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Daniel J. Flint, Major Professor

David W. Schumann, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Ernest Cadotte

_____

Ann Fairhurst

_____

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

_____

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Exploring and Explaining Consumer Competition:
A Mixed-Method Approach to Understanding the Phenomenon

A Dissertation
Presented for
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Bridget Satinover Nichols
August 2010

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving husband, whom this journey led me to. Our life together will be the greatest gift. And to my parents, whose love and support has always given me great motivation.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the phenomenon of "consumer competition." The overarching objective is to help researchers and marketing practitioners understand how the phenomenon is created, how consumers experience competition, and to begin to inspect its effects. Consumer competition is defined as the active processes of striving against others for the acquisition of a consumption object. To date, this phenomenon has been under-researched, despite its prevalence in many marketing and consumer-related domains.

An extensive literature synthesis provides the foundation for understanding competition and competitiveness in general from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Based on the synthesis of literature and respective theory, this research contends that a scarcity effect contributes to consumer competition. It also contends that competitive situations may be purposely created by retailers, who may or may not understand its benefits and/or consequences to the people involved.

This dissertation examines the phenomenon in two manners. First, an exploratory study seeks to enrich our understanding of how consumers experience competition in a retail setting. Employing the grounded theory method, researching participants engaged in a competitive shopping context offers insight into the meaning of competition, the motivation for competing, the experiential components of competing, and the outcome of participating in a competitive shopping situation. Second, an experiment tests the influence of scarcity messages on consumers' perceptions of a competitive purchase situation and the related purchase interest.

The results of the research are multi-faceted. It provides managerial insight into an effect of scarcity not yet examined: perceptions regarding the competitive nature of a purchase situation. This is an important distinction given the influence of perceptions on behavior. It also provides insight to enrich our understanding of how consumers engage in competitive shopping behavior and how they reflect on competitive situations in the retail domain.

In short, these two studies contribute to a holistic understanding of the consumer competition phenomenon, and raise questions that should be addressed with a future stream of research.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION

Competition brings out the best in products and the worst in people.
-- David Sarnoff, founder of NBC

Recognizing that consumers often value their consumption experiences because of the symbolic or emotional element involved opens doors for researchers to explore new phenomena in consumer behavior. One such phenomenon is consumer competition. Despite opinions, such as David Sarnoff's, about the unattractive and undesirable effect of competition on people, little is known about competition in the consumer domain. Understanding and disseminating consumer behaviors and related preferences and attitudes have been a focal point for both researchers and practitioners, especially in the last several decades. Consequently, there has been a shift in consumer research to focus on the more symbolic, emotive and aesthetic aspects of consumer behavior (e.g. Holbrook, Oliva, & Greenleaf, 1984). Today, the importance of symbolism, emotions and aesthetics in consumer behavior has been magnified in part because of a focus on consumers as social beings. Competitions can be emotional experiences with very symbolic outcomes, often fueled by deep personal motivations. This dissertation takes aim at extending our knowledge about competition and competitiveness in the consumer domain.

In *Essays in Social Justice* Carver (1915, p. 19) reflected specifically on consumer competition by noting that "when we come to the field of competitive consumption… there is little that can be said in defense of it. It is the result of the lowest and least defendable quality in human nature. It is the result of the desire to outshine our neighbors, or to avoid being outshone

by them (c.f. Mowen, 2004)." Carver's statement is a perspective nearing the century mark, and thus revisiting competitive consumption through a more modern lens seems timely.

It has been said that the language of business, politics, and education is filled with win–lose terms, e.g. *winning* promotions or *outsmarting* a teacher (Tjosvold, Johnson, Johnson, & Sun, 2003). The language of marketing and advertising is also laden with terms that invoke superiority or inferiority. These terms suggest success or failure mostly in social terms, e.g. be *better off* or *worse off* than your peers, *gaining* access to exclusive resorts, or *living the good life*. Other terms and constructs in consumer behavior are indicative of a competitive motivation. For example, individuals who are materialistic are thought to desire possessions in order to define their own success (Belk, 1984; Richins & Dawson, 1992). They see possessions as a way to project a desired self-identity of accomplishment to other people, or a way to infer status (Veblen, 1899), sometimes in order to present themselves as *better than* others, or higher up on the social ladder. In fact, materialism is commonly related to the competitive display of success and status in a "Veblenesque" fashion (Ger & Belk, 1996). Conspicuous consumption motives fall within the same ideal, emphasizing the display of products for the benefit of other people. Consumption acquisition itself can manifest into competitive situations. Bridal sales, Christmas holiday shopping and "hot toys" like Cabbage Patch Kids, the Nintendo Wii, and Tickle Me Elmo dolls all have been recognized as situations where consumers vie against each other for a scarce product. Most recently, internet auction sites like eBay.com have provided a widespread platform for consumers to compete with each other for goods.

Many agree that competition is deeply ingrained in American culture and society (Horney, 1937; Mowen, 2004) and accepted in many forms. Although American and other Western cultures seem to embrace competition within certain domains (e.g. sports and

salesmanship), it is condemned in others (e.g. romantic relationships). Beyond the United States, Eastern cultures are also gaining recognition for their competitively inclined consumers. In fact, research comparing advertising between Japanese and American media finds that Japanese advertising emphasizes more materialistic and status driven messages than advertising in the U.S. (Belk & Bryce, 1986). China, although generally a collectivist cultures, displays Westernized attitudes towards luxury brands and behaviors towards product ownership in order to both conform to societal norms and project images of prestige (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Juan Li & Su, 2007). Although cross-cultural researchers suggest that the motives for prestige goods differ between Western and Eastern cultures, where Eastern consumers' conspicuous consumption is grounded in conformity for public display, the end result is similar: be left out (lose) or conform (achieve social acceptance).

But competition is not always bad. Competition can motivate people to achieve higher standards, to excel and to reach their goals. This is a generally accepted perspective from sports, education, and the workplace. Competition in the work force can lead to pay raises, promotions, and higher sales commissions. Successful competition in school can help students gain acceptance to colleges and earn scholarships. Successful competition in sports can lead to performance excellence and high standings compared to other athletes or teams in the field. But what does competition mean in the consumption realm? What constitutes a competitive consumption situation? What are the motivations for consumers to compete and under what circumstances? Who is likely to become competitive in a consumption context? What are the positive and negative outcomes of competitiveness in the consumer realm? Finding answers to these questions, and others, will shed light on important aspects of consumers and their behaviors under differing consumption circumstances, and will address Baumgartner's (2002) call to

understand the individual person in his or her role as a consumer. Aspects of competitive consumption will also address Bagozzi's (2000) assertion that many social aspects of consumer research have been overlooked.

Managers and consumer researchers alike can benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of how a competitive consumption environment can impact consumers and their decisions, as well as how competitiveness can act as a motivator under differing consumption situations. Some evidence indicates that competitiveness influences consumer behaviors including bargaining (Jones, Trocchia, & Mothersbaugh, 1997), sports interest (Mowen, 2000), auction behavior (Angst, Agarwal, & Kuruzovich, 2008) and conspicuous consumption (Mowen, 2004). Within a wide array of contexts, competitive consumption can be either individualistic or social in nature. It may also manifest as a consequence of both social and individual factors.

Recent literature on competitiveness has called for more research to explore contextual influences in competitiveness (Houston, McIntire, Kinnie, & Terry, 2002). Because these calls have remained overwhelmingly unanswered, this dissertation's purpose is to provide preliminary answers to looming questions about consumer competition and contextual consumption influences on competitiveness.

Exploratory and Anecdotal Justification

The phenomenon of consumer competition has not received a great deal of attention in marketing or consumer-related literature. Only a small body of work specifically discusses consumers as being competitive (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Bone & Mowen, 2006; Heyman et al, 2004; Mowen, 2004; Nichols & Flint, 2010). Few of these are specifically concerned with the phenomenon (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Mowen, 2004; Nichols & Flint, 2010). Despite its

absence as an empirically examined construct or phenomenon, the consumer competition phenomenon certainly exists. This purpose of this section is to provide examples and evidence of manifestations of competition within consumer behavior.

