



# **Reframing Female Pleasure: The Impact of Empowerment-Oriented Advertising on Purchase Intention for Sexual-Wellness Products**

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** Reframing Female Pleasure: The Impact of Empowerment-Oriented Advertising on Purchase Intention for Sexual-Wellness Products

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Female sexual-wellness products are marketed within a socially stigmatized consumption context, in which self-conscious emotions and situational discomfort may reduce women's purchase intention. At the same time, recent marketing trends such as empowerment-oriented "femvertising" aim to normalize women's pleasure by emphasizing agency and self-determination. Against this backdrop, it is important to understand whether empowerment-oriented advertising can serve as an effective communication strategy in stigmatized categories and which psychological mechanisms drive its impact. The objective of this dissertation is to examine whether empowerment-oriented advertising increases women's purchase intention for sexual-wellness products and whether this effect differs across purchasing contexts (online vs. in-store). In addition, the study investigates whether anticipated pleasure and anticipated embarrassment help explain this relationship. To address this research question, a 2×2 between-subjects online experiment was conducted in which participants were exposed to either an empowerment-oriented or a neutral advertisement and evaluated the product in either an online or in-store purchasing scenario. The results show that empowerment-oriented advertising leads to significantly higher purchase intention than neutral advertising. While purchasing context affects self-conscious emotions, such that in-store settings elicit higher anticipated embarrassment, it does not reliably moderate the effectiveness of empowerment advertising. Mediation analyses indicate that anticipated pleasure represents the primary pathway through which empowerment advertising increases purchase intention, whereas reductions in embarrassment contribute more modestly once pleasure is considered. Overall, the findings suggest that empowerment messaging is particularly effective when it strengthens positive expectations, underscoring its strategic relevance for brands operating in stigmatized categories.

**Key Words:** femvertising, empowerment advertising, sexual-wellness products, stigmatized consumption, purchase intention, hedonic consumption

## **Resumo**

**Título:** Reformular o Prazer Feminino: O Impacto da Publicidade Orientada para o Empoderamento na Intenção de Compra de Produtos de Bem-Estar Sexual

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Produtos de bem-estar sexual feminino são comercializados num contexto socialmente estigmatizado, no qual emoções de autoconsciência e desconforto situacional podem reduzir a intenção de compra. Em paralelo, a “femvertising” orientada para o empoderamento procura normalizar o prazer feminino ao enfatizar agência e autodeterminação. Assim, torna-se relevante avaliar se a publicidade de empoderamento é eficaz em categorias estigmatizadas e quais os mecanismos psicológicos envolvidos. Esta dissertação examina se a publicidade orientada para o empoderamento aumenta a intenção de compra de produtos de bem-estar sexual feminino e se o efeito difere consoante o contexto de compra (online vs. loja física). Adicionalmente, analisa-se o papel do prazer antecipado e do embaraço antecipado como mecanismos explicativos. Para tal, foi conduzida uma experiência online 2×2 entre sujeitos, na qual participantes foram expostas a um anúncio de empoderamento ou neutro e avaliaram o produto num cenário online ou em loja. Os resultados mostram que a publicidade de empoderamento aumenta significativamente a intenção de compra face à publicidade neutra. O contexto de compra influencia emoções de autoconsciência, com cenários em loja a gerarem maior embaraço antecipado, mas não modera de forma consistente a eficácia da publicidade de empoderamento. As análises de mediação indicam que o prazer antecipado é o principal mecanismo que explica o aumento da intenção de compra, enquanto reduções no embaraço têm um contributo mais modesto quando o prazer é considerado. Em suma, mensagens de empoderamento parecem particularmente eficazes quando reforçam expectativas positivas em categorias estigmatizadas.

**Palavras-chave:** femvertising, publicidade de empoderamento, produtos de bem-estar sexual, consumo estigmatizado, intenção de compra, consumo hedónico

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Relevance of the Topic

*“I am done living in a world (...) where women are objects of sexual desire but not subjects of sexual pleasure.”*

This statement by sex educator Emily Nagoski reflects the cultural asymmetry in the construction of female sexuality (Nagoski, 2015). While sexual representation of women is quite common within the media and advertising industry, women’s sexual pleasure is still under the condition of stigma, moral regulation and social taboo. Despite the growing public conversation about gender equality and empowerment, female sexual pleasure is still not widely recognized as an important source of well-being (Balint, 2024). These cultural norms directly affect the way women anticipate emotional responses to consumption.

This is particularly evident in the consumption of sexual wellness products, where purchasing is associated with anticipated embarrassment and concerns about social judgment, especially in contexts involving actual or imagined social exposure (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Bojovic et al., 2025). From a consumer behavior perspective, sexual wellness consumption is an example of stigmatized hedonic consumption, in which anticipated emotions play a crucial role in shaping evaluations and purchase decisions (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Voss et al., 2003). At the same time, some brands, particularly those with a genuine socio-political orientation or those targeting consumers who hold such values, increasingly seek to challenge traditional gender norms through empowerment-oriented advertising strategies. One prominent approach in this context is femvertising, which emphasizes female autonomy, self-determination and agency while rejecting stereotypical portrayals of women (Åkestam et al., 2017; Champlin et al., 2019). Prior research suggests that such advertising can positively influence brand attitudes and perceived authenticity, particularly when such messages are perceived as genuine (Alfaro-Ibáñez & Gallardo-Echenique, 2023). However, these effects have predominantly been examined in low-stigma product categories and have focused primarily on attitudinal outcomes (Alfaro-Ibáñez & Gallardo-Echenique, 2023; Campbell et al., 2021).

Therefore, little is known about how empowerment-oriented advertising operates within highly stigmatized consumption contexts, where anticipated emotions such as embarrassment and pleasure are particularly salient (Dahl et al., 2001; Bojovic et al., 2025). In particular, existing research has largely overlooked how such emotional effects translate into behavioral intentions and how they vary across purchasing contexts characterized by different levels of social exposure.

Against this background, the following two research questions are addressed:

**RQ1: How does empowerment-oriented advertising influence women’s anticipated embarrassment, anticipated pleasure and purchase intention in the context of female sexual wellness products?**

**RQ2: How do these effects differ between private online and public in-store purchasing contexts?**

## **1.2 Thesis Structure**

The thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and scope. Chapter 2 reviews hedonic consumption, stigma-related barriers and femvertising as a potential destigmatization strategy. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, followed by results in Chapter 4 and discussion in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 derives managerial implications. Chapter 7 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

## **1.3 Scope and Delimitations**

The present thesis is subject to delimitations. First, the study focuses exclusively on vibrators as a specific product category within the sexual wellness market, as this product type is particularly associated with social stigma and emotional barriers (Bojovic et al., 2025). Second, the empirical analysis primarily concentrates on female consumers, in line with the research objective of examining women’s anticipated emotional responses and purchase intentions. Men were included only for exploratory purposes and were not the central focus of the analysis. Finally, the study is conceptually limited to the theoretical examination of femvertising as an empowerment-oriented communication approach. It does not aim to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for sexual wellness brands but rather to analyze the emotional mechanisms underlying empowerment-oriented advertising.

## **2 Literature Review**

Derived from the research question, the literature review focuses on three areas: hedonic consumption in the context of sexual wellness products, the barriers associated with this

consumption and femvertising as a destigmatization strategy. These areas are examined in detail in the following sections.

## **2.1 Hedonic Consumption and Sexual Wellness Products**

The following section provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the role of pleasure in consumer behavior. It introduces the concept of hedonic consumption and outlines how sexual wellness products embody this form of experiential and affect-driven consumption.

### **2.1.1 Definition of Hedonic Consumption**

Hedonic consumption refers to forms of consumer behavior driven by the pursuit of pleasure, sensory stimulation and affective experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Rather than fulfilling functional needs, hedonic products are sought for the enjoyment, excitement or relaxation they provide. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) defined hedonic consumption as “those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience” (p. 92), highlighting that consumption is often lived as an experience rather than a purely instrumental act.

This perspective contrasts with utilitarian consumption, which is oriented toward efficiency and functional performance (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Dhar & Wertebroch, 2000). Hedonic decisions are more affect-driven and guided by expectations of how pleasurable an experience will be (Alba & Williams, 2012). The value of such consumption typically emerges during the moment of use, making immediate sensory impressions and emotional reactions central to the evaluation of hedonic products.

Consumers also actively construct these experiences by integrating memories, fantasies and emotional associations into product interactions (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Products therefore serve not only as functional objects but also as carriers of symbolic and affective meaning, capable of eliciting joy, arousal, excitement or comfort (Alba & Williams, 2012). Although most products combine both hedonic and utilitarian dimensions, the relative dominance of each depends on consumers’ motivations and the situational context (Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003).

Understanding hedonic experiences in this way provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing how consumers emotionally respond to products and marketing stimuli, particularly in categories where affective, bodily and sensory experiences such as pleasure, enjoyment and relaxation are central to the consumption episode.

### **2.1.2 Sexual Wellness Products**

Sexual wellness products are a rapidly expanding category of consumer goods designed to support pleasure, sexual health and intimate well-being. This category includes vibrators, dildos, lubricants, condoms and other accessories that facilitate bodily pleasure and enhance sexual experiences (Döring & Poeschl-Guenther, 2018; Narayan & Das, 2024). The World Health Organization explicitly recognizes sexual pleasure as a core component of sexual health, legitimizing products that promote pleasurable experiences as part of holistic wellness practices (WHO, 2006). Positioned at the intersection of pleasure and health, sexual wellness products naturally align with the conceptualization of hedonic consumption outlined in the previous section because they create experiential, affect-driven and sensory forms of value that extend beyond functional utility.

Economically, sexual wellness has evolved into a major global industry reflecting both cultural normalization and increased consumer demand. Their diffusion into mainstream online and offline retail channels marks a shift from marginalized adult retail contexts toward broader lifestyle consumption (Döring, 2021). The global market was valued at approximately USD 35.2 billion in 2023 and is projected to exceed USD 62.7 billion by 2032 with sex toys particularly vibrators representing the largest and fastest growing segment (Grand View Research, 2024). Empirical research confirms their widespread adoption with over half of U.S. women and nearly half of U.S. men reporting lifetime use (Reece, et al., 2009). In this context, vibrators can be defined as electronically powered devices designed to stimulate erogenous zones through vibration or pulsation, vibrators produce inherently multisensory, affective and arousal-oriented experiences that reflect the immediate experiential gratification characteristic of hedonic consumption (Döring, 2021; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Importantly, vibrators also illustrate how hedonic consumption increasingly intersects with contemporary wellness culture. Their use is often framed as a form of self-care that supports stress relief, body awareness and emotional regulation while clinical research highlights therapeutic benefits such as improved sexual function and increased sexual self-efficacy (In Wonderstate, 2024; Herbenick, et al., 2009). As a result, pleasure is progressively positioned as a legitimate component of well-being, reinforcing the hedonic and experiential value associated with vibrator use (Rullo, et al., 2018).

Even though vibrator use is becoming more common, it still evokes ambivalence. Feelings of shame, embarrassment and social discomfort remain common, particularly among women who

have been socialized to view autonomous pleasure seeking as morally inappropriate (Graziani & Chivers, 2024). Thus, vibrators embody a duality: they are prototypically hedonic because they center on multisensory pleasure, affective gratification and embodied experiences yet their consumption remains constrained by persistent social and psychological barriers.

The next section examines these barriers focusing on the emotional and social mechanisms that continue to inhibit women's engagement with sexual wellness products.

## **2.2 Barriers to Hedonic Consumption**

Hedonic consumption is frequently accompanied by anticipated guilt, reflecting moral self-evaluations that arise when pleasure-oriented behaviors are perceived to conflict with internalized social norms and standards of self-control, particularly in Western cultures (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Prior research demonstrates that even before consumption occurs, individuals may anticipate negative self-conscious emotions, which can discourage engagement in otherwise pleasurable activities (Lu et al., 2016). While hedonic consumption is often associated with intuitive and affective impulses, reflective evaluations related to social norms, self-perceptions and moral considerations may shape how individuals' approach and justify pleasure-oriented behaviors (Kahneman, 2011; Fedorikhin, 1999). As outlined in the previous chapter, the consumption of sexual wellness products and vibrators can be marked by feelings of shame, embarrassment and social discomfort despite their pleasure-oriented nature.

These self-conscious emotions may be amplified through reflective evaluative processes and signal a tension between personal desire and socially constructed expectations. The following sections examine these barriers in greater detail and outline how self-conscious emotions, social norms and evaluative concerns shape women's engagement with hedonic products such as vibrators.

### **2.2.1 The Role of Self-Conscious Emotions and Stigma**

Self-conscious emotions are essential in shaping how individuals respond to situations that involve social norms, moral expectations and the potential for evaluation by others. Shame, embarrassment and guilt are often discussed together, yet they differ in their cognitive focus, eliciting conditions and behavioral consequences (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Understanding these distinctions is essential for explaining why female sexual pleasure and particularly the consumption of vibrators continues to evoke discomfort although they are a form of hedonic consumption.

**Shame** is rooted in negative global self-evaluation. It arises when individuals perceive themselves as fundamentally flawed or morally inadequate, typically after failing to meet internalized social or moral standards (Tangney et al., 1996). The focus lies not on a specific behavior but on the entire self, which makes shame especially painful and closely linked to avoidance, withdrawal and feelings of worthlessness. In the context of sexuality, this emotion manifests as sexual shame, a specific form of self-condemnation triggered by one's own sexual thoughts, desires or behaviors (Graziani & Chivers, 2024).

**Embarrassment** differs from shame in both intensity and origin. It arises from a perceived threat to one's public image, typically triggered by real or imagined observers (Dahl et al., 2001). Embarrassment does not involve a moral judgment of the self but reflects concern with public visibility and the possibility of being perceived in an undesirable way. It is therefore especially strong in public or semi-public purchasing situations, such as buying a vibrator in a physical store or interacting with retail staff (Dahl et al., 2001). Whereas shame reflects internalized norms, embarrassment is tied to situational exposure.

**Guilt** focuses on a specific behavior rather than the global self. It is associated with interpersonal harm and the motivation to repair wrongdoing (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt is often conceptualized more broadly as an intrapersonal, self-regulatory emotion associated with indulgence and anticipated moral self-evaluation in hedonic consumption (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Because vibrator use does not involve harm to others, guilt tends to be less relevant and empirical evidence shows that sexual self-expression is shaped primarily by shame and embarrassment rather than guilt (Graziani & Chivers, 2024). Guilt is therefore not included as a focal construct in the present study.

Table 1 summarizes the key distinctions between shame, embarrassment and guilt and highlights their relevance for vibrator consumption.

