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### Consumer Warfare: The Effect of Attitude toward One's Rival on Attitudes toward Defensive Strategies

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# **Consumer Warfare: The Effect of Attitude toward One's Rival on Attitudes toward Defensive Strategies**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The use of warfare analogies in marketing is not something new, particularly in terms of competitive strategies. With the shifting of power down the marketing channel, however, the importance and the effectiveness of competition-centric strategies has declined. Instead, reflecting consumers' new-found power and importance, a focus on strategies employed by consumers in the marketplace appears to be increasingly appropriate to effectively reach today's and tomorrow's consumers. Business leaders who best understand how consumers interact with and relate to each other may find themselves in the best competitive position in the 21st century. Burns and Warren (2008) introduced the concept of consumer warfare as a means to illuminate how consumers interact and how those interactions influence consumer behavior in the marketplace.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to empirically examine consumer warfare, with specific attention on the effects of consumers' attitudes toward their rivals on their choice of defensive strategy. The results of the study indicate a significant relationship between material happiness (i.e., life would be better with more material objects) and three out of the four defensive strategies used by consumers in response to rivals who purchase a desired object. An important consideration, however, is that these relationships are strong because of the negative affect that arises toward the rival. The four defensive strategies include 1) admitting a sense of defeat, 2) doing nothing, 3) buying an object comparable to our rival, and 4) buying an object better than that of our rival.

Results of a survey show that consumers high in material happiness feel significantly more negative affect toward their rival, indicating a positive relationship between those constructs. Only one strategy was not significantly more likely to be used. That strategy involves admitting defeat. Additionally, high negative affect toward a rival was negatively related to the strategy that involves doing nothing. In other words, high negative affect leads to a significantly greater propensity to do "something," indicating a negative relationship between those constructs, as expected. Next, high negative affect toward a rival results in significantly greater likelihood of consumers who are high in material happiness purchasing an object comparable to or better than the object purchased by a rival.

These results reveal how consumers' attitudes are affected by other consumers' purchases. Consumers don't necessarily make purchases based solely on their individual desires. Rather, consumers are influenced to purchase objects as a result of the negative feelings that grow out of seeing a rival obtain a desirable object. Then, consumers respond by purchasing the object. This phenomenon feeds the desire to have more material belongings for those who are high in

material happiness, but for those low in material happiness the end result is to do nothing or at least have a low inclination to purchase the same or better object.

Although this body of research is in its infancy, the findings provide important implications for marketers.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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