Toshiba hard drive (5.61 vs. 5.62; F(1, 199) = 7.29, p < .01), and such a decrease in the perceived compatibility mediated the effect of anthropomorphic product presentation on brand choice (95%Crl .15, .89).

In Study 3, we again used the Samsung laptop videos to manipulate anthropomorphism and added a second between-subjects factor to the experimental design. A half of participants made a decision on hard drives for their Samsung laptop computer as those did in Study 2, and the other half made a decision on what tablet computer (Samsung vs. Toshiba) to buy together with their Samsung laptop computer. There was an interaction between anthropomorphic presentation and decision target (N = 201; b = -.12, z = -.88, p = .06). In the hard drive condition, we replicated our results, such that the anthropomorphic presentation of the Samsung laptop computer increased the choice share of the Samsung hard drive over the Toshiba hard drive (74.5% vs. 54.7%; b = .83, z = 1.95, p = .05). In contrast, this effect disappeared when the decision target was tablet computer (b = -.29, z = -.70, p > .48). These results demonstrated that anthropomorphic product presentations only influence consumers’ brand choice of accessories for the base product, but not their brand choice of other products that can work independently of the base product. Such findings are consistent with the “bodily consideration” account — a “whole-part” relationship does not exist between a laptop computer and a tablet computer, and thus a “bodily consideration” should not be activated, consequently inhibiting consumers’ projection of their own aversion to foreign body-related substances onto this context.

In Study 4, we manipulated product anthropomorphism using print ads. In the anthropomorphic condition, a Philips electric toothbrush was described from a first-person perspective, while the same electric toothbrush was presented from a third-person perspective in the non-anthropomorphic condition. After imagining having decided to buy the Philips electric toothbrush, participants (N = 102) chose between a Philips replacement brush head and a low-cost alternative provided by Up & Up (a store brand owned by Target) for their Philips electric toothbrush. Replicating the previous results, we found that participants were more likely to choose the Philips replacement brush head for their Philips electric toothbrush in the anthropomorphic condition (52.8%) than in the non-anthropomorphic condition (30.6%; Wald = 5.05, p < .03). In addition, at the end of the survey, we measured participants’ chronic aversion to foreign body-related substances (e.g., “having a blood transfusion) with a four-item scale (α = .81). We found that the effect of anthropomorphic presentation on brand choice of accessories increased with participants’ chronic aversion to foreign body-related substances (b = .55, z = 2.05, p < .04), further supporting the “bodily consideration” account.

In sum, our research contributes to the literature on product anthropomorphism by demonstrating that anthropomorphism can activate a “bodily consideration” in the context of accessory decision. The findings also enrich our understanding of consumers’ brand choice of complementary goods. (1000 words)

**The Influence of Product Anthropomorphism on Comparative Judgment Strategy**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Previous research has shown that anthropomorphism can influence evaluation of a product when considered in isolation or in comparison with non-humanized product (e.g., Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Chandler and Schwarz 2010; Kim and McGill 2011). However, little is known about the influence of anthropomorphism on comparisons among several anthropomorphized alternatives presented simultaneously. Intuitively, the effect of anthropomorphism may be cancelled out in such a context, if the effect of anthropomorphism is considered for each product alternative individually. The present research, however, suggests that anthropomorphism influences the comparative strategy to process the product information, and eventually affects consumers’ preference.

Consumers who have to make a decision between different choice alternatives may compute a preference in at least two ways. On one hand, they may perform a dimension-by-dimension comparison and choose the alternative that is superior with the greatest number of dimensions (Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993). Alternatively, consumers may first estimate the overall attractiveness of each alternative by integrating the values along the dimensions and then choose the alternative with the greatest overall attractiveness (absolute judgment process; Parducci 1965). The final decision can be quite different, depending on which strategy is adopted (Park and Kim 2005). That is, the alternative scoring higher on overall attractiveness may be inferior along more dimensions than the other alternative(s).

When product alternatives are presented in a humanized manner, consumers tend to treat each alternative as an organic whole with a soul rather than a loose combination of instrumental attributes — similar to the way we treat people (McGill 1998). Just like each person is distinctive, each humanized product as an integrated entity is perceived as structurally distinct from other humanized products, and should not be broken down to pieces and compared by individual dimensions mechanically (Chandler and Schwarz 2010; Fiske and
Neuberg 1990). We propose that when confronting a consideration set in which all alternatives are anthropomorphized (vs. non-anthropomorphized), consumers are more likely to perceive each alternative as an integrated entity and thus, increase their chance to use an absolute judgment strategy.