Black Friday

In the United States and parts of Canada the kickoff of the holiday shopping season, the Friday following Thanksgiving, is known notoriously as *Black Friday*. According to Bonnie Taylor-Blake of the American Dialectic Society, this name was coined by the Philadelphia police department in 1965 to describe the heavy traffic, stress and chaos associated with the rush of people into the city to shop (Lin, 1985).The term was a spin-off from *Black Tuesday*, the day of the 1929 stock market crash. Black Friday shopping is often competitive in nature, and can sometimes have very damaging effects. In November, 2008, a Wal-Mart store employee was trampled to death by a mob of more than two thousand customers who were eager to enter the store for the Black Friday sales event. Several news sources reported that customers were waiting in line for up to 24 hours in order to be the first in line to have the chance to purchase goods at deep discounts. The crowd became unruly and uncontrollable while customers began to push and shove each other as they tried to be the first to enter the store. When the glass door broke, a store employee was caught underneath. Reports from the incident indicated that no one but other store employees attempted to help the man. He died as a result of consumers racing, rushing and shoving each other to get to products inside the store. After the incident, Wal-Mart advertising was directly blamed for creating the hostile environment that led to the man's death (Neff, 2008).

This tragic example sheds a light on how competitiveness and competitive environments in the consumer realm can be dangerous and undesirable. In fact, competitive environments can,

and often do, spawn unethical behaviors, especially in highly individualistic societies (Spence, 1985). Although Black Friday shopping is a key yearly marker for economists and consumer spending reports, marketing researchers have rarely examined it (Keinan & Kivetz, 2008).

Running of the Brides®

A second example of consumer competition involves Filene's Basement, a department store based in Boston, Massachusetts. Each year the store holds its annual *Running of the Brides* event, a tradition since 1947. The event is a bargain sale on designer wedding gowns with prices as low as $249. Brides-to-Be get line up several hours before the store opens in the hopes of finding the gown of their dreams. In addition to the fame the event has garnered as a way to get a cheap wedding dress, it has also become somewhat infamous for fights, brawls and tramplings while brides clamor over each other to get in the door first, grab dresses off the racks, and find the perfect one. The store's website offers ten tips on how to prepare and strategize for the event. The first three are "get there early or late," "leave all men at home," and "bring a team."

The following quote from the Filene's Basement website gives a vivid picture of what it is like to compete for wedding gowns.

> Brides-to-be and their helpers run full speed to the racks; they grab as many dresses as their arms will hold. It takes anywhere from sixty seconds to two minutes for the racks to be stripped bare (the record is 37 seconds)… At the start, this event can bring out the worst in shoppers—shoving, elbowing, hoarding, and so on; but eventually it brings out the best.

Consumer contests

Creating contests for consumers is a long-lived tradition. Chicken wing-eating contests, pie eating contests and radio call-in contests are popular methods used to gain participation and promote products in a fun way. Normally, the winner of these competitions is the recipient of

cash or prizes that motivated them to enter the competition in the first place. Although most contests are light hearted and fun, some have resulted in very negative outcomes. In 2007, a woman died from water intoxication after entering a Cincinnati radio station's contest called "Hold Your Wee For a Wii." The contest was held during the time when Nintendo Wii game consoles were in very short supply and some consumers resorted to spending over $1,500 to buy one on eBay, or waiting in lines at retail stores overnight. The radio contestants were required to drink eight-ounce bottles of water every fifteen minutes. If a contestant needed to use the restroom, they were eliminated from the competition; the last person remaining would win the game system. Formalized competitions like this one pose clear risks to consumers, and expose managers to liability for avoidable outcomes.

Competing *for* vs. competing *through*

Black Friday and the Running of the Brides are highly publicized examples of situations where consumers are likely to compete. Other examples are more commonplace. Some emerge from spurious market conditions, while others are built in to the acquisition environment itself. Consumers may also employ products as a means through which to compete.

Competing for products: built in

Flea markets, antique stores, swap meets and auctions are consumption environments where competitions are likely to be a natural force. Flea markets and antique stores are known for selling items that are discounted, or have become rare or unavailable in mass retail stores. Because the items are often desired for their uniqueness and scarcity these shopping environments may create a sense of competitiveness in consumers who feel a sense of urgency to purchase items before another shopper shows interest in the same item. The environment also

gives shoppers opportunities to compete with sellers. This view is counter to the mainstream one of flea market and thrift store shopping that presumes consumers are driven by an economic function of being thrifty, deal-prone or frugal. Instead, flea market, thrift store and antique store shopping may be driven by hedonic motives such as the "thrill of the hunt" (Bardhi, 2003, p. 375) or *price games* (Sherry, 1990). Price games are competitions consumers have with themselves when the goal is to find the best possible price for an item. Although finding or bargaining to a good price is the goal, the process of the hunt provides hedonic satisfaction. In an ethnographic study of flea markets, Sherry (1990, p. 24) summarizes that patrons often refer to acquiring items by "beating dealers" at "their own game," supporting competition as a main theme present in flea market or swap meet environments (Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988). Similarly, these themes can be found in both traditional and online auction behaviors where competing with other consumers for acquisition, competing with one's self in price games, or competing with sellers to "beat them at their own game," may all be fundamental to the context. In fact, in a survey of auction participants Ariely and Simonson (2003) reported 76.8 percent of respondents indicated that they perceived other bidders as *competitors* and referred to bid outcomes as either winning or losing.

Competing for products: spurious market conditions

In the last decade the United States and parts of Canada experienced a significant real estate boom where in some markets like Florida, California, Nevada, Toronto and Washington, D.C. it was common for a handful of buyers to be competing over one house. These competitions not only took the form of price wars, but there were reports of some buyers resorting to removing the *For Sale* signs, offering large cash deposits, and of real estate agents holding off on early offers in the hopes of getting higher ones (Adair, 2002).

Between 2006 and 2008 most American cities experienced extremely high oil prices that were often times exacerbated by hurricanes in the Gulf Coast region, squeezing oil refinery production and gasoline supply levels to parts of the Southeast and elsewhere. This resulted in gas prices as high as five dollars in some Southern cities like Atlanta, Charlotte and Knoxville, where drivers resorted to lining up at gas stations, or waking up earlier in the morning in order to get gas before it ran out. Somewhat reminiscent of the gasoline shortage in the 1970's much of the hype and panic of the gas 'shortage' was blamed on the media inducing fear into gasoline consumers (Harris & Keim, 2008). Similarly, in Gulf coast regions like Florida, Texas and Louisiana, where hurricane storms are most frequent, consumers often find themselves racing to buy groceries like milk, bread and water when the threat of a major storm looms. Natural disaster type forces commonly spur individuals to feel threatened by commodity shortages, and thus compete with other consumers to acquire necessities.

Competing through products

On an opposing end, rather than competing to acquire products, consumers employ products or services as mediums through which to compete. Examples provided above suggest consumers compete for social status, thus materialistic or conspicuous consumption motives provide consumers a means by which to employ products to compete for social status. Consumers may also use products as a means to compete with others in formal competitions. For example, fantasy sports, an industry with an estimated $1.5 billion in annual revenues (Prescott, 2006) allows individuals to act as "owners" of a team. Owners draft players to their team and compete against other "owners" in their respective "league" in weekly fantasy matchups. Team owners are responsible for setting their team line-ups each week, and strategizing about which players will be most valuable based on their opponents' team and

players for that week. The fantasy sports market not only includes website hosts like ESPN, FOX sports and Yahoo, but also expands to media forms like magazines, another source of revenue for businesses to capitalize off of competitive consumers. Fantasy sports include football, baseball, basketball, golf, and auto racing. It is suggested that fantasy sports meet consumers' need to compete (Davis & Duncan, 2006) and needs for achievement (Roy & Goss, 2007), and that marketers are cognizant of this. Video games played via gaming systems, the web, or on personal computers are similar examples.

These anecdotal examples are intended to justify the phenomenon of consumer competition. Chapter 2 will highlight academic research to further justify the phenomenon in several contexts that may lend to those within consumer behavior.