Table 1: Differentiation of self-conscious emotions

Emotion	Typical trigger	Primary focus	Typical behavioral response	Relevance for vibrator consumption	Included in the present study
Shame	Violation of internalized moral or social standards	Global self (“Who I am”)	Withdrawal, avoidance, self-devaluation	Highly relevant due to internalized norms surrounding female sexual agency and pleasure; undermines perceived legitimacy and anticipated enjoyment	Yes
Embarrassment	Actual or imagined social exposure; presence of observers	Public image (“How I appear to others”)	Situational avoidance, impression management	Highly relevant in public or semi-public purchasing contexts (e.g., in-store); increases discomfort and inhibits approach behavior	Yes
Guilt	Perceived wrongdoing or harm caused by a specific behavior	Specific behavior (“What I did”)	Reparative action, justification	Limited relevance, as vibrator use does not involve interpersonal harm; less central in sexual self-expression contexts	No

*Note: Conceptual distinctions between shame, embarrassment and guilt are based on prior research on self-conscious emotions and stigmatized consumption (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Dahl et al., 2001; Graziani & Chivers, 2024)*

Beyond self-conscious emotions, **Cultural Stigma** significantly shapes how women navigate sexual wellness products. Drawing on Goffman’s (1963) framework, stigma refers to social attributes that significantly discredit a person and lower their social standing in the eyes of others. Female sexual agency has long been stigmatized across Western societies, where women’s sexual pleasure has often been framed as inappropriate or morally questionable (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). These cultural scripts continue to influence attitudes toward female pleasure today.

A prominent indicator of this ongoing devaluation is the orgasm gap, a well-documented disparity in sexual satisfaction between men and women. In a U.S. national sample, 95% of heterosexual men but only 65% of heterosexual women reported usually or always reaching orgasm during partnered sex (Frederick et al., 2018). This gap reflects norms that treat male orgasm as the default priority, while stigma and sexual shame have historically silenced women’s pleasure. Public controversies reinforce how stigma continues to manifest. When content creator Zoella published a guide to sex toys in 2021, the British exam board AQA removed her materials from its syllabus. The backlash revealed how visible expressions of women’s sexual pleasure remain socially sensitive (Aspinall, 2021).

**Stigma Theory** helps explain how these cultural dynamics translate into consumer behavior. Stigma is relational, meaning that what is considered discrediting depends on social norms and

observing audiences (Goffman, 1963). Importantly, stigma can extend beyond individuals to objects and behaviors through processes of association, often referred to as courtesy stigma or stigma by association. In this sense, vibrators may attract courtesy stigma because they are symbolically linked to autonomous female sexuality, a domain that remains culturally contested and subject to moral regulation in many social contexts (Herbenick, et al., 2009). Taken together, such stigma-related processes can reinforce and amplify self-conscious emotions in consumption contexts. Empirical research on sexual health indicates that sexual shame can dampen interest in seeking information or experimenting with sexual products even when concerns are experienced in private (Mohammadi et al., 2016).

The next section examines how these cultural and emotional forces translate into concrete social barriers that regulate purchasing behavior.

### **2.2.2 Social Barriers: Impression Management & Subjective Norms**

Social contexts play a decisive role in shaping how women navigate stigmatized forms of hedonic consumption. Shame and embarrassment are closely tied to the anticipation of how others may evaluate one's behavior. Fear of negative evaluation refers to the concern that one may be judged unfavorably by others and is a central driver of behavioral inhibition in evaluative environments (Leary, 1995). **Social Evaluation Theory** further emphasizes that people experience heightened evaluation apprehension when they believe they are being observed whether observers are real or imagined (Cottrell, 1972). This mechanism helps explain why even the possibility of being seen near sexual wellness products can activate avoidance tendencies.

**Impression Management Theory** deepens this understanding by highlighting how individuals regulate their behavior to maintain a favorable social image. People present identities that align with prevailing social norms to gain approval and avoid sanctions (Schlenker, 1980). Moreover, impression management is not only a reaction to social pressure but also involves intentional efforts to present oneself in a consistent and socially acceptable way across situations (Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). In the context of sexual wellness products, this means that women may conceal their interest, distance themselves from the act of purchase or select alternative purchasing channels to avoid signaling a form of sexuality that contradicts societal expectations around modesty or restraint (Dahl et al., 2001). These strategies function as self-regulatory mechanisms that protect social identity.

These effects are reinforced by **Subjective Norms**, which reflect perceived expectations of significant others. Normative social influence suggests that individuals conform to social expectations to maintain belonging and avoid disapproval (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). **Social Identity Theory** similarly proposes that people internalize the norms of the groups they identify with, adapting their behavior to protect a valued social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When women belong to social environments in which female masturbation or autonomous sexual pleasure is viewed negatively, perceived normative pressure increases self-monitoring and strengthens avoidance of sexual wellness products. These processes align with dual-process perspectives in that reflective, norm-based considerations can override hedonic impulses even when the product offers clear experiential benefits (Evans & Stanovich, 2013).

Individual differences in social sensitivity amplify these dynamics. **Public Self-Consciousness** reflects the degree to which individuals attend to how they are perceived by others and is associated with heightened concern for social evaluation (Fenigstein et al., 1975). **Social Desirability** tendencies describe the inclination to behave in ways that conform to perceived social expectations, even when these behaviors do not reflect one's private attitudes (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Both dispositions are therefore relevant for understanding why some women experience stronger social inhibition than others when confronted with sexual wellness products.

These social mechanisms become particularly salient when comparing public and private consumption contexts. Public settings heighten real-time evaluation because the presence of others intensifies social monitoring, which increases embarrassment and reduces approach motivation (Argo et al., 2005). Research on other socially sensitive or embarrassing purchases suggests that consumers often experience discomfort during in-store purchases and prefer strategies that reduce social visibility during the purchase process (Dahl et al., 2001). These findings transfer directly to vibrator purchases, where interactions with retail staff or other customers can amplify feelings of exposure and social risk.

Private contexts, such as online shopping, offer anonymity and therefore reduce self-presentational concerns. Studies on digital environments demonstrate that anonymity lowers impression management motives and increases willingness to engage in stigmatized behaviors (Joinson, 1999). For sexual wellness products, this means that women can fulfill their hedonic desires without fearing social disapproval. Discreet packaging and private delivery further reduce perceived risk and make online purchasing particularly appealing. At the same time, first-time buyers may miss the informational support and guidance typically provided in-store,

which can create a different type of barrier that is informational rather than social (Soundrapandian & Priya, 2024).

Taken together, these social barriers show how concerns about public visibility, social judgment and group-based expectations inhibit women's engagement with sexual wellness products. While shame can suppress interest in private contexts, embarrassment and fear of negative evaluation strongly influence decisions in public or semi-public contexts. Recognizing these mechanisms is essential for understanding consumer reluctance and for identifying the social conditions that shape comfort, avoidance and purchase behavior.

## **2.3 Femvertising as a Destigmatization Strategy**

Advertising that actively challenges these barriers of shame, stigma and fear or negative evaluation has the potential to reshape how female pleasure is perceived and experienced. The following sections examine how empowerment-oriented communication can contribute to such destigmatization.

### **2.3.1 Definition and Mechanisms**

The term femvertising, a combination of female and advertising, refers to advertising strategies that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote empowering portrayals of femininity (Åkestam et al., 2017). This communication style represents a shift from stereotype-reinforcing advertising toward messages that foreground empowerment, inclusivity and self-determination (Champlin et al., 2019).

At its core, femvertising operates as a norm-shifting form of advertising. By reframing what is considered legitimate, acceptable or desirable for women, it contributes to the transformation of cultural meanings surrounding femininity (Åkestam et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2021). This mechanism is particularly relevant in domains characterized by taboo and stigma, such as female sexual pleasure. When brands present sexual wellness products as tools for autonomy, wellbeing or self-care, they reposition pleasure as a normal and valid aspect of women's health. Such reframing challenges long-standing cultural scripts that have historically restricted expressions of female sexuality (Bojovic et al., 2025).

A second mechanism involves representational change through inclusive and diverse portrayals. Femvertising frequently depicts women as confident, self-assured and relatable, expanding the visual boundaries of accepted femininity. These representations offer socially validated identities that can normalize behaviors previously associated with shame or stigma

(Coleman & Sredl, 2022). In the context of sexual wellness products, such portrayals help transform vibrator use from a private and discreet act into an expression of agency that is culturally recognized and socially legitimate (Bojovic et al., 2025).

Finally, femvertising contributes to destigmatization by increasing the visibility of topics traditionally treated as sensitive or inappropriate. Campaigns addressing menstruation have shown how increasing public visibility can shift cultural conversations and reduce social discomfort (Campbell et al., 2021). Similar processes are evident in the sexual-wellness domain, where brands openly discuss female pleasure to challenge taboo and destigmatize vibrator use (Bojovic et al., 2025). Sexual wellness brands have increasingly adopted this approach by embedding female pleasure within broader narratives of bodily autonomy and holistic wellbeing. While empirical work directly testing such strategies in the sexual wellness category is still limited, studies on femvertising and body-positive campaigns show that empowerment-oriented messages can improve women's brand attitudes, self-esteem and body satisfaction compared to traditional, objectifying advertising (Dai et al., 2025; Selensky & Carels, 2021; Åkestam et al., 2017).

Through these mechanisms, femvertising provides an important foundation for reducing stigma and reshaping emotional responses associated with female pleasure, which informs the theoretical perspectives examined in the following section.

### **2.3.2 Theoretical Foundations**

The mechanisms through which femvertising operates can be understood through psychological theories that explain how individuals protect their sense of self and align their identities with valued social groups. Two frameworks are particularly relevant for understanding how empowerment-oriented advertising may help reduce shame and normalize the consumption of sexual wellness products: Self-Affirmation Theory and Social Identity Theory.

**Self-Affirmation Theory** proposes that individuals are motivated to maintain a sense of overall self-integrity. When people encounter situations that threaten their self-worth, such as social stigmas surrounding female sexual pleasure, they engage in self-affirming processes that restore feelings of adequacy and moral coherence (Steele, 1988). Women often perceive vibrator use as a threat to self-integrity because cultural scripts have long framed female sexual pleasure as morally questionable or inconsistent with ideals of modesty or respectability. Empowerment-based advertising can function as an affirmation that counteracts this perceived threat by emphasizing autonomy, competence and positive self-definition. By presenting vibrator use as

an expression of agency, wellbeing or self-care, femvertising reduces vulnerability to shame-based reactions and helps reinterpret vibrator consumption not as deviant but as consistent with a valued and empowered version of the self (Bojovic et al., 2025; Coleman & Sredl, 2022).

**Social Identity Theory** provides a complementary perspective by explaining how individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups. People prefer to identify with groups that carry positive social meaning and to avoid those perceived as stigmatized or devalued (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Femvertising reshapes these group-based meanings by presenting empowered, diverse and pleasure-positive portrayals of women, which expands the range of identities considered normative within the female in-group. Identification processes become especially powerful when women encounter representations of others who resemble them demographically or psychologically, as seeing women who are similar to themselves confidently engage with sexual wellness products provides social proof that such behaviors are accepted and valued within the in-group (Coleman & Sredl, 2022; Campbell et al., 2021). This normalization reduces perceived social risk and makes vibrator consumption psychologically safer (Bojovic et al., 2025).

Together, these theoretical perspectives explain how empowerment-focused advertising may reduce shame, increase legitimacy and shift norms surrounding female pleasure. By affirming women's self-worth and offering positive social identities with which they can align, femvertising reduces the perceived deviance associated with pleasure-seeking and creates identity-safe conditions under which the use of sexual wellness products becomes more acceptable.

These foundations prepare the ground for examining the boundary conditions under which femvertising is perceived as credible, which is discussed in the next section.

### **2.3.3 Authenticity and Backlash**

The effectiveness of femvertising depends fundamentally on its perceived authenticity. Empowerment-oriented advertising raises expectations that brands genuinely support the values they communicate, making audiences particularly sensitive to inconsistencies. When empowerment messages are not aligned with a brand's broader behavior, consumers tend to interpret such communication as superficial or opportunistic. This phenomenon, often referred to as **femwashing**, captures the strategic use of feminist rhetoric without a substantive commitment to gender-related issues. Research demonstrates that consumers readily distinguish between authentic and inauthentic empowerment messages and that perceived

inauthenticity leads to skepticism, reactance and negative brand evaluations (Alfaro-Ibáñez & Gallardo-Echenique, 2023). Authentic femvertising is characterized by six core dimensions identified in recent consumer research: **transparency**, **consistency** between advertising messages and corporate behavior, **identification** with the women represented, **diversity**, **respect** for women's bodies and **credible** stereotype-challenging **narratives** (Hainneville et al., 2022). These criteria reflect how consumers distinguish genuine empowerment messaging from superficial or commercially motivated femwashing.

This understanding of authenticity is also reflected in real-world femvertising practices. A positive example is Dame Products, a brand whose empowerment messaging aligns consistently with its organizational practices. Dame foregrounds diverse, non-sexualized and body-positive representations, communicates openly about female pleasure and actively challenges structural stigma. This commitment became visible through the brand's lawsuit against the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority after the agency rejected its vibrator advertisements. This coherence between values, communication and corporate behavior strengthens the credibility of its empowerment message and illustrates how brands can credibly promote women's autonomy and reduce shame surrounding sexual-wellness products (O'Brien, 2019).

As outlined in Section 2.2.1, shame and embarrassment can suppress women's approach tendencies toward sexual-wellness products even when these products clearly offer hedonic and wellbeing-related benefits. Authentic representation can counteract these barriers by creating psychological safety, validating women's experiences and encouraging more open attitudes toward hedonic consumption. When empowerment is portrayed in a coherent, transparent and values-consistent way, femvertising may reduce embarrassment, normalize the use of sexual-wellness products and establish the psychological conditions under which empowerment messaging positively influences consumer behavior.

#### **2.3.4 Psychological Processes: From Shame to Pleasure**

Female sexual pleasure is shaped not only by cultural stigma and social evaluation but also by cognitive and emotional forecasting processes that influence how women anticipate their future reactions. Research on affective forecasting shows that individuals often mispredict the intensity and duration of emotional experiences (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). In stigmatized consumption domains, these mispredictions frequently appear in the form of an impact bias in which women overestimate negative emotions such as shame, embarrassment or stigma and

underestimate positive emotions such as pleasure, relaxation or empowerment (Löwenstein, 1996). These distortions emerge partly from focalism, which describes the tendency to focus disproportionately on the socially risky aspects of the action while neglecting contextual factors that could mitigate negative feelings. Additionally, affective forecasts are shaped by a hot cold empathy gap, meaning that in a reflective cold state women struggle to imagine the positive emotional responses that occur in the experiential hot state of actual consumption. Together, these biases sustain avoidance tendencies even when the real experience is likely to be enjoyable (Löwenstein, 1996).