Experiment 1 tested the effect using a choice task with a one-factor, two-level design (anthropomorphism vs. non-anthropomorphism). Specifically, each participant was presented with two laptops to choose. One laptop (i.e., absolute-dominant laptop) was designed to be preferred if participants use an absolute judgment comparative strategy (i.e., with an overall higher performance), while the other laptop (i.e., dimension-dominant laptop) was designed to be preferred if a dimension-by-dimension strategy is used (i.e., with a greater number of superior dimensions). Anthropomorphism was manipulated by describing the laptops in a human-like tone and by asking participants to concentrate on thinking of each laptop as a person. As expected, anthropomorphism increased participants’ choice of and preference for absolute-dominant alternative.

Experiment 2 tested the underlying mechanism using a moderation-of-process design. We expected that the effect of anthropomorphism on comparative judgment strategy should not hold when participants are led to believe that even human attributes are autonomous and can be detached from each other. The experiment had a 2 (belief of human attributes: autonomous vs. integral) × 2 (anthropomorphism of products: anthropomorphism vs. non-anthropomorphism). Participants first read a paragraph containing arguments that human attributes are either “autonomous and contribute individually” or “integral and embedded to each other” (general trait manipulation approach; Chiu, Hong, and Dweck 1997). Then, similar to experiment 1, participants were presented with a pair of either anthropomorphized or non-anthropomorphized smart phones for evaluation. When participants were led to believe that human attributes are integral, the results replicated those in experiment 1. However, the effect diminished when they were led to believe that even human attributes can be detached and evaluated individually.

To provide direct process evidence of the judgment strategies elicited by anthropomorphism, process-tracing software Mouselab was used in experiment 3. Participants were asked to evaluate two alternatives of restaurants, both described in either a human-like tone or a non-human-like tone. Information of the restaurants was presented on the computer screen in the form of a 2 (alternative) × 3 (attribute) matrix. The information in the matrix was hidden behind masked boxes, and the participants had to open one box at a time by moving a mouse-controlled cursor to the box. Mouselab recorded which boxes the participants opened, and in what sequences. The amount of alternative-based cursor movements relative to attribute-based movements was calculated in a way suggested by Payne, Bettman, and Johnson (1988), and this value was significantly higher in anthropomorphism condition than in non-anthropomorphism condition.

Experiment 4 tested the effect using eye-tracking technique with real information of products. Participants were presented with two alternative digital cameras to choose—described either in a human-like manner or not. Participants’ eyeballs movements were recorded by an eye-tracking machine and analyzed using the method similar to the MouseLab study. The results replicated those from experiment 3.

Experiment 5 further tested the effect in a real choice context. Participants were told that they can get a bag of corn snack for free, and were asked to make a choice between two corn snack alternatives based on the package pictures and descriptions, which were displayed in a way similar to online shopping. Anthropomorphism of snack alternatives was manipulated using human-like or non-human-like packages. Consistent with expectation, participants were more likely to choose the absolute-dominant snack in the anthropomorphism condition than in the non-anthropomorphism condition. Importantly, participants’ perception of each product as an integrated entity or a bundle of attributes was directly measured, and was found to mediate the effect of anthropomorphism on the choice they made.

To summarize, in five experiments involving comparative judgments of products in various categories, we show that anthropomorphism leads to perceptions of each product alternative as an integrated entity (vs. a bundle of attributes), and thus increases consumers’ chance to use an absolute judgment strategy. While previous anthropomorphism literature rarely compares multiple anthropomorphized products presented simultaneously—a context that is pervasive in everyday consumption—this research fills this gap. Additionally, this research contributes to comparative judgment literature by identifying anthropomorphism as a new antecedent of judgment strategy.

(1000 words)

**Money Helps When Money Feels: Money Anthropomorphism Increases Charitable Giving**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Throughout history, philosophers and psychologists have considered money as a negative force that weakens social bonds and reduces people’s tendency to help others (Marx 1844, 1964; Vohs, Mead, and Goode 2006, 2008). However, is it possible that thoughts of money can actually promote helping and charitable giving to others? What happens when people think of money as a person? Will money anthropomorphism increase charitable giving? In the present research, we propose that money anthropomorphism, imbuing money with humanlike characteristics, leads people to consider money to be warmer and in turn makes people more inclined to donate. Across seven studies including one pilot study, we tested our hypothesis.

In the pilot study, we examined consumers’ dispositional tendency to anthropomorphize money and its correlation with their donation intention. We also measured a general tendency to anthropomorphize any entities to show our effect is specific to money anthropomorphism. A correlation analysis revealed that a consumers’ dispositional tendency to anthropomorphize money was positively correlated with their donation intention, whereas the general tendency to anthropomorphize any entities was not. The findings provided preliminary evidence to support our argument that money anthropomorphism can enhance charitable giving. In the main studies, we manipulated money anthropomorphism to examine the causal effect of money anthropomorphism on charity donations.