Defining the Phenomenon

While examples of consumer competition have been presented, it is helpful to provide a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon to be addressed in this dissertation. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss what is and what is not included in the concept of consumer competition. As a more appropriate and concise definition may potentially emerge from the subsequent research, two conceptual categorizations of consumer competition can be offered at this point: pluralized and discreet. Both categorizations are congruent with the experiential, hedonic, aesthetic and subjective dimensions of consuming that was pioneered by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). Additionally, the present definitions of consumer competition allow for both emotions and behavioral outcomes to be inspected by psychological measures. This is critical since presently, there are no measures that address consumer competition. A well-defined construct will enable psychometric measures to be developed.

Pluralized consumer competition

Pluralized consumer competition describes a situation when individuals vie for a common consumer goal for which they can contribute to the outcome. The term *goal* is appropriate because not all consumer outcomes result in an exchange for goods or services. Therefore, a goal could be quickly getting a table at a restaurant, getting in line first at the grocery checkout, acquiring a rare piece of art, paying a low price for an item, owning a luxury car, or purchasing a home. The goal is *believed* to be desired by others. Therefore, pluralized consumer competition requires that individuals consider the presence of other consumers within their decision frame. During this type of competition, consumers may or may not knowingly be competing against one another. In this respect, pluralized consumer competition is grounded in the perspective of each individual. The concept is steeply dependent on the competing individual's ability to contribute to the outcome.

This concept, by definition, excludes 'competing vicariously' such as by watching sporting events. Competing vicariously can be considered a variation of consuming as play (Holt, 1995). Consuming as play involves using consumption objects as resources to interact with fellow consumers (Holt, 1995). Studies regarding vicarious experiences of competition are present in consumer behavior literature (Mowen, 2004) and are found to be preceded by competitiveness. Vicarious competition may certainly influence consumer behavior, but consumers are unable to control or contribute to the competition outcome, therefore their own competitive emotions and feelings are detached from the result of the competition.

Finally, unlike games or contests, consumer competitions need not result in only one winner and one or many losers. Winning depends on the evaluation of the situation by the individual. Rather than winning over others, pluralized consumer competition may only result

in a sense of achievement or self-gratification for how well a consumer performed in comparison to others.

Discreet consumer competition

> *The only competition worthy a wise man is with himself. (*Anna Brownell Jameson, author and co-founder of the *Englishwoman's Journal*, 1858)

Anna Jameson distinguished many years ago that competition with one's self is possible, and also and desirable. Competing with one's self is the basis for the second conceptualization of consumer competition. *Discreet consumer competition* occurs when an individual vies for a goal for which they can contribute to an outcome not contingent on the presence (real or implied) of others. These goals are intrinsically driven by personal achievement motives and reflect personal development (mastery) competitiveness detailed in psychological literature. Although driven by intrinsic motivations, there may be extrinsic rewards involved. Discreet consumer competition is the process by which achievement motives and/or mastery competitiveness manifests in consumption situations. The goals themselves may be identical to those noted within pluralized consumer competition, but the competitive nature is different such that a consumer is essentially competing with herself to reach the goal. For example, consumers who are highly price sensitive may continuously seek out the best or lowest prices on goods. When finding a good price, or a better price than before, they can experience a sense of achievement or *winning* over the last time that item was purchased. Schindler's (1989; 1992) *smart-shopper* concept provides a relevant example. Smart-shopper feelings are the result of an ego-expressive aspect identifiably generated by price promotions. Schindler uses a colorful K-mart blue light special to describe how consumers can behave when low prices are dangled in front of

consumers. Being able to find good prices may elicit strong feelings of accomplishment, pride or anger. This form of competition can be explained sans price goals as well. Some consumers may strive to be a better shopper by finding the quickest way to complete their shopping task. In this case they may be competing with themselves against time or strategy.

Delineating these two forms of consumer competition allows the phenomenon to be scrutinized in terms of the consumer who is both an individual, and a part of a social world. It also affords a means to consider competitiveness outside of formal competition contexts.

Theoretical Justification

It is important within the consumer behavior discipline to continually explore consumers' relationships with their consumption environment, and to frequently revisit how consumption situations can influence cognitions, feelings, emotions, and behaviors. It is equally important to continue our understanding of the individual consumer and the manner in which differences among individuals may influence consumption behaviors and perceptions about consumption environments.

In order to examine competition and its relationship to consumer behavior several theories and streams of research that underlie these relationships must be explored. Because the nature and scope of consumer competition and discovery of "what it's like" to compete as a consumer are underdeveloped, several theories may provide ways of scrutinizing the phenomenon.

The notion of *winning*, or beating out a competitor, is at the core of competition. In order for a person to know if she is winning or how they stand in the competition, a comparison to a *competitor* is needed. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) provides a framework for

examining the comparison element present in consumer competitions. It is widely known and accepted that individuals engage in social comparison as a part of everyday social living as individuals seek to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to either other people or some kind of standard (Mettee & Smith, 1977). Thus, it stands to reason that people will compare themselves to others in order to know if they are winning (achieving) or losing (failing) in a competitive situation.

Because competitions and competitiveness suggest a desire for a predicted achievement outcome or goal, Expectancy Theory (VIE; Vroom, 1964) may explain the underlying motivations for goal driven behavior. Expectancy theory states that individuals will act on the belief that increased effort will lead to increased performance, such that the importance, or valence, of the outcome will determine the instrumentality of the behaviors. VIE would suggest that individuals pursue competitive behaviors (with effort) because they believe them to be instrumental in reaching a valued outcome.

Contextually, commodity theory offers a situationally-relevent platform to examine consumer competition. Commodity theory (Brock, 1968) reflects the psychological effects of scarcity, positing that any commodity will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable. Commodity theory is relevant to the definitions of consumer competition presented because it suggests that some consumer goals cannot, perceptually, be achieved by everyone because there are implied constraints on resource availability. The main tenets of commodity theory are that the commodity *object* be seen by a potential possessor as useful or relevant to their needs or interests, and that threats increase commodity-seeking behavior and the tendencies to withhold commodities from others. Commodity theory is especially fitting to the study of consumer competition because it is conceived with the concept of scarcity. Scarcity, a condition

commonly studied in economics where competition for scarce resources occurs, has only minimally been explored in relationship to consumer response (Lynn, 1989; 1991; 1992; 1992b).

The descriptions of competing and competitiveness thus far have inspired mostly remarks and reference to winning over others. To address discreet consumer competition and the implications from personal development goals of competing with one's self, cognitive evaluation theory (CET) is useful. CET describes humans as having an innate need to be competent, effective, and self-determining (Spence & Helmreich, 1983), as well as motivated to seek out and conquer challenges (Deci & Porac, 1978). CET suggests that consumers may act upon competitiveness even when the end objective is not to beat out or win against an opponent, but to knowingly achieve a higher personal standard or goal.

Finally, trait theory stipulates that differences among individuals can be characterized by certain dispositions. These dispositions are believed to be relatively stable across time and situations, and are regarded as strong drivers for behavior. Under the trait theory framework, an individual's degree of competitiveness is relatively stable across homogenous situations and influences their behavior in various situations.

These theories will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two of this manuscript, and gaps within the literature will be identified. These theories will be detailed further within the comprehensive literature review. Subsequently, the guiding theory most appropriate to the present research will be stated.

Broad Research Objectives and Questions

The overall objective of this dissertation is to begin to formulate an understanding of consumer competition. Four specific objectives support this primary goal. They are: (1) to

better understand the nature of consumer competition as perceived by those competing, (2) to discover antecedents, drivers of, and motivators for consumer competition, (3) given a competitive consumption situation, to explore reflective perceptions about that situation, and (4) determine the conditions (contextual and individual) that lead consumers to perceive purchase or consumption situations as competitive in nature.