Empowerment-oriented advertising may help recalibrate such affective expectations. By presenting female pleasure as legitimate, normal and aligned with autonomy, self-care and wellbeing, femvertising reduces anticipated embarrassment while making positive future emotions more salient (Dai et al., 2025). The inclusion of confident and diverse female role models provides social proof that pleasure seeking can be socially accepted and emotionally rewarding (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Seeing empowered women engage with a vibrator with confidence encourages viewers to revise their emotional predictions by offering normative and identity-relevant cues that counteract stigma-based expectations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As a result, vibrator purchase is reframed from a socially risky act into one that is perceived as more likely to elicit positive emotional outcomes.

Anticipated pleasure plays a central role in this process. Research on hedonic consumption demonstrates that expected enjoyment strongly predicts approach motivation and purchase intention (Bagozzi et al., 2016). From a theoretical perspective, reduction in embarrassment, whether through self-affirmation, norm challenging messages or credible representation, may enable women to more easily imagine themselves experiencing a positive outcome. Anticipated pleasure can therefore be conceptualized as a mediator between reduced embarrassment and behavioral intention. Once women expect that purchasing and using a vibrator will feel good, affirming or emotionally rewarding, they become more willing to engage with it.

Purchase intention represents the final stage in this emotional sequence. More specifically, Bagozzi et al. (2016) show that consumers consider positive and negative anticipated emotions for both purchase and nonpurchase options and that these emotions systematically drive approach versus avoidance tendencies regarding the product. For highly stigmatized consumption such as purchasing vibrators, intention is particularly sensitive to emotional expectations. When empowerment messages reduce negative affective forecasts and highlight

positive experiential value, it creates psychological conditions that support openness and willingness to consume.

Through this emotional progression, beginning with recalibrated affective forecasts and culminating in increased purchase intention, femvertising may influence emotional responses to vibrators. By normalizing pleasure and counteracting embarrassment-based expectations, empowerment-oriented communication can contribute to making vibrator consumption feel psychologically safer and more positive anticipated.

## **2.4 Hypothesis and Conceptual Framework**

The literature review highlighted that vibrator consumption is shaped by the interplay of hedonic motivations and self-conscious emotions such as shame, embarrassment and stigma. Although shame, embarrassment and stigma are all relevant to understanding these emotional barriers, they differ in their cognitive focus and situational relevance. Shame reflects a global negative self-evaluation rooted in internalized moral norms (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Graziani & Chivers, 2024), whereas stigma represents a broader cultural devaluation of female sexual agency (Goffman, 1963). Embarrassment, by contrast, is triggered by concerns about public visibility and social evaluation in the presence of real or imagined observers (Dahl et al., 2001). Because such evaluative pressures intensify in public settings (Argo et al., 2005), embarrassment is the most context-sensitive self-conscious emotion in purchasing situations and therefore the most relevant emotional mechanism for this study. Empowerment-oriented advertising has been shown to counter such emotional barriers by normalizing female pleasure, strengthening identity-affirming cues and reducing perceptions of social risk (Åkestam et al., 2017). Furthermore, purchasing contexts differ in social visibility, which directly affects embarrassment levels and therefore the impact of empowerment cues (Argo et al., 2005).

Building on these insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

To begin with, the overall effect of empowerment-oriented advertising on behavioral intentions is examined.

***H1: Women exposed to empowerment-oriented advertising will report higher purchase intention than women exposed to a neutral advertisement.***

Since this effect is expected to operate through emotional mechanisms, the first step is to assess whether empowerment-oriented advertising lowers anticipated embarrassment. If embarrassment is reduced, women should more strongly anticipate positive emotional outcomes associated with vibrator use. As vibrators are hedonic products, higher anticipated pleasure is expected to translate into greater behavioral motivation.

***H1a:** Empowerment-oriented advertising will lead to lower anticipated embarrassment compared to a neutral advertisement.*

***H1b:** Lower anticipated embarrassment will be associated with higher anticipated pleasure.*

***H1c:** Higher anticipated pleasure will be associated with higher purchase intention.*

Together, these relationships imply a sequential emotional process through which empowerment-oriented advertising may influence purchase intention.

***H1d (Serial Mediation):** The effect of empowerment-oriented advertising on purchase intention will be serially mediated by anticipated embarrassment and anticipated pleasure, such that empowerment-oriented advertising reduces anticipated embarrassment, which increases anticipated pleasure, which in turn increases purchase intention.*

Beyond the mediation pathway, purchasing contexts differ in social visibility, which affects the intensity of self-conscious emotions. Public settings heighten evaluation concerns more than private settings. If embarrassment is stronger in public settings, empowerment-oriented advertising should be particularly effective in reducing this emotional barrier under those conditions.

***H2:** Women will report higher anticipated embarrassment in public purchasing contexts than in private purchasing contexts.*

***H3:** The embarrassment-reducing effect of empowerment-oriented advertising (vs. neutral advertising) will be stronger in public (in-store) contexts than in private (online) contexts.*

A study overview is provided below in the form of a conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

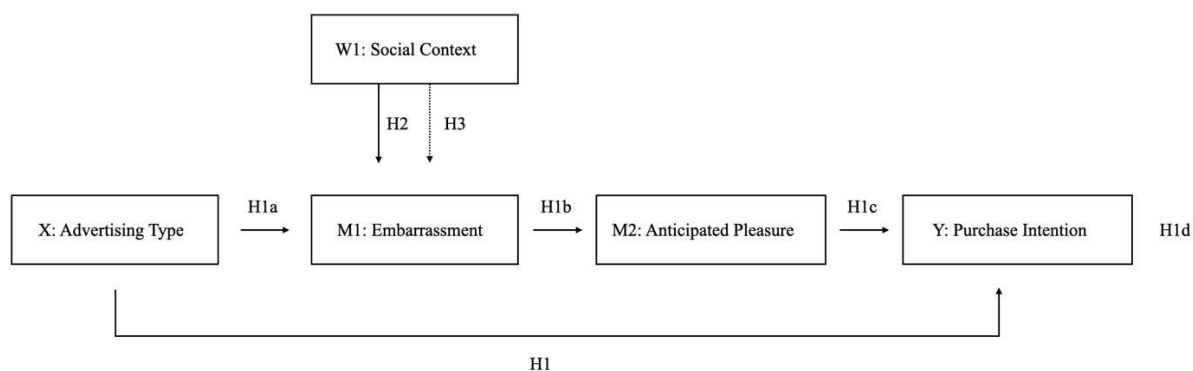


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

### 3 Methodology

The aim of empirical social research is to generate scientific insights based on the systematic collection, preparation and analysis of data (Döring & Bortz, 2016). On this basis, solutions to practical problems can be developed. Empirical research typically distinguishes between quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches. In this thesis, a deductive approach based on quantitative data analysis was chosen. The quantitative paradigm is characterized by a structured research process that begins with the derivation of hypotheses from theoretical foundations. These hypotheses are subsequently tested through statistical analysis of data collected from a sample that is as representative as possible (Döring & Bortz, 2016). Accordingly, the following section describes the study’s participants, materials, procedure and research design.

#### 3.1 Participants

As this study is based on quantitative data collection, it is essential to describe the sample on which the analyses rely. In empirical research, the target population refers to the total set of individuals relevant to a given research question (Hussy et al., 2013). A sample-based approach was selected rather than a full census because sampling provides substantial advantages in terms of time and cost efficiency (Berekoven et al., 2006). A total of 349 individuals began the survey and 193 completed it. After applying exclusion criteria, which will be described in more detail in Section 4.1, six respondents were removed. The final sample therefore comprised 187 participants of whom 153 were women and 34 were men. The sample consisted mainly of young adults: 95.6% of participants were between 18 and 34 years old. The majority lived in Germany (72.2%) or Portugal (18.7%). The relationship status was relatively balanced between “single”

(44.4%) and “in a relationship” (47.1%). In terms of religion, most participants identified as Christian (47.1%) or no religion/atheist/agnostic (46.5%); political orientation was predominantly liberal (39%) to moderate (27%). Overall, the sample was highly educated: 53.5% had a bachelor's degree and 29.9% had a master's degree (see Appendix 1). Random assignment allocated respondents to one of the four experimental conditions in the 2×2 design. Female cell sizes were as follows: Empowerment × Online (n = 39), Empowerment × Store (n = 39), Neutral × Online (n = 39) and Neutral × Store (n = 36). This ensured a balanced distribution across conditions and provided a solid basis for the subsequent analyses. Recruitment took place through Instagram, WhatsApp, university networks, colleagues and personal contacts using a non-probability convenience sampling method. Participation was voluntary and no compensation was provided.

### **3.2 Materials**

This section outlines the methodological approach adopted to empirically test the hypotheses developed in the theoretical framework. The full wording of all items and the operationalization of each construct and are documented in Appendix 2. The questionnaire primarily relied on 5-point Likert scales, which are widely used in psychological and consumer-behavior research due to their ease of interpretation, reduced cognitive burden and high reliability in capturing attitudinal and emotional responses (Dawes, 2008; Revilla et al., 2014). Compared with longer response formats, 5-point scales tend to minimize respondent fatigue while still providing sufficient sensitivity to detect meaningful variance across individuals (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). Unless stated otherwise, all Likert scales ranged from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more positive or intense evaluations. Scale anchors varied depending on the construct measured. In addition to Likert-type items, the survey included a small number of alternative response formats, including a slider-based item (Reips & Funke, 2008) and one open-ended questions (Singer & Couper, 2017). These complementary formats allowed for the collection of both structured and more nuanced evaluative information.

The following subsections describe the operationalization of all independent, dependent, mediator, moderator, control and exploratory variables. Each construct is introduced together with the scale on which it is based, its theoretical grounding and the rationale for its inclusion in the study.

### 3.2.1 Independent and Dependent Variables

This study examines two independent variables, Advertising Type and Purchasing Context and uses Purchase Intention as the dependent variable.

#### Independent Variable: Advertising Type

Two versions of the advertisement were created for this study: one conveying a femvertising message and one designed as a neutral control. The two advertisements differed solely in their textual framing, which aligns with research demonstrating that subtle identity-affirming cues can enhance self-relevance without appearing overly explicit or leading (Reed et al., 2012; Forehand et al., 2011). No human figures were included in either version to avoid confounding effects such as attractiveness bias, perceived similarity or the activation of gendered stereotypes (Bower, 2001; Knoll et al., 2011). Figure 2 presents the two advertisement versions.



Figure 2: Advertising versions

The wording of the empowerment-oriented advertisement was intentionally crafted to evoke empowerment without explicitly using terms such as “empowerment” or “pleasure,” as such wording could produce overly directive stimuli. The headline “You come first” introduced a subtle double meaning, consistent with research suggesting that light humor can increase message openness and perceived approachability in sensitive product categories (Eisend, 2011). Overall, the linguistic framing emphasized autonomy, agency and ownership over desire, which are core dimensions of empowerment-based advertising (Reed et al., 2012).

In the neutral condition, the advertisement focused exclusively on rational, performance-oriented product attributes, providing a clear contrast to empowerment cues (Teicher et al., 2018). In both conditions, the product image, layout, color palette (dusty rose, beige and lilac) and the fictitious brand name (“Inova Pro”) were held constant to prevent design-related confounds (Geunens & De Pelsmacker, 2017).

### **Independent Variable: Purchasing Context**

Purchasing Context was manipulated using a vignette-based textual scenario. Participants were asked to imagine buying the product either in a public drugstore setting or in a private drugstore online environment. In addition to the written instructions, participants were shown a context-specific image depicting either an in-store shopping situation or a private online purchasing scenario to enhance situational immersion. Vignette-based manipulations combined with visual cues are an established method for eliciting context-specific affective responses (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The visual stimuli used for the context manipulation are provided in Appendix 3.

### **Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention was measured using three items adapted from established scales in consumer behavior research (Dodds et al., 1991; Spears & Singh, 2004). A sample item included “How likely would you be to consider buying this vibrator?”. Three items were averaged to form a composite purchase intention index, with higher scores indicating greater behavioral motivation.

#### **3.2.2 Mediators**

Consistent with the conceptual framework outlined in Section 2.4, the study assessed anticipated embarrassment and pleasure as two mediators that reflect the emotional processes through which the advertising manipulation was expected to shape purchase intentions.

Anticipated embarrassment was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Dahl et al. (2001). Participants indicated how embarrassed, uncomfortable and self-conscious they would feel when purchasing the vibrator. A sample item included “How embarrassed would you feel buying this vibrator?”. This scale captures the core components of embarrassment as a self-conscious emotion driven by concerns about real or imagined social evaluation and has been widely used and validated in consumer-behavior research (Dahl et al., 2001; Krishna et al.,

2015). Anticipated pleasure was assessed with two items measuring how pleasurable and enjoyable participants expected using the vibrator to be. A sample item included “How pleasurable do you expect using this vibrator to be?”. This operationalization follows prior literature conceptualizing hedonic consumption as driven by anticipated affective rewards, with pleasure and enjoyment representing the key emotional benefits underlying indulgent choices (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Alba & Williams, 2012).

### **3.2.3 Control and Explorative Variables**

Control variables were included to account for individual differences that could influence emotional or behavioral responses in the context of sexual-wellness products. Sexual-wellness experience was assessed with two binary items asking whether participants had ever used or purchased a vibrator, providing an indicator of prior familiarity with the product category. Social desirability was measured using the short form of the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Reynolds, 1982), which is widely used to capture respondents’ tendencies to answer in socially acceptable rather than fully candid ways (e.g. “I sometimes feel resentful when I don’t get my way”). Erotophilia was assessed with three items adapted from the Sexual Opinion Survey (Fisher et al., 1988), reflecting comfort with and openness toward sexual topics (e.g. “I feel comfortable with sexual topics”). In addition, demographic information was collected, including age, gender, relationship status, highest level of education, religious affiliation, political orientation and country of residence. These variables were used to describe the sample and to control for potential background influences where relevant. In addition, perceived authenticity of the advertisement and ease of imagining the scenario were assessed as control variables. Furthermore, exploratory variables were also included to gain additional insights beyond the primary theoretical model. Public self-consciousness was measured with three items from the Public Self-Consciousness subscale of the Self-Consciousness Scale Revised (Scheier & Carver, 1985), capturing individuals’ chronic concern with how they were perceived by others (e.g. „I am concerned about what others think of me”). Feminist identity was assessed with items adapted from the Feminist Consciousness Scale (Duncan et al., 2021), reflecting identification with feminist values and perceived similarity to feminist groups (e.g. “I am a feminist”). Shame was measured using items from the State Shame and Guilt Scale (Marschall et al., 1994) that were adapted to the context of purchasing a vibrator to capture anticipated self-evaluative negative affect. A sample item included “Buying this vibrator would make me feel small, like I am worth nothing.”.

