

The Condom Project

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INTRODUCTION

As learned in class, a patent is an exclusive right granted for 17 years by the federal government to manufacture and sell an invention. Although the patent was filed on July 7, 1993, it was not issued until October 24, 1995, which means that the patent is valid until 2012. For something to be patented, it must meet the following requirements: the idea must be novel (original), non-obvious, and useful. This product met all three criteria which allowed it to become patented.

Our project is aimed at trying to market U.S. Patent 5,460,188 which is a patent for “a method and garment aid to facilitate and induce the use of a condom for safe or safer sexual acts.” More specifically, our project aims to market a claim in the patent of having an adhesive strip on the packaging of a condom so that it can be attached to one’s body or undergarment. The inventor meant for this patent to be a means to remind participants of a sexual act to practice safe sex by making it easy for a person to carry a condom around in a place that will most likely only be revealed if sexual activity is about to ensue.

In this paper, we will discuss our motivations behind working on this project, how we collected data, our analysis of the data, conclusions from the analysis, and the next steps we plan to take with this project.

MOTIVATION

We decided to do this project in particular because all three of us believe that this is a great idea for a patent and something that is marketable to a condom company. As college students, we are constantly surrounded by sexually active people and therefore felt as if we had a great resource right around us to be able to test this idea out before trying to market it. Since 56.5% of college students are sexually active, college students are a great target market for

condom companies.¹ Also, we feel that with the ever increasing rates of teenage pregnancy, this product can have major societal impact. We felt that if we could pull together strong enough evidence which suggests that this patent would actually be something that college students would buy and use that we could have an exciting project to try to market.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

We designed the survey to be simple, quick and get right to the point (See Fig. 1). At the end of this paper is a copy of the survey. The first question simply asks for the gender of the subject. We wanted to observe what the difference, if any, was between men and women in many areas, specifically, the extra willingness to pay. The second question was to help determine the demand for condoms as compared to other forms of contraception. Questions three and four were more for our own curiosity than any specific statistic that relates to our market analysis. If there was an overwhelming majority in one direction or the other, we would address the questions and try to assess any impact they have on the last two questions. Questions five and six get to the heart of what we are looking for and are by far the most important of all of them. Question five specifically spells out an application of the patent as seen to us and asks the subject to rate its effectiveness. We wanted to find out if people felt that the extra adhesive strip on the condom package would help people remember to use protection during sexual encounters. This was measured on a scale from one to ten with one being “not effective” and ten being “very effective.” The final question is the most pertinent for the condom manufacturers, our potential audience. This question asks how much extra people would be willing to pay for the condom with the adhesive strip. The answer choice was left blank for people to fill in their own responses. We did not include pre-determined ranges because we did not want people to feel

¹ <http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/2095.html>

confined to those or to create any sort of adverse psychological effect that would skew the true data.

For the survey, we wanted to get an accurate representation of the market for college students. Originally, we wanted to survey about two-hundred male and female college students from the greater Boston area. Also, we planned on conducting the surveys electronically with a laptop and having the data been stored directly into a spreadsheet. However, due to the technical difficulties associated in making a program that can do that and a lack of general programming experience amongst the three team members, we decided to not go with this idea. Instead, we printed out the surveys and handed them out to students at MIT, Boston University, Wellesley, and Simmons College. After handing out the surveys, we walked away and came back a few minutes later to collect in order to give people time to respond honestly without someone looking over their shoulders. Then, people put their responses wherever they wanted in the pile in order to help maintain anonymity.

In the end, we collected two hundred fifty-eight surveys; eighty-six male and one-hundred seventy-two females. When analyzing the data, questions two, three and four did not lend any interesting results. However, there was a marked difference between men and women when it came to the effectiveness of the new product in helping people remember to use protection. The results were 4.85 for males and 3.82 for females with an average of 4.16 over the entire sample (See Fig. 2). While we would have liked to see a result greater than 5.0, we were pleased that it is not closer to one. Also, men were willing to pay 10.8 cents on average and women 5.6 cents on average extra for the adhesive strip (See Fig. 3). Overall, people were willing to pay an extra 7.4 cents for the adhesive strip, a 14.7% increase from the 50 cents price used in the survey. We feel that this data is significant enough to approach condom manufacturers, such as Trojan and Durex.

CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

After analyzing the data from our survey, we found our results to be very positive. The two main focal points of our survey were

- 1) is the idea an effective one? and
- 2) are people willing to pay extra for the adhesive strip?

Because we surveyed college students from all around the Boston area, we feel that the results we obtained are more or less indicative of the college population as a whole. Further, seeing as though a large fraction of college students in America engage in regular sexual activity, we feel that the invention should be able to make an impact in the condom markets. At first, we were not sure how each sex would respond to the above questions. Our guess was that females would find the invention more effective, and therefore willing to pay slightly more for the condom. However, we actually found that males valued the idea stronger than did females, and ultimately would pay a higher price for the condom/strip package. Now, what implications does this have for the marketability of the product? Due to these results, we feel that there is sufficient room for expansion, and maybe even profit. And thus, we are going to continue our quest for marketability into the summer, with our first step being contacting marketing managers for both Trojan and Durex, two of the world's leading condom manufacturers.