The following research questions are meant to address these objectives:

Research objective 1 questions:

1. *What does it mean for consumers to compete from the point of view of consumption competitors?*
2. *What processes do consumers engage in as they compete?*
3. *What attitudes, perceptions and emotions are experienced by consumers who compete?*
4. *What problems do consumers encounter during competition?*

Research objective 2 questions:

1. *What attitudes, perceptions and emotions motivate consumers to compete?*
2. *What situations create an environment whereby consumers compete or a feel a need to compete?*

Research objective 3 questions:

1. *Who are the people involved in the competition, from the perspective of the consumer?*
2. *What do consumers report doing during competition?*
3. *What are consumers' perceptions and feelings about competitive situations after having engaged in consumer competition?*

Research objective 4 questions:

1. *What type of information leads consumers to perceive purchase situations as competitive? How might this vary?*
2. *Who is likely to interpret these situations as being competitive?*
3. *Are general measures of competitiveness applicable within consumption domains?*

Contribution of this Research

This research was designed to extend the body of knowledge in consumer behavior. It will be accomplished by extending the existing body of research on the relationships between social and psychological theories, their applications in consumer behavior, and begin to respond to a call for more research regarding the contextual influences in competitiveness (Houston, McIntire, Kinnie, & Terry, 2002) as well as understanding the individual in his or her role as a consumer (Baumgartner, 2002).

While a handful of studies have begun to explore and identify competitiveness and competition in the consumer realm (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Heyman et al, 2004; Mowen, 2004) the present research extends this knowledge by focusing strategically on the competitive element, rather than as a peripheral to other phenomena.

A further consideration is whether or not competitive consumption behavior is considered *normal* or *abnormal,* and under what conditions might it change. The vast majority of consumer research focuses on normative behaviors (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), but only recently has begun to inspect abnormal and less prevalent consumer behaviors like compulsive consumption. Although Western society considers competitiveness a natural part of social life, it has yet to be qualified as either normal or abnormal in consumption situations. Insights to normative aspects of competing may be found.

Consumer behaviors are subject to many influences. These influences can be attributed to the general environment, individual characteristics, temporal motivations, emotional reactions and so forth. Understanding how consumers experience competition and competitiveness in consumption settings and how a competitive environment can affect consumers should be a priority for managers in marketing, advertising and public policy alike. Creating

competitiveness in consumer contexts appears to be a common tactic in the marketing world, therefore, understanding how consumers respond to these situations should be of interest. Beyond considering consumers' reception and response to competitive situations, managers are likely to be concerned with learning how these situations may affect their organizations. Creating a competitive consumer environment has proved to be dangerous to the welfare of consumers, as well as to the corporate image of firms. Neither is desirable. As Peter (1991, p. 543) stated, "one criterion for considering the usefulness of research concerns its contribution to society and society's welfare." This research will explore some of these issues and make suggestions for exploring the phenomenon further.

Further, it could be that under constructed competitive environments, a desired outcome may not be achieved. As Martin (1996, p. 17) points out, "relationships between a business and its consumer customers are enhanced when the business' customers interact with one another in a satisfying (or at least tolerable) manner." Some customers may be encouraged by a competitive consumption environment, while others might retreat; suggesting that approaching customers with messages or surroundings that create competitiveness is not a wholly-desirable effect. Competitive environments and consumers who are experiencing competitive-related emotions and motivations may respond either favorably or unfavorably to competitive consumption contexts, such as advertising and marketing messages implying scarcity. Therefore, managers who are striving to create or maintain satisfying and tolerable interactions between their consumers should consider how these interactions may be experienced when consumer competition ensues.

In summary, a deeper understanding of the nature of consumer competition as perceived by consumers who compete, its motivators, behaviors, and situational contexts ought to help

marketing managers more accurately recognize and more carefully manage competitive situations. This deeper understanding might also help consumers better recognize and respond to competitive situations where they otherwise might not.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five distinct chapters. Chapter one served to introduce the dissertation and explain the topic. The focus was to introduce the impetus for studying consumer competition and the expected contribution to marketing and consumer behavior literature. The chapter also provided examples of consumer competition, a brief theoretical basis for the research, definitions of the construct, and broad research objectives and questions. Chapter two is a comprehensive literature review which provides the foundational information used to build the theoretical framework for this dissertation, and to identify the gaps in the extant dialogue in the discipline. Chapter three specifies and details two methodological approaches that were employed to address the research questions posed. Chapter four is comprised of two manuscripts that report on the findings from the approaches and research questions in chapter three. The first manuscript is based on an interpretive study of consumers engaged in a competitive shopping experience. The second manuscript reports the results of an experiment that investigated the role of scarcity messages on consumers' perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. Chapter five concludes the dissertation by summarizing and integrating the findings from the two studies. Suggestions for future research are made.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present and synthesize applicable literature from several fields of study in order to identify the major knowledge gaps in the area of consumer competition. The chapter is comprised of two major parts that support a mixed-method research design. Part One begins by reviewing relevant literature on the definitions of competition in order to construct and justify a working definition of consumer competition for this dissertation. Next, research from psychology, social psychology, sports, organizational behavior and consumer behavior is reviewed and synthesized in order to examine how competition has been studied previously and how the concept of competitiveness has been defined and operationalized. Part one is structured to review the relevant literature by addressing the following five questions:

1. *What* is competition and *what* is competitiveness?
2. *Why* do individuals compete?
3. *When* do individuals compete?
4. *How* do individuals compete?
5. *Who* competes?

This format provides a comprehensive means to integrate literature from several fields of study in a meaningful way. Within this synthesis, the theories introduced in chapter one are elaborated upon. Additionally, Part One reviews research stemming specifically from literature in consumer behavior encompassing elements of consumer competition. This demonstrates the field's current myopic consideration of the phenomenon. To address the implications for marketing policy and marketers' desirability to create competitive situations, potential individual and societal outcomes of competition are discussed in light of current research. Part One concludes by forging a preliminary nomological network of consumer competition, confirming

that a qualitative research approach is necessary in order to garner a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon that will aid in theory development and solidification of the construct.

Part Two details the organizing theoretical framework guiding the quantitative phase of the dissertation. Relevant research within the guiding theory is reviewed and gaps requiring attention are stated.

The chapter concludes by (1) substantiating the rationale for a mixed-method research approach, (2) outlining descriptions of the general qualitative and quantitative research agendas, (3) and presenting the model that guides the quantitative design.

PART – ONE: COMPETITION AND COMPETITIVENESS

WHAT IS COMPETITION?

The term *competition* has many meanings. Table 1 (p. 22) summarizes the definitions stemming from economics, psychology, ecology, sports and sociology.

Although the term *competition* is defined in several ways, the verb "to compete" comes from the Latin root *competere*, meaning "to seek or strive together." Most would agree that this is not the generally accepted interpretation of the term, as this offers a very broad and vague description. Cooperativists and some sociologists (Alfie Kohn, for example) define competition as *amoral competition* or *the survival instinct* where competition is biologically motivated and results in behaviors that are neither good nor bad, but are directed towards the survival of species, or for acts of self-defense. The opposing perspective, from social Darwinists, is that not only is competition always moral, but it is necessary for survival. The end result of competition amongst species is survival, extinction, or adaptation.

Table 1 *Definitions of Competition*

Citation	Term	Definition
Princeton University's *WordNet*	*Competition (act)*	The act of competing as for profit or a prize. "The teams were in fierce contention for first place."
Princeton University's *WordNet*	*Competition (noun)*	A contender (the contestant one hopes to defeat). "He had respect for his rivals." "He wanted to know what the competition was doing."
Maller (1929)	*Competitive Situation*	One which stimulates the individual to strive against others for a goal object of which he hopes to be the sole principle possessor.
Mead (1937)	*Competition*	The act of seeking or endeavoring to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time.
Khuddoos (2006)	*Competition (Economic)*	The effort of two or more parties acting independently to win the business of a third party.
Kohn (1992)	*Amoral Competition*	*The survival instinct* where competition is biologically motivated and results in behaviors that are neither good nor bad, but are directed towards the survival of species, or for acts of self-defense.
Williamson (1975)	*Internal Competition*	Two or more business units compete with each other for capital resources or customers.
Kohn (1992)	*Process Competition*	Within the confines of a competition. An in-the-moment experience of struggling for superiority sometimes seen as an end itself, rather than a step towards the final victory (i.e., a set of downs within the game of football).
Kohn (1992)	*Intentional Competition*	An attitude; The inclination to be better than others – a matter of values and self-esteem. One's proclivity to be better than others.
Kohn (1992)	*Structural Competition*	A situation dealing with the win-lose framework; characterized by mutually exclusive goal attainment.
Begon, Harper & Townsend (1996)	*Intraspecific Competition*	Occurs when members of the same species vie for the same resources in an ecosystem.