Perceived stigma was measured with items adapted from prior research on sexual-behavior stigma (Herbenick et al., 2011), assessing beliefs about societal judgment toward women who use vibrators. A sample item included “Most people think less of a women who uses a vibrator”. Willingness to pay was captured through a single open-ended item in which participants indicated the maximum amount they would be willing to pay for the product. Anticipated positive feelings, such as feeling joyful, relaxed, confident or happy, were measured in accordance with common practices in anticipated-emotion research. Perceived product quality, including attributes such as reliability, high quality, hygiene and safety, was assessed using standard product-evaluation items frequently employed in consumer research.

### **3.3 Procedure**

A standardized online questionnaire served as the data collection instrument for this study. Questionnaires allow for the assessment of subjective experiences that are not directly observable. Moreover, they offer a high level of anonymity and discretion, which is especially advantageous when dealing with sensitive or intimate topics (Döring & Bortz, 2016). The survey consisted of a pretest phase and the main data collection, both of which are described in the following sections.

#### **3.3.1 Pretest and Pilot Testing**

After developing the initial version of the questionnaire, a focus group with three participants was conducted to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the survey items. In addition, a pretest with seven participants was carried out to evaluate whether the advertising stimuli produced a clearly distinguishable difference between the empowerment-oriented and the neutral condition and thus whether the manipulation functioned as intended. The pretest also provided insights into clarity, unambiguity and completion time of the survey (Berger-Grabner, 2016). All individuals who participated in the focus group or the pretest were excluded from the main data collection.

#### **3.3.2 Main Study**

The detailed questionnaire is presented in Appendix 3. Overall, the survey followed the format of a fully structured and anonymized self-administered questionnaire and consisted of three main sections: an introductory section, a main section and a closing section (Niewerth & Thiele, 2014).

The introductory section began with a brief text that informed participants about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymity of their responses. Two screening questions were included to ensure that participants were at least 18 years old and identified as female. Participants under the age of 18 were excluded, while male respondents were included for exploratory purposes and received an additional instruction text. Following this, the experimental manipulations were introduced by presenting the advertising stimulus and the purchasing context scenario. The main section of the questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part included items measuring the study’s dependent variables. The second part assessed whether the manipulations of Advertising Type and Purchasing Context were successful. The third part contained an attention check as well as the control and exploratory variables. In the closing section, demographic information was collected and the questionnaire concluded with a brief thank you message for participating (see Figure 3).

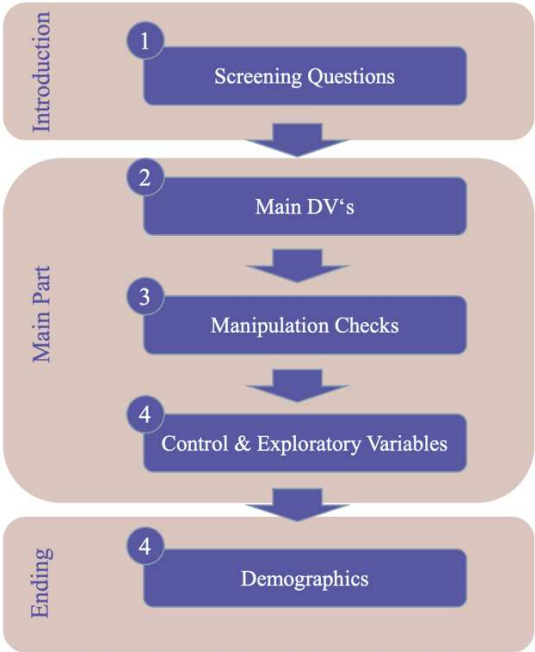


Figure 3: Structure Questionnaire

**3.4 Research Design**

The present study employed an experimental 2x2 between-subjects design. The two independent variables were Advertising Type (empowerment-oriented vs. neutral advertisement) and Social Context (public in-store vs. private online purchasing context). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions to ensure internal validity and reduce selection bias (Shadish et al., 2002). An experimental design was chosen because it allows for the systematic manipulation of stimuli and causal inference

regarding the effects of advertising and social context on emotional and behavioral responses (Field, 2018). This approach aligns with best practices in consumer behavior and advertising research, where controlled experiments are commonly used to isolate psychological mechanisms and test theoretically derived hypotheses (Morales et al., 2017; Geunens & De Pelsmacker, 2017).

## **4 Results and Analyses**

The following chapter presents the detailed results of the quantitative research, with the aim of answering the research question and providing the basis for the final managerial implications. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30). Assumptions underlying the applied inferential statistical procedures, including normality, homogeneity of variance, linearity and independence of observations, were examined and met (Field, 2018). No violations requiring corrective procedures were observed. All statistical tests were evaluated using a significance level of  $\alpha = .05$ . Effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ,  $\eta^2$ ) are reported alongside significance tests to facilitate interpretation of the practical relevance of the findings (Cohen, 1988).

### **4.1 Data Preparation and Scale Reliability**

Before conducting the analyses, the dataset was screened for data-quality issues. No extreme outliers using the  $\pm 3$  SD criterion were detected; one case exceeded the threshold on the "shame" measure but did not meaningfully affect the distribution and was therefore retained. No participants were identified as speeders and all remaining cases met the predefined quality criteria. Six respondents failed the attention check and were therefore excluded from all subsequent analyses. Most scales demonstrated good to excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .80 to .93, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2014). The Feminist Identity ( $\alpha = .38$ ) and Social Desirability ( $\alpha = .19$ ) scales showed insufficient internal consistency and were therefore excluded from all subsequent analyses. Detailed reliability statistics are reported in Appendix 4.

### **4.2 Descriptive Analysis**

The following subchapters aim to provide an overview of the survey results. First, the personal characteristics relating to sexual wellness products are described, followed by the emotions and behavior influenced by the advertisement. The analysis only considers responses from females,

as they represent the main target group of the study. Comparative analyses between women and men were conducted separately and are reported in Section 4.6.1.

#### **4.2.1 Personal and Experience-Related Characteristics**

A substantial proportion of women reported having previously purchased a vibrator (65.4%) and an even larger share indicated prior usage experience (77.8%). Participants reported a mean score of 4.20 (SD = 0.82) on the sexual openness scale. Regarding public self-consciousness, the mean score was 3.50 (SD = 0.88) (see Appendix 5).

#### **4.2.2 Emotional Responses and Behavioral Intentions**

The following section provides an overview of participants' emotional responses to the advertising stimuli, followed by their evaluations of the product and their behavioral intentions. To begin, negative emotional reactions associated with the product were assessed. Anticipated embarrassment showed a mean of 2.65 (SD = 1.15), anticipated shame averaged 1.49 (SD = 0.81) and stigma perceptions yielded a mean of 2.30 (SD = 1.07). Next, anticipated positive emotions were examined to provide an overview of affective responses. They displayed an overall mean of 3.71 (SD = 0.90). In addition to these emotional responses, product evaluations showed similarly positive tendencies. Perceived quality had a mean of 3.98 (SD = 0.71) and anticipated pleasure displayed a mean of 3.95 (SD = 0.97). Finally, behavioral intentions were considered. Purchase intention showed a mean of 3.40 (SD = 1.08). Willingness to pay, assessed as an open-ended monetary value, averaged €34.34 (SD = 18.28) (see Appendix 6).

#### **4.3 Manipulation Checks**

To ensure that the experimental manipulations operated as intended, manipulation and realism checks were conducted prior to testing the main hypotheses (see Appendix 7). Independent-samples t-tests were used to assess differences in perceived empowerment between the empowerment-oriented and neutral advertisement conditions and differences in perceived publicness between the online and in-store purchasing contexts (Pallant, 2020). In addition, one-sample t-tests were employed to evaluate stimulus validity and scenario realism by comparing perceived authenticity of the empowerment advertisement and ease of imagination of the purchasing scenario against the respective scale midpoints (Field, 2018).

### **Advertisement Empowerment**

Participants exposed to the empowerment-oriented advertisement reported feeling substantially more empowered ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) than those who viewed the neutral advertisement ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). An independent-samples t-test confirmed a highly significant difference between conditions,  $t(142.60) = -8.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.02$ . This demonstrates that the manipulation of advertisement type was successful.

### **Social Context**

The manipulation of purchasing context also functioned as intended. Participants in the store condition perceived the situation as substantially more public ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) compared to those in the online condition ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). This difference was statistically significant,  $t(144.20) = -11.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.00$ . Thus, participants clearly distinguished between the private and public purchasing contexts.

### **Advertisement Authenticity**

The perceived authenticity of the empowerment-oriented advertisement was examined as a stimulus validity check, given the importance of credibility for empowerment messaging. A one-sample t-test compared authenticity ratings to the midpoint of the 5-point scale (3). Participants judged the advertisement as highly authentic ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) and the mean was significantly above the midpoint,  $t(77) = 13.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.53$ . This confirms that the empowerment advertisement was perceived as sincere and credible, validating its intended positioning.

### **Scenario Realism (Ease of Imagination)**

To assess how well participants could imagine themselves in the described shopping situation, they rated the ease of imagination on a 0-100 scale. The average rating indicated that the scenario was easy to picture ( $M = 75.05$ ,  $SD = 23.50$ ). A one-sample t-test against the scale midpoint (50) showed that the situation was perceived as significantly easier to imagine than a neutral level,  $t(152) = 13.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.07$ . This suggests that the scenario was generally interpreted as clear and realistic.

Together, these results confirm that all experimental manipulations functioned as intended, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent hypothesis testing.

#### **4.4 Control Variables**

To rule out alternative explanations for the effects of the experimental manipulations, potential control variables were examined (see Appendix 8). Independent-samples t-tests, correlation analyses and hierarchical regression models were used to assess the influence on the key dependent variables (Cohen et al., 2003; Field, 2018). Social desirability was, due to insufficient internal consistency, not used as a covariate in the main analyses.

##### **Sexual Wellness Experience**

Independent-samples t-tests comparing women with and without prior purchase and usage experience revealed no significant differences across anticipated embarrassment, anticipated pleasure or purchase intention (all  $p > .20$ ,  $|d| \leq .25$ ). Sexual wellness experience therefore did not operate as a confounding variable and was not included as a covariate in the main analyses.

##### **Erotophilia**

Erotophilia showed systematic associations with all key outcome variables and was therefore treated as a central covariate. Hierarchical regression analyses including advertisement type and erotophilia revealed that erotophilia significantly increased purchase intention ( $\beta = .294$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and anticipated pleasure ( $\beta = .196$ ,  $p = .009$ ), while significantly reducing anticipated embarrassment ( $\beta = -.23$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Importantly, across all models, the effect of the empowerment-oriented advertisement remained statistically significant after controlling for erotophilia (purchase intention:  $\beta = .378$ ,  $p < .001$ ; anticipated pleasure:  $\beta = .381$ ,  $p < .001$ ; anticipated embarrassment:  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p = .024$ ). This indicates that the observed effects of empowerment advertising on emotional responses and purchase intention cannot be attributed to pre-existing individual differences in sexual openness. To verify that erotophilia was not affected by the experimental manipulations, a  $2 \times 2$  ANOVA with Advertising Type and Social Context as factors was conducted. The analysis revealed no significant main effects of Advertising Type or Social Context, nor a significant interaction effect (all  $ps > .78$ ), indicating that erotophilia did not differ systematically across experimental conditions.

##### **Ease of Imagination**

A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant main or interaction effects of Advertising Type or Social Context on ease of imagining (all  $p > .09$ ), indicating that the experimental manipulations did not affect participants' ability to imagine the shopping situation.

## **Authenticity**

A two-way ANOVA revealed a strong main effect of Advertising Type on perceived authenticity,  $F(1,149) = 86.01, p < .001, \eta^2p = .37$ . Empowerment-oriented advertisements were perceived as substantially more authentic than neutral advertisements. Neither the main effect of social context nor the interaction between Advertising Type and Social Context reached statistical significance (both  $ps > .57$ ), indicating that perceived authenticity was driven primarily by the advertising content rather than by situational factors.

Given these differences, perceived authenticity was included as a covariate in subsequent robustness analyses. The ANCOVA results showed that authenticity was positively associated with purchase intention,  $F(1,148) = 26.12, p < .001, \eta^2p = .15$ , and anticipated pleasure,  $F(1,148) = 47.93, p < .001, \eta^2p = .25$  and anticipated embarrassment,  $F(1,148) = 11.99, 0 < .001, \eta^2p = 0.08$ . After controlling for authenticity, the main effect of Advertising Type on these outcomes was no longer statistically significant, suggesting that perceived authenticity partially accounts for the effects of empowerment-oriented advertising. Importantly, the main effect of social context remained significant and the interaction between Advertising Type and Social Context on anticipated pleasure also remained robust. Overall, these findings indicate that while empowerment-oriented advertising influences key outcomes partly through increased perceptions of authenticity, contextual effects operate independently of this perceptual pathway.

## **Demographic Variables**

Several demographic variables were examined as potential controls, including age, political orientation, religious affiliation, education and relationship status. Age and relationship status were not significantly related to the key dependent variables (all  $p > .09$ ) and were therefore not retained as covariates. Political orientation and religious affiliation showed some associations with embarrassment- and shame-related measures. However, these effects were small, exploratory in nature and based on highly unbalanced subgroup sizes. As a result, demographic variables were not included as standard controls in the main analyses.

## **4.5 Hypothesis Testing**

After providing an overview of the descriptive results and examining both the manipulation checks and potential control variables, the formulated hypotheses are now tested for statistical

significance. In the following sections, each hypothesis is evaluated using the appropriate inferential statistical procedures and the corresponding results are reported in a structured manner.