Our original target result was to have a 10% markup willingness (in other words, if the average price of a condom is \$0.50, then we were hoping to see, on average, students willing to pay at least \$0.05 or more per condom). We found that men would be willing to pay a hefty 10.8 cents extra, while females would be willing to pay an extra 5.6 cents. Seeing as though the average willingness to pay does indeed satisfy our minimal target requirements, attention should now be turned to marketing this invention. While conducting our research analysis, we felt that there were several ways to accomplish this, one sex at a time.

In retrospect, it comes as no surprise that men value the condoms more than women. As principle purchasers of condoms, it is imperative that the male population be targeted rather heavily. Even though our data indicated that both men and women feel the burden of providing sexual protection lies equally among both sexes, it does not take away from the fact that men are pre-dominant purchasers of condoms. Therefore, we would suggest a marketing campaign that highlights the practical aspects of the invention. For men, the “Axess strip” provides a way of conveniently being equipped with protection for any occasion. We would advocate a marketing strategy heavy in today’s vehicles of popular media: television ads (specifically on channels such as MTV and ESPN) and magazine ads (in periodicals such as “Stuff,” “Maxim,” “Playboy,” and other such male-subscribed journals). The ads will highlight the benefits of adhering the condom discreetly to the inside elastic strap of the boxer, and how doing this will definitely prevent forgetting. One idea we had was that there could be a video commercial of two men (preferably college aged). In the scene, both men will be getting ready to engage in sexual activity with a girl they met, and there will be a flashback to when the men were getting ready to go out a while earlier, showing one who used the strip and the other who didn’t. Consequently, the gentleman who used the strip was prepared enough to be able to have the encounter, while the other man lost the condom, and had to go home because his partner refused to have sex with him. If we market the condom strip to Trojan, we could also incorporate their famous “Trojan Man” and how the Trojan Man is no longer useful because the men are using the condom strips.

Our invention could analogously be marketed to women as well. This would have to be done under slightly different contexts, however. While surveying some girls, we received feedback how it was a great idea because for many girls, who go to clubs and parties wearing tight pants (usually pocketless), it allows them to be prepared because they can discreetly adhere the condom to their upper thigh or just under the belts of their pants (inside the pants). And so,

we would have to market it in a way which showed women how they are at an advantage using the product because it spares them from the possible encounter when there is no protection, saving them from the repercussions that may follow such an act (i.e. pregnancy). These commercials probably wouldn't be as humor-driven, but still could be very effective. We anticipate that such ads would probably be most effective in magazines such as "Cosmo", "Glamour", and even "17."

Hopefully, we will be able to take our results, along with our Power Point presentation, to executives at Trojan or Durex in the hopes of marketing the condoms. Of course, we do have the incentive of financial payoffs, which helps us and inspires us. We shall continue our marketing efforts into the summer, hopefully making contacts and managing to get an opportunity to present our idea.

FIG. 2

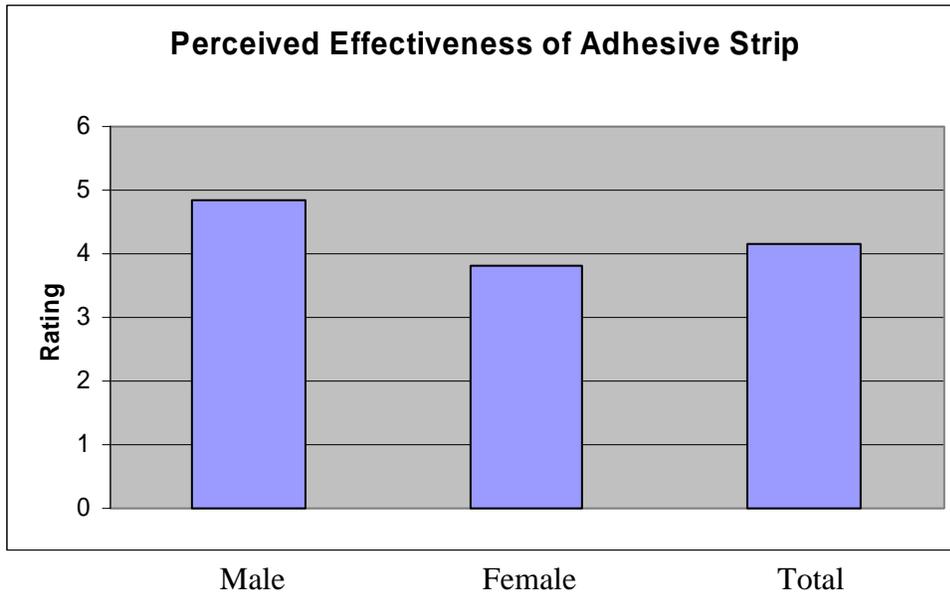


FIG. 3