Other social theorists define competition as a situation which stimulates the individual to strive against others for a goal object of which he hopes to be the sole principle possessor (Maller, 1929). Mead's (1937) definition of competition is less restricting: the act of seeking or endeavoring to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time. Mead's definition avoids the concept of being the "sole" possessor, widening the concept.

In economics, competition is defined in business terms as the effort of two or more parties acting independently to secure or win the business of a third party by offering the most favorable terms (Khuddoos, 2006). Competition is viewed as the pillar of capitalism and the means by which innovation is stimulated and efficiencies are enabled, allowing for equilibrium between supply and demand and the driving down of prices. In effect, capitalism is justified because of competitive environments. The purest form of competition occurs when resources are allocated most efficiently, usually with many competitors in the field, offering a variety of products to consumers. This is quite the case in most Westernized civilizations. Economic theory stipulates that companies compete as a natural force of the free market system. Within the same theory, assumptions about how consumers respond to supply and demand fluctuations are made without much consideration for many tenets of consumer behavior such as preferences or attitudes. Only recently have researchers begun to explore the "human" effect of supply and demand (e.g. Lynn, 1989, 1991, 1992).

In sports, *competition* is meant to describe a formalized instance of rivalry against an opponent or opposing team. This is also referred to as *intergroup* competition (Kohn, 1992). In most cases, competition results in a clear distinction between winners and losers. Sport competition may also surface internally within a team; i.e. athletes competing for a starting position. This situation begets the term *intragroup* competition (Kohn, 1992). The free market

system and sports are good examples of competitive contexts that are generally socially accepted. Other notable environments where competition exists is amidst politics, education and among siblings.

The overarching commonality to the definitions of competition and competitive situations is the inclusion of scarce resources: i.e. food, shelter, territory, possessions, notoriety, customers, winning etc... The subject of scarcity will be reviewed in subsequent sections.

Classifying competition

Competitions can be formal, as in sporting events or wars between rival nations, or informal, as in competing for the best grade on a course exam, or advertising wars between the Coke and Pepsi brands. Similarly, competitions in consumption situations are both formal, as in auctions or bidding on real estate, or informal, as when trying to get in line ahead of other shoppers at the grocery store or using products to compete with others for social status. These examples show that consumers compete for both ownership of tangible goods, and non-tangibles like time or prestige. Classification of competition will become useful when studying consumer competition because consumers may differ in how they interpret or respond to a situation based on its degree of formality.

What is Competitiveness?

Competition invokes the presence of competiveness, whether between firms, species, nations, teams, or individuals. Because the focus of this dissertation is on consumers, the following section will review different conceptualizations of competitiveness that apply to consumers as individuals, rather than as aggregates, which is implied in economics, sociology,

ecology and other studies of intra-group functioning. A summary of definitions is shown in Table 2 (p. 26).

Competitiveness is an important individual difference that influences a range of social interactions (Gough, 1987) and is thought to become relevant every time individuals interact (Smither & Houston, 1992). Competitiveness is often viewed from an individual perspective as *trying to be better than others*. It has been defined as the desire to win in interpersonal situations (Griffin-Pierson, 1990; Helmreich & Spence, 1978; Smither & Houston, 1992), and is often associated with aggressiveness and achievement motivation (Murray, 1938; McClelland, 1976; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Despite the noted relevance to a wide variety of situations, competitiveness has only recently received heightened empirical attention as a personality characteristic.

Although competiveness is described as an attitude, a social orientation, a motivation/need, and a general personality trait, it is typically treated in one consistent manner: as an antecedent or indicator to a prescribed outcome or behavior. The remainder of this section will delineate types of competitiveness that are identified in the literature, directing the use of these "types" as distinct individual differences.

Types of competitive attitudes

There are three primary types of competitive attitudes: (1) personal development competitive attitudes, (2) interpersonal competitive attitudes, and (3) hypercompetitive attitudes. These are summarized in Table 3 (p. 27). Each will be discussed in turn.

Table 2 *Definitions of Competitiveness*

Citations	Term	Definition
Helmreich & Spence (1978)	Competitiveness	The desire to win in interpersonal situations The enjoyment of interpersonal competition and the desire to win and be better than others.
Hibbard (2000) Griffin-Pierson (1990) Rawsthorne & Elliot (1999)	Interpersonal Competitiveness	Disposition for superiority over rivals for limited resources ; A need to feel superior in order to feel good about one's self; Competence relevant to the performance of others
Griffin-Pierson (1990); Ryckman (1996); Kayhan (2003)	Personal Development Competitiveness (mastery or goal competitiveness)	Mastering tasks or exceeding one's own level of performance, rather than on winning over others. The focus is on the goal or task rather than on others.
Horney (1937); Ryckman et al (1996)	Hyper-competitiveness	An extreme form of interpersonal competitiveness. An indiscriminant need to compete and win at any costs: characterized by manipulation, exploitation, derogation of others.
Smither & Houston (1992)	Competitiveness	Competitiveness requires the perceived presence of a rival or group of competitors who serve as performance standards for the individual.
Jones &Swain (1992; 1995)	Sport Competitiveness	The desire to enter and strive for success in sport competition.
Martin & Larsen (1976)	Competitive Attitude	Encompassing characteristics of Machiavellianism, values of winning are more important than being honest and use relationships as a way to attain other goals

Table 3 *Three Types of Competitive Attitudes*

Mastery Competitiveness	**Interpersonal Competitiveness**	**Hyper-Competitiveness**
Focus on achievement and performance improvement	Focus on winning	Focus on winning
Measures ones-self by a global or absolute personal standard. Others are not considered.	Measures ones-self against others. Social comparison likely	Measure ones-self only by the ability to win over others
Tend to choose tasks that are challenging	Tend to choose tasks when the likelihood of winning is high	Tend to choose tasks in order to win or overcome others.
Losing is not absolute	Losing is absolute, but psychological effects are not harmful	Losing is absolute: often results in low self esteem, dissatisfaction with the self and depression
Bettering myself is important	Winning is important, some cooperative tendencies may still be present	Win at all costs, regardless of harm to others
Primarily intrinsically motivated	Primarily extrinsically motivated, but not exclusive of intrinsic rewards	Highly extrinsically motivated. The payoff or reward motivates behavior

Personal Development competitive attitude

A *personal development* competitive attitude (PDCA; Ryckman et al, 1990, 1994, 1996) is considered a healthy type of competitive attitude that is intrinsically motivated and geared towards positive achievement and reaching goals. This type of attitude focuses primarily on enjoyment and mastery of tasks, rather than on winning over others (Ryckman et al, 1996). Such competitors are more concerned with self-discovery, self-improvement, and task-mastery than "winning". However, other people may continue to play a valuable role because they are viewed as helpers who provide the individual with learning and personal discovery opportunities. Those guided by personal development competitive attitudes still want to win and achieve success, but not at the expense of others. This attitude is synonymous with the terms *mastery* and *goal competitiveness* (Griffin-Pierson, 1990; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999).

Reliable scales measuring PDCA have been used extensively in psychological research, most notably Ryckman et al's (1996) personal development competitive attitude scale. Griffin-Pierson (1990) also developed a measure of mastery competitiveness, but it was found to have low internal reliability (< .50). Subsequently, Kayhan (2003) combined items from the PDCA and the mastery competitiveness scales to form the Personal Mastery Survey. The 15-item measure was found to have high internal reliability (.81), however it has not received extended use in research endeavors beyond Kayhan's study.