#### 4.5.1 Effects on Purchase Intention (H1)

**H1** proposed that women exposed to empowerment-oriented advertising would report higher purchase intention than women exposed to a neutral advertisement. To test this hypothesis, a two-way ANOVA with Advertising Type (empowerment vs. neutral) and Social Context (online vs. in-store) as independent variables and purchase intention as the dependent variable was conducted (see Appendix 9). The analysis revealed a significant main effect of Advertising Type,  $F(1, 149) = 27.25, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .16$ , indicating that empowerment-oriented advertising led to higher purchase intention than neutral advertising ( $M = 3.80, SD = 0.98$  vs.  $M = 2.98, SD = 1.03$ ). In addition, a significant main effect of Social Context emerged,  $F(1, 149) = 6.47, p = .012, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$ , with higher purchase intention in the online condition ( $M = 3.59, SD = 1.00$ ) compared to the in-store condition ( $M = 3.20, SD = 1.14$ ). The interaction between Advertising Type and Social Context was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 149) = 1.73, p = .191$ . Descriptively, purchase intention was higher for empowerment-oriented advertising than for neutral advertising in both contexts (see Figure 4), consistent with a main effect rather than a context-dependent effect. **Based on these results, H1 is supported.**

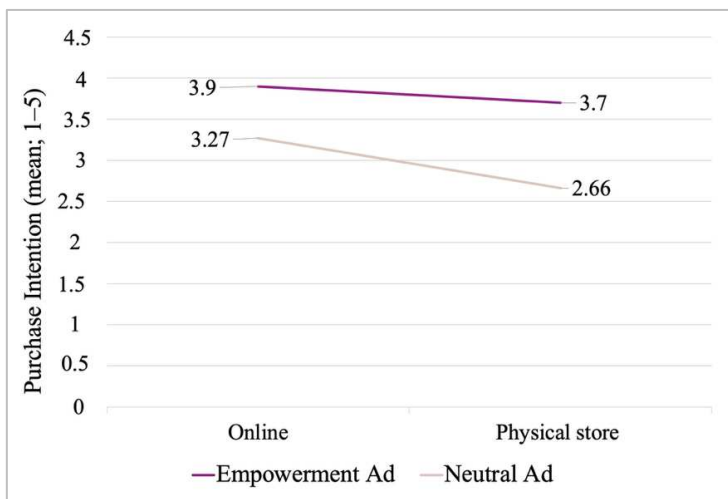


Figure 4: Purchase intention by advertising type and purchasing context

#### 4.5.2 Effects on Anticipated Embarrassment (H1a, H2, H3)

**H1a** proposed that women exposed to empowerment-oriented advertising would report lower anticipated embarrassment than women exposed to a neutral advertisement and **H2** proposed that anticipated embarrassment would be higher in public purchasing contexts than in private

purchasing contexts. A two-way ANOVA with Advertising Type and Social Context was conducted with anticipated embarrassment as the dependent variable (see Appendix 10). The analysis revealed a significant main effect of Advertising Type,  $F(1,149) = 6.19, p = .014, \eta^2 = .04$ . Women in the empowerment condition reported lower anticipated embarrassment ( $M = 2.45, SD = 1.12$ ) than women in the neutral condition ( $M = 2.86, SD = 1.12$ ), **supporting H1a**. The analysis further revealed a significant main effect of Social Context,  $F(1,149) = 23.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$ , with higher anticipated embarrassment reported in the in-store condition ( $M = 3.07, SD = 1.10$ ) compared to the online condition ( $M = 2.24, SD = 1.04$ ), **supporting H2**. The interaction between Advertising Type and Social Context was not statistically significant,  $F(1,149) = 0.004, p = .952, \eta^2 < .00$ . However, Figure 5 displays the corresponding cell means, illustrating higher embarrassment in the in-store condition and under neutral advertising.

**H3** proposed that the embarrassment-reducing effect of empowerment-oriented advertising would be stronger in public purchasing contexts than in private purchasing contexts. In line with the non-significant interaction, planned independent t-tests comparing empowerment versus neutral advertising within each context showed descriptively lower anticipated embarrassment under empowerment-oriented advertising in both the in-store and online conditions, but neither comparison reached statistical significance (all  $ps > .05$ ; see Appendix 10). Based on these results, **H3 is not supported**.

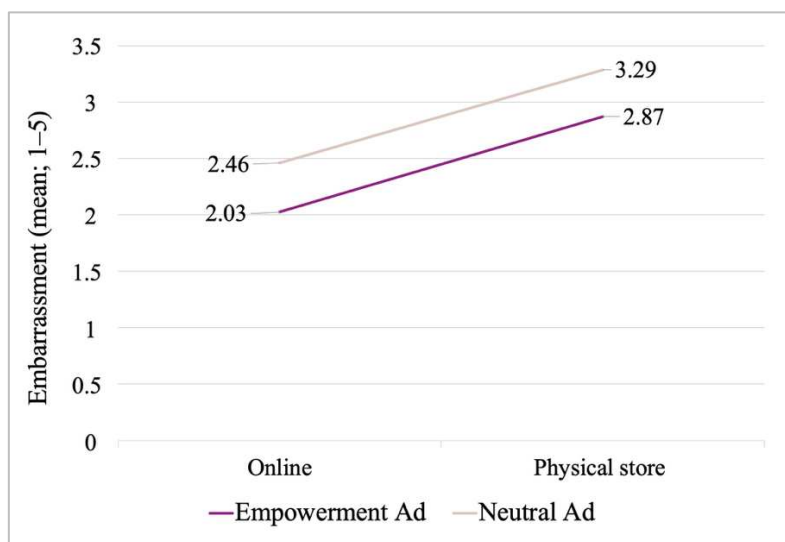


Figure 5: Embarrassment by advertising type and purchasing context

#### 4.5.3 Serial Mediation via Embarrassment and Pleasure (H1b-H1d)

**H1b** proposed that anticipated embarrassment would be negatively related to anticipated pleasure and **H1c** that anticipated pleasure would be positively related to purchase intention.

These component paths, as well as the proposed sequential mediation (**H1d**), were examined within a serial mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 6 with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2018) (see Appendix 11). Advertising type was entered as the independent variable, anticipated embarrassment as the first mediator, anticipated pleasure as the second mediator and purchase intention as the dependent variable. Within the model, anticipated embarrassment significantly predicted anticipated pleasure ( $b = -0.23, p < .001$ ). Based on these results, **H1b is supported**. Advertising type also significantly predicted anticipated pleasure directly ( $b = 0.65, p < .001$ ). Anticipated pleasure, in turn, significantly predicted purchase intention ( $b = 0.68, p < .001$ ). Based on these results, **H1c is supported**. In contrast, anticipated embarrassment did not significantly predict purchase intention when anticipated pleasure was included in the model ( $b = -0.09, p = .113$ ).

Regarding the indirect effects, the indirect effect through anticipated pleasure alone was significant,  $b = 0.441, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.231, 0.664]$ . In contrast, the indirect effect through anticipated embarrassment alone was not significant, as the bootstrap confidence interval included zero  $b = 0.038, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.008, 0.113]$ . The sequential indirect effect through both embarrassment and pleasure was small but statistically significant,  $b = 0.064, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.005, 0.151]$ . The direct effect of advertising type on purchase intention remained significant when both mediators were included ( $p < .041$ ), indicating partial mediation (see Figure 6). Based on these results, **H1d is supported**.

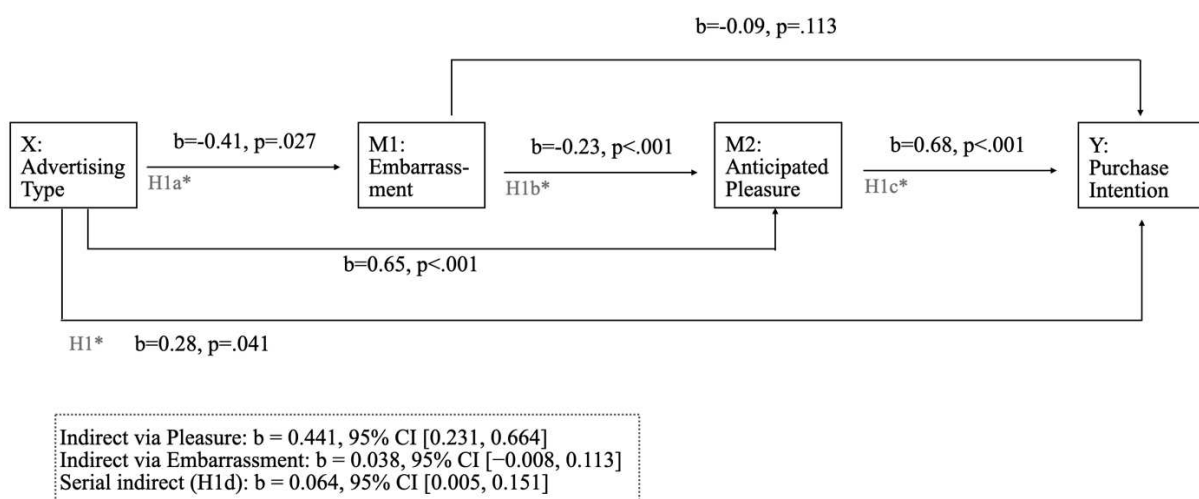


Figure 6: Serial mediation model via embarrassment and pleasure

As an exploratory robustness check, a moderated serial mediation model (PROCESS Model 83) was estimated to examine whether social context moderates the indirect effects via embarrassment and pleasure. The interaction between Advertising Type and Social Context did

not significantly predict anticipated embarrassment ( $p = .952$ ), and the indices of moderated mediation were not significant, indicating that the indirect effects across the two contexts did not differ reliably between the online and in-store contexts (see Appendix 11).

## **4.6 Additional Analyses**

In addition to the hypothesis-driven analyses, supplementary analyses were conducted to further contextualize the findings and explore patterns not directly addressed by the main hypotheses. These analyses examine gender differences, the role of anticipated shame as a complementary self-conscious emotion and additional contextual effects on anticipated pleasure. Exploratory results were interpreted cautiously and reported separately from the hypothesis-driven analyses (Field, 2018).

### **4.6.1 Gender Differences**

Exploratory analyses were conducted to examine potential gender differences between women ( $n = 153$ ) and men ( $n = 34$ ) across the key psychological and behavioral variables included in the study. Descriptive comparisons showed that prior experience with vibrators was more prevalent among women than among men, with 65.4% of women and 47.1% of men reporting having purchased a vibrator and 77.8% of women and 55.9% of men reporting prior usage. Across the main evaluative and emotional variables, women and men reported very similar levels of anticipated pleasure, perceived product quality, positive feelings, empowerment, public self-consciousness, embarrassment, shame, purchase intention and authenticity, with mean values generally ranging between 1.28 and 4.0. Independent-samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant gender differences across these variables (all two-tailed  $ps > .05$ ) and effect sizes were small, indicating negligible practical differences between women's and men's evaluations of the product and the advertising stimuli. Regarding erotophilia, men report descriptively higher levels ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) than women ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). However, this difference does not reach statistical significance ( $p = .087$ ) and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Similarly, men report a descriptively higher willingness to pay ( $M = €41.53$ ,  $SD = 27.66$ ) compared to women ( $M = €34.34$ ,  $SD = 18.28$ ), but this difference is not statistically significant ( $p = .156$ ).

A significant gender difference emerges for perceived stigma. Women report higher levels of stigma ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) than men ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ),  $t(77.41) = 4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Indicating that stigma related to sexual-wellness consumption is more salient among women than among men (see Appendix 12).

#### 4.6.2 Shame as a Complementary Emotional Mechanism

To further explore the role of moral self-conscious emotions beyond situational embarrassment, the analysis examined anticipated shame as a complementary emotional mechanism in the evaluation of sexual wellness products.

First, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the effects of Advertising Type (empowerment-oriented vs. neutral) and Purchasing Context (private online vs. public in-store) on anticipated shame (see Appendix 13). The analysis revealed a significant main effect of Advertising Type,  $F(1,149) = 8.31, p = .005, \eta^2 = .053$ , indicating that participants exposed to empowerment-oriented advertising reported lower anticipated shame ( $M = 1.31, SD = 0.65$ ) than those exposed to a neutral advertisement ( $M = 1.67, SD = 0.92$ ). In addition, a significant main effect of Purchasing Context emerged,  $F(1,149) = 7.18, p = .008, \eta^2 = .046$ , with higher anticipated shame reported in the public in-store context ( $M = 1.65, SD = 0.93$ ) compared to the private online context ( $M = 1.32, SD = 0.64$ ). Figure 7 displays the corresponding cell means, illustrating higher shame in the in-store condition and under neutral advertising. However, the interaction between advertising type and purchasing context was not statistically significant ( $p = .477$ ).

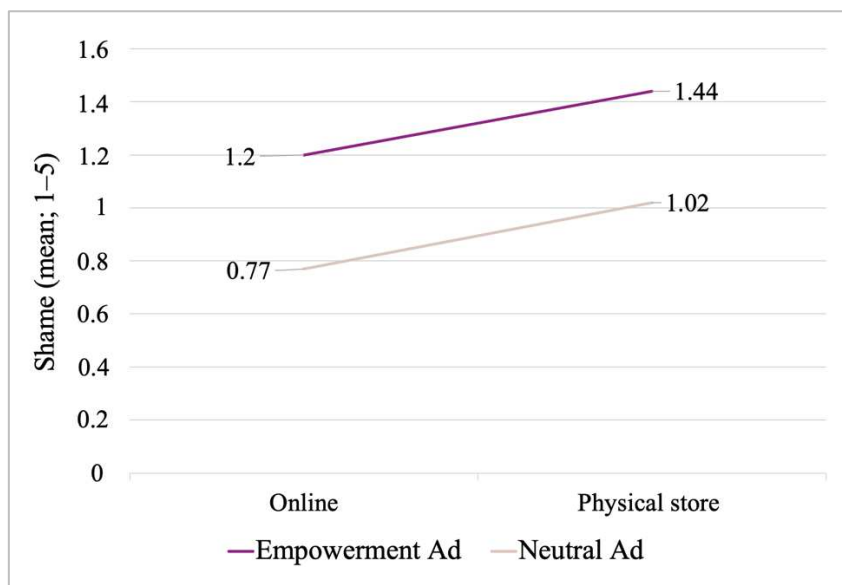


Figure 7: Shame by advertising type and purchasing context

To examine the relationship between shame and anticipated pleasure, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted. Anticipated shame was significantly and negatively associated with

anticipated pleasure,  $r = -.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that higher levels of shame were related to lower anticipated pleasure. This association was of moderate magnitude. To assess the degree of overlap between shame and embarrassment, a Pearson correlation was computed between anticipated shame and anticipated embarrassment. The variables were moderately positively correlated,  $r = .54$ , 95% BCa CI [.44, .64],  $p < .001$ , indicating that the constructs are related but not redundant (see Appendix 13).