In Study 1, we used a previously validated anthropomorphism manipulation (Aggarwal and McGill 2007), and show participants in the anthropomorphism condition displayed a higher donation intention ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.98$) than those in the object condition ($M = 3.69, SD = 2.03$).

Study 2 replicated findings in Study 1 by using a different method to manipulate money anthropomorphism (adapted from Chandler and Schwarz 2010). In the anthropomorphism condition, participants thought of money with personality traits, whereas in the object condition, participants thought about money in terms of its physical features. Consistent with Study 1, money anthropomorphism significantly increased participants’ donation intention. In addition, we also tested the underlying mechanism of the effect of money anthropomorphism on charitable giving. A mediation analysis showed that the effect of money anthropomorphism on donation intention was mediated by the enhanced warmth perception of money (Indirect effect: b
However, we did not find strong evidence to suggest that the enhanced competence perception mediated the effect (Indirect effect: $B = .15, SE = .12, 95\% CI [.13, .17])

Study 3 further examined the underlying process of the money anthropomorphism effect by examining a boundary condition. Our logic was that if perceived warmth, not perceived competence, mediated the money anthropomorphism effect on charity donation, the effect should be attenuated if participants were explicitly guided to think of money as a competent, agentic person (agentic human condition). We predicted we would replicate the findings in the previous studies when participants were asked to think of money as a warm, empathetic person (communal human condition). Supporting our prediction, results showed that participants in the communal human condition ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.94$) had a higher donation intention than those in the object condition ($M = 3.84, SD = 2.12, F(2, 259) = 4.90, p = .02$) and those in the agentic human condition ($M = 3.73, SD = 1.86, F(2, 259) = 6.66, p = .01$). There was no significant difference between the agentic human and object conditions ($F(2, 259) = 1.33, p = .22$). A mediation analysis further confirmed that perceived warmth, not perceived competence, served as the mediator for the money anthropomorphism effect.

Study 4 focused on ruling out an alternative explanation that charitable donations might have benefited from a humanization itself rather than monetary anthropomorphism per se (humanization halo effect). That is, anthropomorphizing anything might enhance charitable giving. However, our results showed that the effect was specific to money anthropomorphism ($M_{anthropomorphized} = 4.33, SD_{anthropomorphized} = 1.67, M_{object} = 3.40, SD_{object} = 1.86, F(1, 363) = 9.68, p = .002$). We did not observe the same effect when participants were asked to anthropomorphize the charity, any object they can easily anthropomorphize, or any familiar product they can think of (all ps > .17). These findings suggest that anthropomorphism itself is insufficient to induce a heightened intention to donate. Although the charity organization is also involved in the charitable process, charity anthropomorphism did not lead to an increase in donation amount compared with money anthropomorphism.

Study 5 examined whether money anthropomorphism would lead participants to donate real money. Results showed that money anthropomorphism increased not only the probability of donation ($P_{anthropomorphized} = 72.09\%, P_{object} = 46.80\%, \chi^2 = 5.93, p = .02$) but also the amount of donation ($M_{anthropomorphized} = 2.98, SD = 3.52; M_{object} = 1.36, SD = 2.52, t(75) = 2.49, p = .02$).

In Study 6, we used a different method to manipulate money anthropomorphism that can enhance the external validity and provide meaningful managerial implications. For example, in the anthropomorphism condition participants were asked to contribute one “George Washington,” whereas those in the control condition were asked to donate $1 dollar. Moreover, we ruled out an alternative explanation that the effect might have been driven by the reduced pain of parting with money.

Our research provides new insight into the potential positive effects of the cue of money on consumer behavior. The findings also contribute to the emergent theorization about underlying psychological mechanisms for the effect of anthropomorphism on consumer behavior.

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**Evaluating Anthropomorphized Products Less Positively: “Shame on Me!”**

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Shame is an aversive affective reaction that occurs following the failure to meet internalized social standards (Tangney 1999; Tracy and Robins 2004). Hence, shame has been characterized as both a “self-conscious” (Tangney 1999) and a “social” emotion (Fischer and Tangney 1995), and has been linked with low self-worth (Tracy, Robins, and Tangney 2007), dysfunctional interpersonal behaviors (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007), and a motivation for escape or concealment (Tangney et al. 2007). These findings suggest that shame-laden individuals tend to cope by avoiding public exposure.