Interpersonal competitive attitude

An *interpersonal competitive* attitude reflects the generally accepted definition of competitiveness; one that focuses on winning over others. It has also been described as a disposition for superiority, or a way to gain superiority over rivals for limited resources (Hibbard, 2000), and characterized by a need to feel superior to others in order to feel good about

one's self and affirm one's self worth (Kayhan, 2003). This attitude focuses on being better than others, winning in interpersonal situations, and enjoyment of interpersonal competition (Griffin-Pierson, 1990; Helmreich & Spence, 1978, 1983). The focus in interpersonal competitiveness can be on reaching performance goals, or those that demonstrate competence relative to the performance of others (Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999). An interpersonal competitive attitude is considered opposite to those that are cooperative (Deutch, 1949; Martin & Larsen, 1976). In such descriptions, competitive attitudes are perceived to be a negative attribute, sometimes compared to Machiavellianism, when compared with cooperative attitudes (Martin & Larsen, 1976).

Psychometric scales measuring interpersonal competitive attitudes are multiple, however, they are generally found to have high internal consistency, e.g. the competitive subscale of the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (WOFO; Helmreich & Spence, 1978), the Competitive Index (CI; Smither & Houston, 1992), and the Interpersonal Competitiveness subscale of the Competitiveness Questionnaire (CQ; Griffin-Pierson, 1990).

Hypercompetitive attitude

A *Hypercompetitive* attitude (Horney, 1937) is an extreme form of interpersonal competitiveness. Sometimes undistinguished from general interpersonal competitiveness (e.g. Martin & Larsen, 1976; Kayhan, 2003) this extreme competitive attitude is considered unhealthy, detrimental to personality development, and potentially leading to destructive behavior. Martin and Larsen's (1976) concept of competitiveness is actually more descriptive of hypercompetitiveness than general interpersonal competitiveness because of their highly negative view of the attitude and the focus on "win at any costs." In fact, Martin and Larsen's (1976) measure of competitive attitudes consists of items found to classify as factors of

aggressiveness, fascist tendencies, and power orientation (i.e. "people who get in my way end up paying for it," "the best way to get someone to do something is to use force," "it is alright to do something to someone to get even," "I don't trust very many people," "your loss is my gain," "losers are inferior," etc…).

Hypercompetitiveness describes individuals who have an indiscriminant need to compete and win at any cost as a way to enhance feelings of self-worth, often by means of manipulation, aggressiveness, exploitation, and derogation of others across a wide set of situations (Horney, 1937; Ryckman et al, 1990, 1994, 1997). This form of competitiveness is believed, by Horney, to be a result of highly individualized societies. To distinguish this attitude from general interpersonal competitiveness, hypercompetitiveness integrates a high level of aggressiveness and sometimes obsession within competitive situations, often resulting in forms of neurosis. Horney's belief was that this extreme type of attitude towards achievement is learned through exposure to highly competitive, achievement-oriented cultures, rather than part of one's genetic makeup. Some social psychologists share this view (e.g. Kohn, 1992).

Based on Horney's theory of neurosis, Ryckman et al (1990) constructed the hypercompetitive attitude scale (HCA). The scale was found to have high internal and test-retest reliability, and studies employing the scale found those high in hypercompetitiveness to be less psychologically healthy, displaying low self-esteem and high levels of dogmatism and mistrust of others (Ryckman et al, 1990). Research also suggests that hypercompetitive individuals are narcissistic and often pursue success in such a way that they feel dissatisfied with their actual achievements (Ryckman et al, 1994). A scale measuring the *win at all costs* attitude in sports was developed by Sukhdial et al. (2002).

Summary of competitiveness measures

From the summary of definitions, it is clear that researchers studying the nature of competitiveness often differ in the valence of their definition; some are positive, others negative (Kildea, 1983). This led to questions regarding the construct validity of competitiveness measures and whether or not they were measuring the same thing. To address this question, Houston et al (2002) conducted a factor analysis of ten scales measuring competitiveness, finding them to be highly inter-correlated, and resulting in a two-factor solution. The results suggest that competitiveness is a multi-dimensional construct comprised of superiority and success. Therefore, superiority competitive attitudes may be placed on validating one's self worth in comparison to others (negative attitude towards losing and being a loser) and emphasizing the benefits one may gain from a successful competitive experience, i.e. enjoyment of competing with others and learning about one's own abilities (Houston et al, 2002). Identifying two dimensions of an interpersonal competitive attitude demonstrates the need for more precise definitions and measures of competitiveness, and raises questions about the validity of widely used global competitiveness measures across contexts. It also questions the appropriateness of employing general competitiveness measures in studies of consumer competition, supporting the need to address objective four stated in chapter one.

Competitiveness as a measure of individual difference

The preceding discussion of *what is competitiveness* ultimately describes competitiveness as an individual difference, or disposition that can be used to explain variations in behavior. Behaviors are viewed, in part, as a result of personality characteristics that drive people to act in one way or another in given situations. This is at the heart of the state-trait debate that has prevailed in psychological literature for many years. Personality psychologists have long

contemplated the relationship, or lack thereof, between traits (internal dispositions) and situations in determining behavior. Personality traits are "consistent patterns of thought, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another (Johnson, 1997, p. 74)." Theorists generally assume that traits are relatively stable over time, differ among individuals, and influence behavior. Most have come to an agreement that behavior is a function of both traits and situational contexts, where an interaction occurs to produce behaviors (McAdams, 1997). This *interactional strategy* assumes a unidirectional relationship between personality-situation and behavior such that behavior could only be the product of the interaction between personality and situation.

Most recently, a *dynamic interactional strategy* has surmounted, viewing behavioral consistency as "the product of the *reciprocal* causal relation between personality and environment (Ickes, Snyder, & Garcia, 1997, p. 167)." This dynamic interactional strategy presumes that behaviors will repeat themselves within generally similar situations because individuals learn from experiences. Social psychology and personality researchers (e.g. Allport, 1937; Bandura, 1982; Bowers, 1973; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986) predominantly agree that it is likely individuals choose to be in situations that provide the best "fit" with their own personality (Ickes et al, 1997).

Although core personality studies focus on the inherent "nature" of individuals irrespective of external influences, a "nurture" element of competitiveness is also recognized. For example, Monsaas and Engelhard (1990) found that individuals tended to be more competitive when raised in home environments that highly valued, modeled, and rewarded competitiveness. This is also the view of social theorists who contend that competitiveness is derived from social experiences, rather than from innate personal tendencies. There is however,

a level of agreement that one's social environment and learning structures assist in the development of competitive attitudes and tendencies within individuals. The need compete, as described by Mowen (2000) reflects this assumption.

The need to compete

Mowen (2000, p. 83) describes the need to compete as an "important evolutionary-based personality construct," one which is required in order to operate in a world of scarce resources. Mowen (2000) defines competitiveness, or the need to compete, as a compound trait; one that emerges from the interplay of more basic traits, culture, subculture, and an individual learning history. He suggests that the need for arousal is an antecedent of competitiveness, and that people can evolve into competitive beings, as well as un-evolve. The need to compete is considered a prevalent motivation and driving force of many behaviors. It has been especially linked to sports participation, sports interest and attendance of sporting events. Generally, the need to compete is perceived as a relatively stable personality trait. Mowen's measure of the need to compete indicates high correlation to general competitiveness measures, but the need to compete scale does not necessarily distinguish between the three types of competitive attitudes. The need to compete scale is comprised of four items. Each item is measured on a nine point scale ranging from never to always. Participants respond to how often they feel (act) in a certain way (enjoy competition more than others; feel that it is important to outperform others; enjoy testing my abilities against others; feel that winning is extremely important). The scale is reported to have a coefficient alpha score of .89 (Mowen, 2000).

Summary of competitiveness

Competitiveness exists in several forms. Three general competitive attitudes are identifiable: interpersonal, personal development, and hypercompetitiveness. Trait competitiveness and the need to compete suggest that there are distinct differences between individuals who are highly competitive versus those who are not, and that these differences may lead to variations in behavior. *Trait competitiveness* and a strong need to compete are terms used to describe interpersonal competitiveness, i.e., individuals who have a proclivity to strive to be better than others. Following the dynamic interactional strategy of traits, researchers have attempted to delineate trait competitiveness along numerous types of situations, often reporting gender differences.