Finally, to compare the relative roles of shame and embarrassment, both variables were entered simultaneously into a multiple regression model. When predicting anticipated pleasure, both shame and embarrassment emerged as significant negative predictors, with shame showing a stronger standardized effect. In contrast, when predicting purchase intention, only anticipated embarrassment remained a significant predictor ( $\beta = -.282$ ,  $p = .002$ ), whereas shame did not reach statistical significance ( $\beta = -.076$ ,  $p = .41$ ) (see Table 1). This pattern is consistent with the notion that embarrassment is more closely tied to socially exposed, action-related responses than shame.

Table 2: Distinct roles of shame vs. embarrassment

Outcome (DV)	Anticipated Shame	Anticipated Embarrassment	Key takeaway
Anticipated Pleasure	Negative, significant (stronger) ( $\beta = -0.262$ , $p = .004$ )	Negative, significant ( $\beta = -0.190$ , $p = .035$ )	Both reduce pleasure, but shame is the stronger predictor → deeper/identity-linked barrier
Purchase Intention	Non-significant ( $\beta = -0.076$ , $p = .410$ )	Negative, significant ( $\beta = -0.282$ , $p = .002$ )	Embarrassment is more closely tied to action-/purchase-related responses than shame

## 5 Discussion

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the research question and the literature.

### Empowerment Advertising, Purchase Intention and the Role of Purchasing Context

Consistent with femvertising research, the results show that empowerment-oriented messaging that highlights agency, autonomy and self-determination significantly increases women's purchase intention for sexual wellness products compared to neutral advertising (Åkestam et al., 2017; Champlin et al., 2019). At the same time, the purchasing context clearly plays a role

in situational discomfort: in public in-store situations, participants report a higher anticipated embarrassment than in private online contexts (see Section 4.5.2). However, the purchasing context does not reliably moderate the effectiveness of empowerment advertising. The non-significant interaction between advertising type and purchasing context shows that empowerment messages are similarly effective online and in stores. The results reinforce the view of femvertising as a meaning-shifting communication strategy that recontextualizes female desire as legitimate and self-determined, especially in stigmatized areas (Åkestam et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2021). While privacy can reduce situational discomfort, empowerment messaging appears to influence emotional evaluations and purchase intentions across contexts.

### **Anticipated Pleasure as the Central Psychological Mechanism**

Another key contribution of this study is the identification of anticipated pleasure as the dominant mechanism through which empowerment-oriented advertising influences purchase intention. The mediation analyses show that the indirect effect via “anticipated pleasure” is statistically significant, whereas the effect via “anticipated embarrassment” was not (see Section 4.5.3). When both mediators are considered simultaneously, “anticipated pleasure” remains a significant predictor of purchase intention, while “anticipated embarrassment” no longer provides an independent explanatory contribution. This suggests that empowerment advertising increases purchase intention primarily by reinforcing positive, approach-oriented expectations about the use of the product. Consistent with hedonic consumption research emphasizing anticipated affect as a key driver of approach motivation (Bagozzi et al., 2016). Sexual wellness consumption is thus framed as compatible with self-care, autonomy and personal enjoyment, rather than being seen primarily as a means of avoiding negative feelings. At the same time, the direct effect of empowerment-oriented advertising on purchase intention remains significant, suggesting that other pathways may play a role in addition to emotional processes. One possible factor is perceived authenticity. Empowerment advertisements were rated as more authentic and authenticity was positively associated with both anticipated pleasure and purchase intention (see Section 4.4). When authenticity is included as a covariate, the effect of the advertisement type on these variables was no longer significant. This suggests that authenticity could explain part of the effect. Although these findings are exploratory, they suggest that authenticity should be explicitly tested as a mediator in future research, alongside emotional processes (Alfaro-Ibáñez & Gallardo-Echenique, 2023).

### **Differentiating Embarrassment and Shame as Emotional Barriers**

The differentiation between “embarrassment” and “shame” as two functionally different, self-conscious emotions in the context of consuming sexual wellness products is another important factor (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Embarrassment proved to be highly dependent on visibility and was particularly pronounced in public in-store situations (Dahl et al., 2001). The combined regression analyses also showed that embarrassment is more closely linked to action-oriented reactions and more strongly associated with purchase intention (see Section 4.6.2). Shame, on the other hand, appears to be a deeper, identity-related barrier. Although shame was reported less frequently overall, it showed a significantly stronger negative relationship with anticipated pleasure. This suggests that shame primarily undermines the expected pleasure and perceived legitimacy of product use. Empowerment-oriented advertising reduced anticipated shame, and shame was negatively associated with anticipated pleasure, suggesting that shame may constrain more positive affective expectations. The findings thus suggest that empowerment messages are less effective in merely reducing situational embarrassment and more effective in mitigating negative self-evaluations and facilitating pleasure-based evaluations. Exploratory gender comparisons support this interpretation of a socially asymmetrical norm situation. While women and men reported comparable values for anticipated pleasure and purchase intention, women perceived greater stigmatization. This is consistent with the assumption that norms surrounding sexual autonomy have a stronger social impact on women and that internalized evaluations can therefore be particularly relevant (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Bojovic et al., 2025).

### **Theoretical Contributions**

Taken together, the findings extend femvertising research to a highly stigmatized hedonic category and show that empowerment messaging increases purchase intention across purchasing contexts (Åkestam et al., 2017; Champlin et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2021). They further support emotion-based accounts of hedonic consumption by highlighting anticipated pleasure as the primary proximal driver of purchase intention (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Bagozzi et al., 2016). Finally, the results underline the functional distinction between embarrassment and shame and point to perceived authenticity as a promising complementary mechanism for future research (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Dahl et al., 2001; Alfaro-Ibáñez & Gallardo-Echenique, 2023).

## **6 Managerial Implications**

Based on these findings, the study offers important guidance for managers and brand strategists in the sexual-wellness market. Rather than suggesting isolated tactical adjustments, the results point to a coherent hierarchy of strategic, psychological and executional implications. Together, they clarify what sexual-wellness brands should aim to achieve emotionally, which internal barrier must be addressed and how empowerment-oriented communication should be implemented across contexts.

### **1. Strategic Objective**

At a strategic level, this study indicates that sexual-wellness brands should prioritize pleasure legitimacy as a central consideration in brand positioning. While strategies that aim to minimize discomfort may contribute to situational ease, the findings show that such approaches are not sufficient to meaningfully increase purchase intention. Instead, anticipated pleasure emerges as the dominant psychological driver of behavioral motivation. From a branding perspective, this implies that effective sexual-wellness communication should frame product use as a source of positive, self-directed pleasure rather than merely positioning it as socially acceptable. Empowerment-oriented advertising influences behavior by legitimizing pleasure as a desirable, autonomous outcome. Brands are therefore encouraged to foreground pleasure, personal fulfilment and emotional reward in their messaging, positioning sexual-wellness products within a positive and aspirational meaning framework rather than a defensive one.

### **2. Psychological Level**

At the psychological level, the findings highlight shame as the most consequential emotional barrier to sexual-wellness consumption. Although embarrassment occurs more frequently, shame shows a substantially stronger negative effect on anticipated pleasure and therefore indirectly reduces purchase intention. Importantly, shame is not situational but internalized, reflecting broader moral evaluations of sexual autonomy. For managers, this distinction has significant implications. Interventions such as discreet packaging, self-checkout options or private online purchasing may reduce situational embarrassment, but they are unlikely to substantially influence shame. Addressing shame therefore requires upstream intervention. Empowerment-oriented communication must function as a sustained meaning-building effort rather than a short-term tactical campaign. This includes consistently framing sexual-wellness consumption as morally legitimate, self-affirming and aligned with wellbeing over time. From

a managerial standpoint, this implies embedding empowerment messaging in the brand's identity, tone of voice and long-term narrative architecture rather than deploying it episodically. Shame cannot be resolved at the point of sale. It must be addressed before the purchase situation is even reached.

### **3. Execution Principle**

At the executional level, the findings clarify how empowerment-oriented communication should be implemented across purchasing contexts. While public in-store environments increase anticipated embarrassment, the effectiveness of empowerment advertising does not depend on whether the product is encountered in a public or private setting. This indicates that purchasing context influences the intensity of emotional reactions but not the underlying mechanism through which empowerment messaging operates. For managers, this insight cautions against treating channel choice or situational visibility as the primary strategic lever. The absence of context moderation does not imply that empowerment messaging is only required in visible environments. Rather, it suggests that empowerment advertising reshapes internal evaluations in a way that transcends situational exposure. Consequently, purchasing context should be treated as a tactical consideration for adjusting tone or activation level, not as a determinant of message strategy. This perspective also has implications for resource allocation. Investments aimed solely at reducing public exposure may yield diminishing returns if they fail to address internalized evaluations. Instead, brands should prioritize consistency of empowerment meaning across touchpoints, ensuring that the same legitimizing narratives are reinforced regardless of where the consumer encounters the brand. Context alters how strongly emotions are felt, but not how meaning is constructed.

## **7 Conclusion and Outlook**

The following chapter concludes the thesis by outlines the main limitations of the study and identifies avenues for future research. It further summarizes the key findings and reflecting on their theoretical and practical implications.

### **7.1 Limitations**

The present study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the study relied on a convenience sample, predominantly from Germany and Portugal,

which had relatively limited demographic diversity. This restricts representativeness and may have reduced variance in norms and attitudes relevant to sexual wellness consumption. In addition, the partly active recruitment method may have introduced self-selection bias, as reflected in the high proportion of participants who reported prior experience with sexual wellness products. This could have reduced the impact of self-conscious emotions compared to first-time buyers or more conservative segments. Additionally, the constructs of social desirability and feminist identity exhibited insufficient internal consistency. As a result, these theoretically relevant variables could not be included in the inferential analyses, limiting the explanatory scope of the study. Second, the experimental design did not include alternative control conditions besides a neutral advertisement. Without additional comparison advertisements (for example, a pleasure-focused but non-empowerment message), it is difficult to determine whether the effects are specific to empowerment cues or whether they are due to broader differences in message positivity or persuasion strength. Authenticity also emerged as a highly relevant factor: empowerment advertisements were perceived as more authentic and this perception was strongly associated with purchase intention and anticipated pleasure. As authenticity was not manipulated in the experiment, it is not possible to determine whether empowerment increases purchase intention independently or primarily through authenticity-related perceptions. Third, the manipulations were implemented via vignette-based imagination tasks and outcomes were assessed via self-report. Consequently, the study captures anticipated emotions and intentions rather than emotions and behaviors experienced in real purchasing situations, which limits its ecological validity, especially in the in-store context where actual public exposure is absent. Finally, the theoretical patterns were tested within a single product category, vibrators, which represents a specific form and intensity of stigma. The extent to which the same psychological mechanisms apply to other sexual wellness products or adjacent intimate categories cannot be determined by this design.

## **7.2 Future Research**

Future research could expand upon the present findings by broadening the methodological and conceptual scope of the study. For instance, moving beyond scenario-based designs toward more behaviorally grounded approaches would strengthen ecological validity by capturing choice behavior or purchasing outcomes in realistic online and retail environments. From a conceptual standpoint, future studies could examine additional boundary conditions that may influence emotional responses, anticipated pleasure and purchase intent. Psychological distance

dimensions may function similarly to the online versus in-store manipulation in the present study. Social distance (e.g., purchasing alone versus with others, with familiar versus unfamiliar people), temporal distance (purchasing now versus later) and hypotheticality (definite versus tentative purchase) may systematically influence self-conscious emotions and the extent to which empowerment-oriented messages generate positive anticipation. In addition, future research should directly examine perceived authenticity as a causal mechanism. Since empowerment ads were rated as more authentic and authenticity predicted anticipated pleasure and purchase intention, future research could manipulate authenticity cues (high vs. low). This would clarify whether empowerment works directly or mainly via authenticity perceptions. Finally, future studies could more explicitly examine the role of men as agents of normalization and validation within women's immediate social environment. The present findings suggest that men may experience substantially lower levels of stigma in relation to sexual-wellness products, positioning them as potential facilitators rather than sources of social sanction. Experimental research could therefore investigate whether male-initiated support, such as purchasing sexual-wellness products for partners or explicitly endorsing female sexual pleasure, contributes to reduced anticipated shame and increased perceived legitimacy of consumption.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

The objective of this thesis was to examine how empowerment-oriented advertising influences women's anticipated embarrassment, anticipated pleasure and intention to purchase a vibrator and whether these effects differ between private online and public in-store purchasing contexts. Based on the empirical findings, this objective can be considered achieved. The results indicate that empowerment-oriented advertising positively affects emotional and behavioral responses in the context of female sexual wellness products. Exposure to empowerment-oriented communication was associated with lower anticipated embarrassment, accompanied by higher anticipated pleasure and increased purchase intention. These findings underscore the importance of emotional mechanisms in stigmatized consumption contexts and suggest that empowerment-oriented advertising can shape consumer decision-making by addressing both inhibiting and motivating emotions. Regarding purchasing context, private online environments were associated with more favorable emotional responses than public in-store settings. Anticipated embarrassment was lower and anticipated pleasure higher in private contexts, highlighting the continued role of social visibility and perceived judgment in public purchasing

situations. While empowerment-oriented advertising reduced emotional barriers across contexts, public in-store environments remained more strongly shaped by social norms and stigma, indicating that contextual factors moderate emotional responses.

From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest that brands operating in the female sexual wellness market can benefit from adopting empowerment-oriented communication strategies to reduce emotional barriers and enhance purchase intention. Beyond its instrumental value, such communication may contribute to challenging stigmatizing narratives surrounding female pleasure. However, the results also caution against viewing femvertising as a universal solution. Emotional barriers such as shame and embarrassment are deeply embedded in societal norms and gendered expectations, particularly in socially visible purchasing contexts. Returning to the opening statement that women are often treated as objects of sexual desire rather than subjects of sexual pleasure, this thesis suggests that marketing communication can play a role in shifting this narrative. Ultimately, the broader goal extends beyond increased purchase intention toward fostering a societal mindset in which female pleasure is no longer perceived as taboo but accepted as a legitimate and normalized aspect of human experience. Creating such a culture remains a collective responsibility that extends beyond brands and markets alone.

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**Use of AI in this work:**

Individual prompts were entered into the AI application ChatGPT to check the entire text for spelling and grammar. The following prompt was applied to this thesis. The corrected version from the AI was reviewed and largely adopted.

Prompt: "I am writing a thesis on the following topic: "Reframing Female Pleasure: The Impact of Empowerment-Oriented Advertising on Purchase Intention for Sexual-Wellness Products". I would like you to act as a proofreader and edit my text for better readability, focusing on grammar, spelling, and phrasing. I will provide you with my text below. Use only the information from my text, without adding information from other sources. Write in a neutral and unbiased tone, so that it is suitable for an academic paper. Make sure that all citations remain in their proper places, and do not alter quotes within quotation marks. Focus on spelling and grammar, but if the sentence structure or phrasing is very awkward, you may also rewrite that."

