



“Shades for All of Us!” – Consumer Perceptions of Band-Aid Ourtone Bandages

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Keywords: inclusivity, skin tone, online reviews, content analysis, consumer products

Introduction: In early 2021, Johnson & Johnson launched its new line of Band-Aid Ourtone bandages, “to help complement brown skin tones” (“Meet Ourtone”). Per Band-Aid’s website, “The line features three new skin tone complementing adhesive bandage shades: BR65 (Dark Brown), BR55 (Brown), BR45 (Light Brown) (“Meet Ourtone”). This study focuses on online consumer reviews of Ourtone bandages as found on Amazon’s website. As a consumer product line created to explicitly appeal to a multiplicity of skin colors in U.S. society, it may bring to mind the 2017 release of Fenty Beauty’s first makeup foundation range, which was formulated with 40 shades, a groundbreaking introduction that is often seen as setting the standard for inclusivity in the mainstream beauty industry (Werle, 2019). While Ourtone currently offers only three shades, will consumers react as positively as they did to Fenty Beauty (Werle, 2019)? How well have Ourtone bandages been received?

Literature Review: Online consumer reviews have frequently been employed in the academic literature (typically in quantitative studies – see Dellarocas et al., 2007). Dress scholars have, for instance, used online reviews to assess the process of shopping for cycling pants (Kim & Na, 2021) and to develop a framework to examine post-consumption evaluations of a rental e-commerce site (McKinney & Shin, 2016). Moreover, literature solely concerned with analyzing Amazon reviews is plentiful (such as Chua & Banerjee, 2016; Heng et al., 2018). However, few articles have been published on commercial products that are available for a diversity of skin colors, and the need for multi-toned bandages has primarily been mentioned only in passing (see Husband, 2012; Roth, 2009; and Pereira, 2018). An exception is Oyesiku’s 2020 editorial in *Pediatric Dermatology*, in which the author called for the use of bandages that match brown and black skin tones as a tool for “decoloniz[ing] our clinics with a seemingly insignificant yet powerful symbolic gesture that lets our patients know that they are seen and not deviations from the norm” (p. 152). This research seeks to contribute to the literature by considering a product that aims to do just that.

Methods: The main research question explored in this qualitative study was “What are consumer perceptions of the Band-Aid Ourtone line of adhesive bandages?” On Amazon, these bandages are sold by color (i.e., BR45, BR55, BR65), as individual boxes or in packs of three. Customer reviews were gathered for all options. Each review contained a title, star rating (one to five, with five being the best), and textual feedback. Only reviews identified as a Verified Purchase were included in this study. That designation indicates that Amazon has “verified that the person writing the review purchased the product at Amazon and didn’t receive the product at a deep discount” (Amazon, n.d.). Reviewers without that identifier cannot be confirmed as actual consumers of the product, so those reviews were eliminated from analysis. The researchers

gathered one year of reviews, beginning with the earliest Amazon review for a product in the Ourtone line on February 22, 2021 to February 21, 2022.

To analyze the data, the star ratings given in reviews were averaged within each color and across the entire data set. For the qualitative data, the researchers used the constant comparative method, derived from Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Grounded Theory methodology, now often utilized on its own (Fram, 2013). With constant comparison, researchers "develop categories from the first round of data reduction and further reducing and recoding allows possible core categories to emerge" (Fram, 2013, p. 3). To begin analysis, each researcher coded ten reviews, and then met to compare the codes and negotiate disagreements, resulting in a preliminary coding guide. With the guide, the researchers coded the remaining data separately, with regular meetings to continue the comparisons and to revise the coding guide as needed. Ultimately, the researchers achieved an intercoder reliability rate of 91%, exceeding the minimum recommended by Creswell (2007) and Saldaña (2013).

Results: In total, 77 reviews were analyzed (BR45 = 33, BR55 = 30, BR65=14). Two reviews for BR65 were coded as *bad faith* – the reviewers negatively commented on the idea of inclusive bandages rather than the bandages themselves (e.g., "My feelings are hurt that these did not match my skin color! How unfair! BOOHOO!"). These two reviews were removed from further analysis, making a data set of 75 reviews. The most common codes encompassed two broad categories: *color* and *function*. With regard to color, the reviewers focused on how well the bandage *matched their skin* and how poorly the bandage *matched the photograph* on the box. Of the reviewers who discussed the first code, the majority (80%) wrote positively about "a band-aid fits my skin color!" (BR55.18). As BR65.14 said:

A Quality band aid that is my "nude"! When I put the Band-Aid on, it literally brought a tear to my eyes. Seriously lol. It's a silly little thing, but it's really nice to have a Band-Aid that fits your skin tone. I bought them in bulk :-).

But many reviewers of BR45 (i.e., the lightest color in the line) were not as positive in their reviews. For instance, BR45.27 addressed both issues with color in saying:

Very disappointed in this purchase as the actual color of the bandaid is much lighter than the packaging representation. If the bandaid had been like the photo on the package, it would have been a perfect match to my skin tone.

In fact, quite a few BR45 reviewers pointed out that the BR45 bandage just "seems to be regular toned bandaids" (BR45.8).

Given the utilitarian purpose of the product, color was not the only aspect of the bandage that reviewers addressed; 33% discussed various functional features. Largely, reviewers were pleased with the *quality*, particularly the bandages' flexibility and texture. However, some were also frustrated with the lack of water resistance and adhesive strength (e.g., "These Band-Aids are horrible they do not stick they don't even stay on for one minute" [BR45.16]).

Regardless of complaints, in general, reviewers appraised Band-Aid Ourtone bandages highly, with an average star rating of 4.05. BR55 earned the highest rating at 4.8, and BR45, the lowest at 3.11, with BR65 in the middle with 4.25. BR55 and BR65 reviewers reported similar levels of satisfaction with the bandages (77% and 75%, respectively), while only 30% of BR45

reviewers were satisfied. The low level of appreciation for BR45 is further seen in the code of *finally*, assigned when a reviewer used that precise word (as done by 23% of reviewers) or referred to having waited a long time for bandages for people of color. This code was in 42% of BR65 reviews, 33% of BR55 reviews, and just 21% of BR45 reviews, perhaps because those reviewers did not yet feel they found a bandage that was for them. BR45 reviewers also expressed the lowest amount of positive emotions, while excitement, gratitude, and happiness were all explicitly discussed in BR55 and BR65 reviews.

Conclusion: While reviewers of Band-Aid Ourtone bandages were chiefly positive about this new line, in terms of both the “options for owies that match [our] beautiful chocolate skin!” (BR65.6) and the quality, the lightest new color was not as well received as the two darker shades, and there was some indication that an even darker color would be welcome. But there is little doubt that this new line was valued. As BR45.28 said, “High kudos to Band-Aid for making these, I don’t see them on the shelves, but I’m so appreciative they exist. It’s little things like this that help people of color feel more included.” BR55.19 also gave credit to Band-Aid with the final word of their review: “#microaffirmations.”

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