For example, studies employing trait competitiveness measures generally reports males to have higher competitiveness scores than females (e.g. Bone & Mowen, 2006; Deaner, 1996; Frederick, 2000; Helmreich & Spence, 1983; Houston et al, 2005; Lynn, R., 1993). Deaner (2006) concluding that males are generally more competitive than females in sport contests, suggests that this finding might be due to two main socio-cultural factors: (1) a male focus on dominance and egocentrism and (2) evolved predispositions. This finding is partially re-iterated by Lynn (1993) in a cross-cultural study of twenty countries. He finds that in general, men score higher than women in competitiveness and in the valuation of money, and that these measures are positively correlated. The higher scores on the two measures are ascribed to the fact that in many societies money is viewed as a symbol of success, a desirable symbol in many cultures. In a study of American, Chinese, and Japanese students, Houston et al (2005) report that across countries males report a higher enjoyment of competition than females, but that overall, Americans report higher enjoyment of competition than their Asian counterparts.

Specifically, trait competitiveness has been found to correlate negatively with college student grade point averages (Frederick, 2000; Spence & Helmreich, 1983), internal locus of control (Frederick, 2000) national wealth and personal income (Furnham, Kirkcaldy, & Lynn, 1994).

Trait competitiveness is also frequently employed in personal selling research. Endeavors report that competitiveness is related to goal setting and performance (Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1998; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002), and may increase learning effort in competitive sales situations (Wang & Netemeyer, 2002).

General competitiveness has been found to be predictive of extreme behaviors like pathological gambling (Parke et al, 2004), but not necessarily to recreational gambling (Mowen, 2004). Parke et al (2004) purport that this can be explained by Goffman's (1982) *deprivation-compensation* theory. The theory infers that individuals will exercise competitive instincts in opportune situations because the stability of modern society no longer creates situations to test competitive instincts. This raises propositions about the motivations and likelihood of individuals to exercise competitive behaviors in consumption situations. Do individuals use consumption situations as an outlet to test competitive instincts?

Houston et al (2002) examined the competitiveness trait by its relationship to other psychological constructs, finding that three constructs relate to the definition of competitiveness: leadership, need for achievement, and cooperation. Hypercompetitiveness has been found to relate to values of social power, including domination over others and weak concern for others (Ryckman et al, 1997).

Summarizing *what is competition* and *what is competitiveness* support the notion that competitiveness has socio-cultural influences, may be context-specific, and can be classified as

an individual difference characteristic or trait. The review of psychometric measures of competitiveness also suggests a need for context-specific measures of competitiveness that are capable of reflecting its multi-dimensionality across various situations. Such instruments in the consumer domain are non-existent.

Why Do Individuals Compete?

Clearly, competitions exist between individuals, and competitiveness is present within individuals to some degree. Although general trait measures of competitiveness suggest individuals differ in the degree of competitiveness, which may indicate a proclivity to enter competitive situations, there is much to be said about *why* people do or do not enjoy competitions, and why they may be motivated to exercise competitive behaviors.

This section addresses three major themes. First, the roles of achievement, social orientations, and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation will be discussed in light of competitiveness. Second, the relationship of competitiveness to performance outcomes will be reviewed. Third, preliminary assumptions about why consumers compete are discussed. The section concludes by presenting theories that assist in explaining why individuals, and consumers specifically, may be driven to compete.

Achievement motivation and social orientations

The achievement motive, or the need to achieve, has been closely linked to the concept of competitiveness. Research streams preceding those focusing dominantly on competitiveness use competitive orientations to help explain differences among individuals in the need to achieve or achievement motivations (e.g. Helmreich & Spence, 1983; Murray, 1938). Murray suggested that competitive attitudes are characteristic of the need to achieve. Achievement is "task

oriented behavior that allows the individual's performance to be evaluated according to some internally or externally imposed criterion, that involves the individual in competing with others, or that otherwise involves some standard of excellence (Spence & Helmreich, 1983, p. 12)." This definition encompasses behaviors that occur in settings with generally agreed upon standards with which to judge one's performance, as well as those behaviors that occur outside of a structured performance measure. Therefore, achievement has the ability to reflect both personal development and interpersonal competitiveness.

In spite of the definitional interweave of achievement and competitiveness, Helmreich and his colleagues overtly established that competitiveness and achievement are two distinct constructs, having the ability to reflect both very different as well as complimentary behaviors in individuals.

Competitive vs. cooperative social orientations

In social situations individuals are often faced with considering their own welfare with respect to the welfare of others. In these circumstances individuals are thought to encompass a predominant type of social value orientation: either competitive or cooperative. Competitive social values are egoistic towards weighting one's own outcomes positively and others' negatively (Platow & Shave, 1999). Individuals with more cooperative social values are non-egoistic and desire achievement for the entire group. Cross-cultural research suggests that there are differences in competitive/cooperative social values in relation to achievement motivation, noting that those with competitive social values have higher achievement motivations than those with cooperative social values (Kagan & Knight, 1981).

Extant literature classifies competitive social orientations in individuals as a major component of achievement motivation (Platow & Shave, 1999). In particular, interpersonal

competition and competitive attitudes are believed to be prominent components of achievement motivations and the need to achieve (Helmreich & Spence, 1978; Murray, 1938; Murray, 1976; Pluto & Shave, 1999). However, achievement motives have also been found to relate strongly to strivings for personal success and task-mastery (personal development competitiveness) in situations where performance is not conditional upon relevant others (Helmreich & Spence, 1978)

Both interpersonal and personal development, or mastery, competitiveness suggests some type of achievement goal: to win against others, to overcome a task or personal goal, or a combination of the two. However, research also suggests that individuals are motivated to choose behaviors in order to avoid failure (Atkinson, 1981). Perhaps *keeping up with the Jones'* is a relevant example of why consumers compete to avoid failure. Reaching the status quo can be an important part of social reputation. Individuals who wish to be seen as *equal to* others, as opposed to *better than* others may be motivated to compete only to avoid social failure. Atkinson suggests that individuals who are more motivated to avoid failure than to achieve are also more likely to select easy tasks to challenging ones in order to reduce the risk and anxiety of failure.

Gender differences in achievement

Like competitiveness, research in the area of achievement predicates that men and women differ in their achievement motives with relation to competition. Especially in Western societies males value publically achieved success more than females (Kipnis, 1974; Veroff, 1977) and increase their achievement motivations in reaction to public competition (Veroff, Wilcox, & Atkinson, 1953). This effect is not as strong outside of the public domain. On the other hand, women tend to define achievement and success in terms of the process, rather than

the reward of overcoming or winning over others (Helmreich & Spence, 1978; Kidd & Woodman, 1975; Veroff, 1977). This competitiveness gender difference raises interesting questions in terms of its potential influence in the consumer domain. For example, it may suggest that men and women employ competitiveness to meet different consumption-related needs. Women may desire to feel good about the manner in which they go about acquiring an item, whereas men are more concerned with only the end result: acquire or not.

The role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in competitiveness

Competitive behaviors are influenced by either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations.

Intrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations induce particular behaviors based on the enjoyment or challenge of a task itself, regardless of any social payoff or reward (Binney, Hall, & Oppenheim, 2006), even though a reward or payoff may be involved. Intrinsic motivations are those that may be more stable across contexts where individuals focus on striving towards performance excellence. These motivations are fundamentally unselfish and are not normally associated with an external reward as the primary goal outcome, however they may result in extrinsic gratification. For example, one who strives to perform exceptionally well at their job may also find gratification in knowing they are valued as an employee. In time this may result in a pay raise or promotion. Personal development competitive goals are typically considered to be driven by intrinsic motivations.

A highly regarded intrinsic motivation related to competition participation is that of self-esteem. Self-esteem (low self-esteem in particular) is proposed to motivate people to compete because individuals with low self-esteem may view competitions as an opportunity to compensate for impressions of personal inadequacy (Kohn, 1992). However, research indicates that high self-esteem is related both to general competitiveness (Rosenberg, 1965), especially

when the cultural norm is competitive rather than cooperative (e.g. Kagan & Knight, 1979), and to personal development competitiveness (Ryckman et al, 1996).