## **Appendix**

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## Appendix 1: Participant Characteristics

Variable	Value	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	153	82%
	Male	33	17.6%
	Non binary / third gender	0	
	Prefer not to say	1	0.5%
	Other	0	
Age	18-24	76	40.6%
	25-34	103	55%
	35-44	4	2.1%
	45-54	2	1.1%
	55+	2	1.1%
Country	Australia	1	0.5%
	Austria	7	3.7%
	Canada	1	0.5%
	France	1	0.5%
	Germany	135	72.2%
	Italy	2	1.1%
	Netherlands	2	1.1%
	North Korea	1	0.5%
	Norway	1	0.5%
	Portugal	35	18.7%
	Switzerland	1	0.5%
Education	Less than highschool	1	0.5%
	High school diploma / secondary education	12	6.4%
	Currently enrolled in university / higher education (no degree yet)	14	7.5%
	Bachelor's degree	100	53.5%
	Master's degree	56	29.9%
	Doctorate / PhD	1	0.5%
	Other	3	1.6%
Relationship	Single	83	44.4%
	In a relationship	88	47.1%
	Married	10	5.3%
	Prefer not to answer	4	2.1%
	Other	2	1.1%

Religion			
	Christianity	88	47.1%
	Islam	2	1.1%
	Judaism	1	0.5%
	Hinduism	0	0
	Buddhism	1	0.5%
	No religion / Atheist / Agnostic	87	46.5%
	Prefer not to say	7	3.7%
Other	2	1.1%	
Political Views	Far left / Very liberal	33	17.6%
	Liberal	73	39%
	Moderate / Center	51	27.3%
	Conservative	13	7%
	Far right / Very conservative	1	0.5%
	Prefer not to say	16	8.6%

Other Religion	Believe in God, but not sure if I can consider myself Christian Spiritual / Working it out
----------------	---

Other Education	Diplom Graduated from university First state exam (law)
-----------------	---

Other Relationship	Friends With Benefits It's complicated, Situationships
--------------------	---

## Appendix 2: Measurement Overview of Constructs

Construct	Items	Scale Format
Screening Question	Are you 18 years old or older?	Binary (Yes / No)
	Do you currently identify as a women?	
Purchase Intention (DV)	How likely would you be to consider buying this vibrator?	5-point Likert (1–5)
	How likely is it that you would be willing to buy this vibrator?	
	How likely would you be to actually purchase this vibrator?	
	What is the maximum amount (in €) you would be willing to pay for this vibrator?	Open-ended numeric input (€)
Anticipated Pleasure (Mediator)	How pleasurable do you expect using this vibrator to be?	5-point Likert (1–5)
	How enjoyable do you expect using this vibrator to be?	
Anticipated Embarrassment (Mediator)	How embarrassed would you feel buying this vibrator?	5-point Likert (1–5)
	How uncomfortable would you feel buying this vibrator?	
	How self-conscious would you feel buying this vibrator?	
Context (Manipulation Check)	Where were you imagining this product taking place?	Slider scale (0–100)
Empowerment (Manipulation Check)	This advertisement made me feel empowered as a woman.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	This advertisement made me feel confident about my own sexuality.	
	This advertisement made me want to make my own choices regarding my sexuality.	
	This advertisement made me feel comfortable expressing my sexual desires.	
Authenticity (Manipulation Check)	The female empowerment message in this advertisement felt authentic.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	This advertisement felt overall authentic.	
	I believe this advertisement portrayed female sexuality in a respectful way.	
	This advertisement challenges traditional stereotypes about women’s sexuality.	
Ease of imagination (Control)	How difficult or easy was it for you to imagine being in this shopping situation?	Slider scale (0–100)
Sexual Wellness Experience (Control)	Have you ever purchased a vibrator?	Yes / No
	Have you ever used a vibrator?	
Erotophilia (Control)	I feel comfortable with sexual topics.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	I am open to information about sexual wellness (e.g., products, education).	
	I think masturbation is a normal part of life.	
Feminist identity (Control)	Women have just about the right amount of power and influence in our society as they deserve.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	I feel that I have a lot in common with most feminists.	
	I am a feminist.	

Construct	Items	Scale Format
Social Desirability (Control)	I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.	
	I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.	
Demographics (Control)	What is your age?	Open-ended numeric response (years)
	What is your gender?	Categorical (single choice)
	In which country do you currently reside?	
	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	
	What is your current relationship status?	
	What is your religion?	
	Which of the following best describes your political view?	
Public Self Consciousness (Exploratory)	I am concerned about what others think of me.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	I care a lot about how I present myself to others.	
	I usually worry about making a good impression.	
Positive Feelings (Exploratory)	To what extent do you expect that using this vibrator would make you feel: (1) Joyful, (2) Relaxed, (3) Confident, (4) Happy	5-point Likert (1–5)
Quality (Exploratory)	How would you describe this product? (1) Reliable, (2) High-Quality, (3) Hygienic, (4) Safe to use	5-point Likert (1–5)
Stigma (Exploratory)	Most people think less of a woman who uses a vibrator.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	Most people believe using a vibrator as a women is inappropriate.	
	If I were to use a vibrator, I would worry about being judged by others.	
Anticipated Shame (Exploratory)	Buying this vibrator would make me feel like I am a bad person.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	Buying this vibrator would make me feel humiliated and disgraced.	
	Buying this vibrator would make me feel small, like I am worth nothing.	
Purchase Anonymity (Exploratory)	I felt that others could see my vibrator purchase.	5-point Likert (1–5)
	I felt that others were judging me when making the vibrator purchase.	
	I felt that my purchase was anonymous.	

## Appendix 3: Survey

### *Block 1: Introduction*



Dear participant,

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.

My name is Anna-Chiara Winning and I am currently conducting this study as part of my Master's thesis at Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics, where I am majoring in Strategic Marketing.

This research aims to better understand how different types of advertising influence people's attitudes, feelings and decisions about products for female pleasure.

All answers will be treated with strict confidentiality and will remain completely anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers, your personal and honest opinions are wanted. Participation is entirely voluntary and will take approximately **5 minutes**.

By proceeding, you confirm that you:

- agree to participate voluntarily
- understand that your responses will remain anonymous

Click "**Next**" to begin the survey.

### *Block 2: Screening Age*

Before we begin, please answer a few short questions to ensure that you are eligible to participate. This study is intended for people aged 18 years or older.

Are you 18 years old or older?

Yes

No

### *Block 2: Screening Gender*

Do you currently identify as a women?

Yes

No

### *Block 2: Info Male*

This study focuses on a product **designed for women** and includes some questions that refer specifically to how a woman might feel in certain situations.

If you identify as male, please imagine that you are purchasing or viewing the product on behalf of a woman. For example, your partner or a close friend. When you encounter questions that ask how you would feel as a woman, **please try to put yourself in her position and respond accordingly.**

Thank you for your participation and for taking the time to engage thoughtfully with this scenario.

### *Block 3: Manipulation*

You will now see an advertisement for a product from a fictitious brand. Please look at it carefully, as you will be asked a few short questions about the ad and the product afterwards.

#### **Before you continue, please imagine the following situation:**

You are shopping for a **sexual-wellness product**: You might be doing this out of curiosity, self-care or simply to explore new ways of experiencing intimacy. After taking some time to look through different options, you decide to focus on a **vibrator** that seems to fit your preferences.

Try to picture this situation as vividly and realistically as possible: what the environment feels like, what you notice, and how you imagine yourself in this moment.

When ready, click "Next."

### *Block 3: Manipulation Context (Store vs Online)*

#### *Online:*



Imagine you are shopping **online at home**, using your personal device. While browsing a popular drugstore website that offers a wide range of everyday products, you come across a section featuring **sexual wellness products**, discreetly packaged products designed to support intimacy and well-being.

The page looks familiar, with product images, short descriptions and customer ratings appearing as you scroll. As you continue scrolling, one particular product catches your attention, a **vibrator** displayed with an advertisement beside it, just as it would appear on a real shopping page.

Please take a moment to imagine that you are really in this situation, focusing on what you would see and feel in that moment.

When ready, click "Next" to view the advertisement.

*Store:*



Imagine you decided to stop by a **drugstore** after work to browse some personal care products. As you walk through the aisles, you reach the **sexual wellness section**: a well-organized area of the store known for its reliable selection of high-quality products. You like being able to see and compare different items in person, taking a moment to read the short descriptions on the packaging and get a sense of their design and features.

You pick up a **vibrator** that catches your attention. While holding the product, you notice an advertisement for it displayed on a nearby shelf, just as it would appear in this environment.

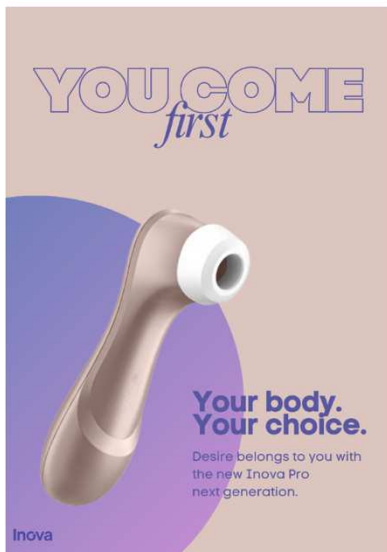
Please take a moment to imagine that you are really in this situation, focusing on what you would see and feel in that moment.

When ready, click "Next" to view the advertisement.

*Block 3: Manipulation Advertisement (Neutral vs Empowerment)*

*Empowerment:*

Now, please look at the following advertisement as part of this situation:



Click "Next" to continue once you have finished looking at it.

*Neutral:*



Click "Next" to continue once you have finished watching it.

*Block 4: Main DV's*

The next questions focus on how you would feel and react in the situation you just imagined: seeing this advertisement and considering buying the vibrator in the described shopping situation.

Please answer the questions as if you were actually in that situation.

	Extremely unlikely 1	2	3	4	Extremely likely 5
How likely would you be to consider buying this vibrator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely is it that you would be willing to buy this vibrator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely would you be to actually purchase this vibrator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is the maximum amount (in €) you would be willing to pay for this vibrator?

Please enter a whole number. If you would not be willing to pay anything, enter 0.

Please answer the questions as if you were actually in that situation. Think about the vibrator you were considering to purchase and how it would make you feel.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	Extremely 5
How pleasurable do you expect using this vibrator to be?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How enjoyable do you expect using this vibrator to be?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent do you expect that using this vibrator would make you feel:

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	Extremely 5
Joyful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relaxed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Happy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you describe this product?

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	Extremely 5
Reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High-Quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hygienic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safe to use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please answer the questions as if you were actually in that situation. Think about the vibrator you were considering to purchase and how much you would feel each of the following emotions.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	Extremely 5
How embarrassed would you feel buying this vibrator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How uncomfortable would you feel buying this vibrator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How self-conscious would you feel buying this vibrator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how much you would feel each of the following emotions. Think about the vibrator you were considering to purchase and how it would make you feel.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	Extremely 5
Buying this vibrator would make me feel like I am a bad person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying this vibrator would make me feel humiliated and disgraced.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buying this vibrator would make me feel small, like I am worth nothing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements. Think about the vibrator you were considering to purchase and how it would make you feel.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5 Extremely
Most people think less of a woman who uses a vibrator.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people believe using a vibrator as a women is inappropriate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were to use a vibrator, I would worry about being judged by others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Block 5: Manipulation Checks & Perceptions:*

The following questions refer to the advertisement you just saw and how it made you feel in the imagined shopping situation.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the advertisement you just saw.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
This advertisement made me feel empowered as a woman.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This advertisement made me feel confident about my own sexuality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This advertisement made me want to make my own choices regarding my sexuality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This advertisement made me feel comfortable expressing my sexual desires.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about the advertisement you just saw.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
The female empowerment message in this advertisement felt authentic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This advertisement felt overall authentic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe this advertisement portrayed female sexuality in a respectful way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This advertisement challenges traditional stereotypes about women's sexuality.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



To ensure data quality please select "Somewhat agree"

Strongly disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Strongly agree

Have you ever purchased a vibrator?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Have you ever used a vibrator?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
I feel comfortable with sexual topics.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am open to information about sexual wellness (e.g., products, education).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think masturbation is a normal part of life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
Women have just about the right amount of power and influence in our society as they deserve.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a lot in common with most feminists.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am a feminist.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5
I am concerned about what others think of me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I care a lot about how I present myself to others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I usually worry about making a good impression.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## *Block 7: Demographics*

The final section contains a few general questions for descriptive purposes. The information provided will be analyzed only in aggregated and anonymous form.

What is your age?

What is your gender?

Female

Male

Non binary / third gender

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

In which country do you currently reside?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school

High school diploma / secondary education

Currently enrolled in university / higher education (no degree yet)

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate / PhD

Other (please specify)

What is your current relationship status?

Single

In a relationship

Married

Prefer not to answer

Other (please specify)

What is your religion?

Christianity

Islam

Judaism

Hinduism

Buddhism

No religion / Atheist / Agnostic

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

Which of the following best describes your political views?

Far left / Very liberal

Liberal

Moderate / Center

Conservative

Far right / Very conservative

Prefer not to say

## Block 8: Ending

Thank you very much for participating!

This research investigates how advertising with feminist empowerment messages can influence women's reactions toward products for female well-being. The aim is to better understand the effects of femvertising (advertising that incorporates feminist themes) on attitudes, feelings, and choices related to such products.

If you have any questions about the study or would like to receive a short summary of the results once it is completed, please contact: [s-anwinning@ucp.pt](mailto:s-anwinning@ucp.pt)

Thank you again for your valuable time and contribution!