Although the strategies that people use to cope with feelings of shame in social relationships are well documented, the impact of these feelings on non-social, consumption behavior has not received much attention. Building on the premise that shame-laden individuals have a strong desire to avoid public exposure, the current research explores the possibility that shame may lead to lowered evaluation of anthropomorphized products. Prior research suggests that when people anthropomorphize a product, they imbue it with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, or emotions (Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2007). As a result, people may interact with anthropomorphized products in a way similar to their interactions with other persons. Consequently, even the mere presence of anthropomorphized products might create a psychological feeling of being in a public environment and being under the watchful eyes of others, regardless of actual anonymity (Bateson, Nettle, and Roberts 2006). Thus, we expect that shame-laden consumers would evaluate the anthropomorphized (vs. non-anthropomorphized) products less favorably, and that this effect will be driven by a general desire to avoid social contact with others.

Moreover, we argue that the effect of incidental shame on reduced evaluation of anthropomorphized products will be (a) stronger for consumers with interdependent (vs. independent) construal, as they are generally more susceptible to others’ evaluations (Oyserman and Lee 2008); and (b) weaker for products consumed publicly (vs. privately), as we do not expect the presence of an anthropomorphized product to exert any additional effect on consumers’ desire to avoid social contact above and beyond what they already experience in a public consumption context.

Further, the effect will be specific to shame and would not generalize to other negatively valenced emotions such as fear or sadness, which are characterized by different cognitive appraisals and social motivations. While shame elicits a greater desire to avoid social interaction with others (Tracy and Robins 2004), people tend to cope with fear and sadness through greater affiliation with others. For instance, Dunn and Hoegg (2014) showed that fearful consumers tend to seek affiliation with an available brand when the opportunity to build affiliations with others is not immediately available. Similarly, sadness may evoke the motivation to seek help and accompaniment from others driven by a sense of loss and helplessness (Gary and Lerner 2013). Thus, to get further evidence for the process by which shame reduces consumers’ evaluation of anthropomorphized products and to rule out a generalized negative valence of the emotion as an alternative explanation, we compared the effect of shame with fear and sadness. Four experiments were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses.

Experiment 1 employed a 3 (emotion: shame vs. fear vs. neutral) x 2 (product type: anthropomorphized vs. non-anthropomorphized) between-subjects design. Participants first recalled a past experience that gave rise to feelings of shame, fear or neutral emotion (a typical day experience). Afterwards, participants proceeded to an ostensibly unrelated task, in which they provided evaluations of either an anthropomorphized or non-anthropomorphized smoothie-maker (Puzakova et al. 2013). As expected, participants who recalled a shameful (vs. fearful or neutral) experience provided less favorable evaluation of an anthropomorphized smoothie-maker, but not...
a non-anthropomorphized smoothie-maker. Moreover, as expected, fear (vs. neutral emotion) increased consumers’ evaluation of the anthropomorphized product.

Experiment 2 replicated the results of Experiment 1 and further tested the underlying mechanism of the effect. We followed the same procedure as in Experiment 1 except that we used sadness (rather than fear) as the comparison negative emotion and a different product category (i.e., digital camera). The results mirrored those of Experiment 1. A moderated mediation analysis revealed that participants’ desire to avoid social contact with others mediated the emotion × product type interaction effect on evaluation.

Experiment 3 tested the moderating role of self-construal through a 2 (emotion: shame vs. neutral) × 2 (self-construal: independent vs. interdependent) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to an independent or interdependent self-construal condition (Schlosser 2015), and then one of two emotion induction conditions (shame vs. neutral) using the same recall task. As predicted, the negative effect of shame on evaluation of anthropomorphized products occurred for participants primed with interdependent self-construal, but not independent self-construal.

Experiment 4 further tested the moderating role of private (vs. public) consumption context using a 2 (emotion: shame vs. neutral) × 2 (product type: anthropomorphized vs. non-anthropomorphized product) × 2 (consumption context: public vs. private) between-subjects design. After recalling either a shameful or neutral event, participants were asked to imagine that they had just bought a tablet and would like to buy a case for it. To manipulate consumption context, participants were instructed that the tablet was mainly used at home (private context) or at school (public context). Then participants provided evaluations of a tablet case that was either anthropomorphized or not. As further support for our underlying mechanism, we found that when the product was used publicly (i.e., when social contact was already high), the negative effect of shame on anthropomorphized product disappeared, in keeping with our hypothesis. However, when the product was used privately, the social presence of anthropomorphized product resulted in a less favorable evaluation.

Taken together, this research documents a novel emotional antecedent – incidental shame – on consumer’s evaluation of anthropomorphized products. Although anthropomorphizing a product has been shown to lead to positive outcomes (Chandler and Schwarz 2010; Delbaere et al. 2011), our research suggests that marketers may need to re-consider the effectiveness of this strategy if their products elicit feelings of shame (e.g., counterfeit products).

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