## Appendix 4: Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient			
Variable	Q	Cronbach's a	Cronbach's a if deleted
Purchase Intention	Q3_1	0.929	0.908
	Q3_2		0.862
	Q3_3		0.92
Anticipated Pleasure	Q5_1	0.930	-
	Q5_2		-
Anticipated Feelings	Q6_1	0.854	0.799
	Q6_2		0.832
	Q6_3		0.819
	Q6_4		0.809
Quality	Q7_1	0.803	0.755
	Q7_2		0.723
	Q7_3		0.757
	Q7_4		0.775
Anticipated Embarrassment	Q8_1	0.838	0.723
	Q8_2		0.704
	Q8_3		0.882
Anticipated Shame	Q9_1	0.907	0.849
	Q9_2		0.869
	Q9_3		0.882
Stigma	Q10_1	0.876	0.794
	Q10_2		0.788
	Q10_3		0.896
Empowerment	Q11_1	0.936	0.933
	Q11_2		0.897
	Q11_3		0.913
	Q11_4		0.919
Authenticity	Q12_1	0.881	0.803
	Q12_2		0.854
	Q12_3		0.862
	Q12_4		0.861
Visibility	Q14_1	0.855	0.711
	Q14_2		0.782
	Q14_3 (R)		0.886
Erotophilia / Erotophobia	Q19_1	0.797	0.731
	Q19_2		0.711
	Q19_3		0.73
Feminist Identity	Q20_1 (R)	0.383	0.366
	Q20_2		0.27
	Q20_3		0.259
Social Desirability	Q21_1	0.189	0.313
	Q21_2 (R)		0.07
	Q21_3 (R)		-0.16
Public Self Consciousness	Q22_1	0.841	0.777
	Q22_2		0.763
	Q22_3		0.799

## Appendix 5: Personal and Experience-Related Characteristics

Have you ever purchased a vibrator

Response	Female		Male	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	100	65.4%	16	47.1
No	53	34.6%	16	47.1
Prefer not to say	-	-	2	5.9

Have you ever used a vibrator

Response	Female		Male	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	119	77.8%	19	55.9
No	33	21.6%	13	38.2
Prefer not to say	1	0.7%	2	5.9

## Appendix 6: Emotional Responses and Behavioral Intentions

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Mean Embarrassment	153	2.65	1.15
Mean Shame	153	1.5	0.81
Mean Stigma	153	2.3	1.07
Mean Pleasure	153	4	0.97
Mean Quality	153	4	0.71
Mean Feelings	153	3.7	0.9
Mean Purchase Intention	153	3.4	1.01
Mean Willingness to Pay	153	34.34	18.28

## Appendix 7: Manipulation Checks

### *Advertisement Empowerment & Social Context*

Independent-sample t-test

Measure	Group 1 (M, SD)	Group 2 (M, SD)	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Mean Empowerment	2.61 (1.12)	4.08 (0.91)	-8.85 (142.60)	<.001	1.02
Mean Social Context	2.10 (1.12)	4.01 (0.86)	-11.84 (144.20)	<.001	1

*Note: Group 1 represents the neutral advertisement / online condition and Group 2 represents the empowerment advertisement / in-store condition. Welch's independent-samples t-tests are reported due to unequal variances. Cohen's d values are reported as absolute values.*

### *Authenticity & Ease of Imagination*

One-sample t-test

Measure	Scale	Test value	M (SD)	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Authenticity	1-5	3	4.21 (0.80)	13.49 (77)	<.001	1.53
Ease of imagination	0-100	50	75.50 (23.50)	13.19 (152)	<.001	1.07

*Note: One-sample t-tests compare mean ratings against the scale midpoints. Higher values indicate greater perceived authenticity and ease of imagination. Cohen's d values are reported as absolute values.*

## Appendix 8: Control Variables

### *Sexual Wellness Experience*

Sexual Wellness Experience

Outcome variable	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Anticipated embarrassment	-1.16 (48.92)	0.252	0.23
Anticipated pleasure	1.12 (49.17)	0.27	0.23
Purchase intention	1.20 (47.26)	0.24	0.25

*Note: Independent-samples Welch t-tests comparing participants with versus without prior sexual wellness experience. Cohen's d values are reported as absolute values.*

### *Erotophilia & Ease of Imagination*

Erotophilia as Covariate

Dependent variable	$\beta$ (Erotophilia)	p	$\beta$ (Ad Type, controlled)	p
Anticipated embarrassment	-0.23	0.004	-0.18	0.024
Anticipated pleasure	0.196	0.009	0.381	<.001
Purchase intention	0.294	<.001	0.378	<.001

*Note: Values represent standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) from hierarchical regression models including advertisement type and erotophilia as predictors.*

Manipulation Independence & Robustness Checks

Dependent variable	Effect	F(df)	p
Erotophilia	Ad Type	0.01 (1,149)	0.94
	Social Context	0.02 (1,149)	0.89
	Interaction	0.07 (1,149)	0.79
Ease of imagination	Ad Type	0.01 (1,149)	0.91
	Social Context	0.01 (1,149)	0.92
	Interaction	2.84 (1,149)	0.09

*Note: Two-way ANOVAs were conducted with advertisement type and social context as between-subjects factors.*

### *Authenticity*

Perceived Authenticity

Dependent variable	Effect	F(df)	p	$\eta^2p$
Authenticity	Ad Type	86.01 (1,149)	<.001	0.37
	Social Context	0.12 (1,149)	0.74	0.001
	Interaction	0.31 (1,149)	0.58	0.002

*Note: Two-way ANOVAs were conducted with advertisement type and social context as between-subjects factors.*

Robustness Checks: ANCOVAs Controlling for Perceived Authenticity

Dependent variable	Effect	F(df)	p	$\eta^2p$
Purchase intention	Authenticity (covariate)	26.12 (1,148)	<.001	0.15
	Ad Type (adjusted)	1.97 (1,148)	0.16	0.01
	Social Context	6.8 (1,148)	0.01	0.04
	Interaction	1.4 (1,148)	0.24	0.01
Anticipated pleasure	Authenticity (covariate)	47.93 (1,148)	<.001	0.25
	Ad Type (adjusted)	0.41 (1,148)	0.53	0.003
	Social Context	5.09 (1,148)	0.03	0.03
	Interaction	4.98 (1,148)	0.03	0.03
Anticipated embarrassment	Authenticity (covariate)	11.99 (1,148)	<.001	0.08
	Ad Type (adjusted)	0.002 (1,148)	0.97	0
	Social Context	24.6 (1,148)	<.001	0.14
	Interaction	0.05 (1,148)	0.83	0

Note. ANCOVAs were conducted with advertisement type and social context as between-subjects factors and perceived authenticity included as a covariate. "Adjusted" indicates effects estimated after controlling for authenticity.

### Appendix 9: Effects on Purchase Intention (H1)

Two-Way ANOVA on Purchase Intention (H1)

Dependent variable	Effect	F(df)	p	$\eta^2p$
Purchase intention	Ad Type	27.25 (1,149)	<.001	0.16
	Social Context	6.47 (1,149)	0.01	0.04
	Interaction	1.73 (1,149)	0.19	0.01

Note. Two-way ANOVA with Advertising Type (empowerment vs. neutral) and Social Context (online vs. in-store) as between-subjects factors.  $\eta^2p$  = partial eta squared.

Descriptive Statistics for Purchase Intention (H1)

Social Context	Empowerment Ad (M,SD)	Neutral Ad (M,SD)	Total
Online	3.9 (0.92)	3.27 (0.99)	3.59 (1.0)
Physical Store	3.7 (1.05)	2.66 (0.98)	3.2 (1.14)
Total	3.8 (0.98)	2.98 (1.03)	3.4 (1.08)

Note. Purchase intention was measured on a 1–5 scale.

"Total" values reflect overall means and standard deviations by advertising type.

### Appendix 10: Effects on Anticipated Embarrassment (H1a, H2, H3)

Two-Way ANOVA on Anticipated Embarrassment (H1a)

Dependent variable	Effect	F(df)	p	$\eta^2p$
Anticipated Embarrassment	Ad Type	6.19 (1,149)	0.014	0.04
	Social Context	23.87 (1,149)	<.001	0.14
	Interaction	0.004 (1,149)	0.952	<.001

Note. Two-way ANOVA with Advertising Type (empowerment vs. neutral) and Social Context (online vs. in-store) as between-subjects factors.  $\eta^2p$  = partial eta squared.

### Descriptive Statistics for Anticipated Embarrassment (H1a)

Social Context	Empowerment Ad (M,SD)	Neutral Ad (M,SD)	Total
Online	2.03 (1.09)	2.46 (0.96)	2.24 (1.04)
Physical Store	2.87 (1.07)	3.29 (1.11)	3.07 (1.1)
Total	2.45 (1.15)	2.86 (1.11)	2.65 (1.15)

Note. Anticipated Embarrassment was measured on a 1–5 scale.

“Total” values reflect overall means and standard deviations by advertising type.

### Planned Comparisons Testing the Simple Effect of Advertising Type Within Each Social Context (H3)

Social Context	Comparison	t (df)	p	Cohen's d
Online	Anticipated embarrassment	-1.88 (76)	0.06	0.43
Physical Store	Anticipated embarrassment	-1.65 (73)	0.1	0.38

Note. Independent-samples t-tests comparing empowerment versus neutral advertising separately within each social context. Cohen's d values should be reported as absolute values.

## Appendix 11: Serial Mediation (H1b-H1d)

### Serial Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Model 6): Path Coefficients (H1b-H1d)

Outcome	Predictor	b	SE	t	p
M1: Anticipated embarrassment	Advertising type (X)	-0.41	0.18	-2.24	0.03
M2: Anticipated pleasure	Anticipated embarrassment (M1)	-0.23	0.06	-3.7	<.001
	Advertising type (X)	0.65	0.14	4.54	<.001
Y: Purchase intention	Anticipated pleasure (M2)	0.68	0.07	9.38	<.001
	Anticipated embarrassment (M1)	-0.09	0.06	-1.6	0.113
	Advertising type (X)	0.28	0.14	2.06	0.041

Note. Unstandardized coefficients (b) from PROCESS Model 6 with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Advertising type was coded (0 = neutral, 1 = empowerment). M1 = anticipated embarrassment; M2 = anticipated pleasure; Y = purchase intention.

### Indirect Effects of Advertising Type on Purchase Intention (H1d) (PROCESS Model 6; 5,000 bootstraps)

Indirect path	Effect (b)	BootSE	95% Boot CI LL	95% Boot CI UL
Via anticipated pleasure (X → M2 → Y)	0.441	0.11	0.231	0.664
Via anticipated embarrassment (X → M1 → Y)	0.038	0.032	-0.008	0.113
Serial: via embarrassment and pleasure (X → M1 → M2 → Y)	0.064	0.037	0.005	0.151

Note. Bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples.

An indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the confidence interval does not include zero.

### Total, Direct and Total Indirect Effects of Advertising Type on Purchase Intention (PROCESS Model 6)

Effect	b	SE	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Direct effect (c')	0.279	0.135	2.06	0.041	0.012	0.546
Total indirect effect	0.543	0.124	-	-	0.308	0.791

Note. Bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples.

An indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the confidence interval does not include zero.

Moderated Serial Mediation (PROCESS Model 83): Tests of Moderated Mediation

Moderator	Index of moderated mediation	BootSE	95% Boot CI LL	95% Boot CI UL
Social Context	-0.002	0.037	-0.079	0.082
Key moderation test	b	SE	t	p
Ad type × Social context → Anticipated embarrassment (M1)	0.021	0.342	0.06	0.952

Note. PROCESS Model 83 with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Indices of moderated mediation are significant when the bootstrap CI does not include zero.

## Appendix 12: Gender Differences

### Gender Differences in Key Study Variables (Women vs. Men)

Outcome variable	Women (M, SD)	Men (M, SD)	t(df)	p
Purchase intention	3.4 (1.08)	3.32 (0.78)	0.46 (64.81)	0.65
Anticipated pleasure	3.95 (0.97)	3.99 (0.79)	-0.22 (57.39)	0.83
Feelings	3.7 (0.9)	3.67 (0.57)	0.36 (75.23)	0.72
Quality	3.98 (0.71)	3.89 (0.53)	0.82 (62.85)	0.42
Embarrassment	2.65 (1.15)	2.57 (0.94)	0.43 (56.81)	0.67
Shame	1.49 (0.81)	1.28 (0.63)	1.59 (59.86)	0.12
Stigma	2.3 (1.07)	1.65 (0.66)	4.62 (77.41)	<.001
Empowerment	3.6 (1.26)	3.21 (0.74)	0.94 (81.54)	0.35
Erotophilia	4.2 (0.82)	4.39 (0.52)	-1.73 (75.79)	0.087
Public Self-Consciousness	3.5 (0.88)	3.4 (0.78)	0.65 (53.17)	0.52
Authenticity	3.56 (1.11)	3.33 (0.64)	1.63 (88.55)	0.11
Willingness to Pay	34.34 (18.28)	41.53 (27.66)	-1.45 (39.63)	0.156

Note. Independent-samples Welch *t*-tests were used where the assumption of equal variances was violated (reflected by fractional degrees of freedom). Cohen's *d* values are reported as absolute values. Women: *n* = 153; men: *n* = 34.

### Gender Difference in Perceived Stigma (Women vs. Men)

Outcome variable	Women (M, SD)	Men (M, SD)	t(df)	p	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Perceived stigma	2.30 (1.07)	1.65 (0.66)	4.62 (77.41)	<.001	0.66

Independent-samples Welch *t*-test. Women: *n* = 153; men: *n* = 34. Cohen's *d* is reported as an absolute value.

## Appendix 13: Shame as a Complementary Emotional Mechanism

### Two-Way ANOVA on Anticipated Shame

Dependent variable	Effect	F(df)	p	η <sup>2</sup> <sub>p</sub>
Anticipated shame	Ad Type	8.31 (1,149)	0.01	0.05
	Social Context	7.18 (1,149)	0.01	0.05
	Interaction	0.51 (1,149)	0.48	0.003

Note. Two-way ANOVA with Advertising Type (empowerment vs. neutral) and Social Context (online vs. in-store) as between-subjects factors. η<sup>2</sup><sub>p</sub> = partial eta squared.

### Descriptive Statistics for Anticipated Shame

Social Context	Empowerment Ad (M,SD)	Neutral Ad (M,SD)	Total
Online	1.19 (0.44)	1.46 (0.77)	1.32 (0.64)
Physical Store	1.44 (0.8)	1.89 (1.02)	1.65 (0.93)
Total	1.31 (0.64)	1.67 (0.92)	1.49 (0.81)

*Note.* Anticipated shame was measured on a 1–5 scale.

“Total” values reflect overall means and standard deviations by advertising type.

### Pearson Correlations Involving Anticipated Shame

Variables	r	p	95% BCa CI
Shame ↔ Pleasure	–.37	<.001	-
Shame ↔ Embarrassment	0.54	<.001	[.44, .64]

*Note.* Pearson correlations. BCa confidence interval for the shame–embarrassment correlation was obtained via bootstrap (5,000 resamples).

### Multiple Regression: Shame & Embarrassment as Joint Predictors

DV = Anticipated Pleasure	$\beta$	p
Shame	–0.262	0.004
Embarrassment	–0.190	0.035
DV = Purchase Intention	$\beta$	p
Shame	–0.076	0.41
Embarrassment	–0.282	0.002

*Note.* Standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) from multiple regression analyses.