Extrinsic motivations. In contrast, extrinsic motivations are those that drive individuals to achieve and perform at high levels in order to have tangible or intangible rewards, and are often materialistic or self-aggrandizing in nature. Extrinsic motivations induce individuals to partake in certain activities and/or adopt behaviors that gives them access to, or win, incentives or external rewards (Johnmarshall, 2001; Urdan, 2003), or to possibly avoid a negative consequence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Interpersonal competitive goals are typically more extrinsically motivated because they focus on winning over others or gaining access to a reward. Hypercompetitive attitudes are considered highly extrinsic in nature.

The relationship of motivation to competitive attitudes. Despite their contrasting goal orientation, interpersonal and personal development competitive attitudes are not deemed to be mutually exclusive (Griffin-Pierson, 1990), and both may be either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Therefore, an individual can exhibit varying levels of each attitude within different contexts. For example, a person who runs marathons may be highly competitive against other runners, enjoy the racing environment, and have a strong desire to win against them. At the same time, the runner may be competing with herself for a personal best time, therefore motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic goals. The same runner my find herself in other life situations where she does not feel the need to win over others or to strive for personal excellence.

Performance-competitiveness relationship

Regardless of the active motivation that drives competitive behavior, many competitive situations are predicated on achieving a goal or desired result, of which performance may be a key outcome variable. In fact, in Deutsch's (1949) theory of competition and cooperation, views

winning from the perspective of goal relationships, rather than that of instinctual concepts. Performance levels are especially noteworthy in sports, personal selling and education. In running the goal may be to win the race or perform the best possible time relative to others in the field. In sales the goal may be to earn large commissions or sell many units. In education the goal may be to achieve a high GPA. Despite hypotheses that individuals who are highly competitive outperform those who are less competitive, research results remain ambiguous and inconclusive (e.g. Gould, Petlichkoff, & Weinberg, 1984; Jones G. A., 1995; Krane & Williams, 1987; Martens et al, 1990). While some research suggests that this hypothesis can be supported in certain contexts such as situations classified as "work" (Helmreich &Spence, 1983) or when measuring salespersons' performance orientation (Harris, Mowen, & Brown, 2005), other studies reflect the opposite: individuals low in competitiveness perform better (Carsrun & Olm, 1986).

To date, research suggests that the relationship between competitiveness and performance is curvilinear, where those high and low in competitiveness are most successful in reaching goals such as high GPA and sales performance (Valenti, 2006). This suggests that the competitiveness-performance relationship may be susceptible to several moderating and/or mediating variables such as learning effort, self-efficacy (e.g. Wang & Netemeyer, 2002), or facilitative versus debilitative anxiety (Jones, 1995). While a general consensus is that performance outcomes are optimum within a certain range of competitive arousal or anxiety, the extremes of high and low competitive anxiety are also undistinguishable in relationship to performance prediction (Jones, 1995). Anxiety will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

Critics of some of these studies suggest that measures of successful performance (i.e. win vs. lose) are too global in nature to capture competitiveness effects (Jones, 1995). As such, competitiveness and performance in consumption contexts should be evaluated individually with

respect to consumers because successful (or high level) performance is likely to be defined independently by each consumer, varying greatly from one situation and consumer to the next. Consequently, addressing performance in consumer competition may be synonymous with goal setting and goal achievement. This will also be discussed in forthcoming sections.

Theoretical explanations

To date, consumer competition has scarcely been considered within theoretical frameworks. However, several theories offer explanatory power for why consumers may exhibit competitive behaviors, and why they may experience feelings of competitiveness. Trait theory predicts that individual differences in attitudes, motivations and behavior are attributed to stable structures of personality. The preceding discussion of competitiveness is formulated predominantly on the concept of competitiveness as a trait that varies from person to person. Social comparison theory suggests individuals desire to know *how they are doing* compared to relevant others. These comparisons may lead to feelings of competitiveness and competitive behaviors. Since competitive tendencies are related to achievement and conquering challenges, cognitive evaluation theory explains competitiveness based on intrinsic motivations. Each of these theories will be discussed.

Trait theory

Trait theory is a widely employed, longstanding approach to personality research. Personality is a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in various situations (Ryckman, 2004). Personality traits are "consistent patterns of thought, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another (Johnson, 1997, p. 74)." Personality theory generally predicts that traits

are relatively stable over time, differ among individuals, and influence behavior. A longstanding tradition in many research fields, trait theory suggests that although personality differences are generally stable over time, they are likely to vary in intensity from situation to situation. The wide acceptance of research programs employing traits is due, in part, to the use of scientifically sound scales that create reliable and valid measures of individual differences (Mowen, 2000). Trait theory is not without its critics, but even strong opponents suggest that traits are important constructs for perceivers, helping them to organize perceptions of others (Mischel, 1973). With this in mind, individuals who perceive others as competitive may unknowingly activate their own competitiveness.

Whether inspecting personal development, interpersonal, or hypercompetitiveness, the majority of competitiveness research within sport, organizational and consumer-related research employs a trait theoretic approach (e.g. Angst et al, 2008; Frederick, 2000; Jones et al, 1997; Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Krishnan, Netemeyer, & Boles, 2002; Lynn R., 1993; Ku et al, 2004; Mowen, 2004; Parke et al, 2004; Wang & Netemeyer, 2002).

Much of trait theory research employs either the three-factor (Eysenck, 1967) or five-factor model (McCrae & Costa, 1987) of personality. These models offer high-level factors of personality that are unique from temporary states. Beyond the three and five factor models several theorists also propose that traits are hierarchical based on their level of abstractness (Allport, 1961; Eysenck, 1967; Joachimsthaler & Lastovicka, 1984). A hierarchical model affords a firmer place for competitiveness within consumption contexts because it is accepted as a situation-based trait. Founded on the trait theory approach, Mowen and Spears (1999) proposed a hierarchical model of personality for which general competitiveness is a central tenet,

and consumer competitiveness can be easily distinguished. Mowen (2000) formalized this model as the meta-theoretic model of motivation and personality, or the 3M Model.

The 3M model of motivation. The meta-theoretic model of motivation and personality (3M) outlines four hierarchical levels of personality traits that may influence consumer behaviors: elemental, compound, situational and surface traits. Elemental traits are those that arise from genetics and early learning history. These include the basic five factor model traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeability, and neuroticism) as well three others believed to be the most abstract: material needs, need for arousal and body needs. Compound traits result from the effects of multiple elemental traits, learning history and culture. They are proposed to provide direct guidance for achieving tasks. Situational traits are those that result from the joint effects of elemental and compound traits as well as a specific situational context. Surface traits occur as a result of person, by situation, by product category interactions. Competitiveness is deemed a compound trait within this hierarchy (Mowen, 2000), however, when juxtaposed within a consumption context consumer competitiveness is presumed to fit within a situational trait definition, and possibly a surface trait.

The 3M hierarchical approach is employed in several streams of consumer research including the development of a model to explain online shopping behavior (Bosnjak, Galesic, & Tuten, 2007) understand how consumers receive marketplace information (Mowen et al, 2007), identify motivations for types of travel (Scott & Mowen, 2007), predict credit card misuse (Pirog & Roberts, 2007) understand volunteering orientation (Mowen & Sujan, 2005) and investigate specific consumption domains in which competitiveness impacts behavior (Mowen, 2004).

Social comparison theory

Individuals engage in social comparison as a part of everyday social living, and individuals may compete because of a natural inclination to compare to others.

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) posits that individuals seek to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to standards in order to "gain self-knowledge and discover reality about themselves (Mettee & Smith, 1977, p. 169)." Social comparison is "the process of thinking about information about one or more people in relation to the self (Wood, 1989, p. 520)." As Wood (1996) points out, *thinking about* does not necessarily refer to cognitive processes or conscious thought, and *relation to the self* refers only to finding some similarity or difference, no matter how small or seemingly trivial, between one's self and another. From this definition it may become clear as to the inevitability for individuals to engage in social comparison. In developing measures and a definition of competitiveness, Smither and Houston (1992) note that comparison is a central theme. While developing their competitive index measure, they explain that "competitiveness requires the perceived presence of a rival or group of competitors who serve as performance standards for the individual (p. 408)."

Two types of social comparisons. There are two recognized types of social comparison: (1) upward and (2) downward. Upward social comparison occurs when individuals perceive others to be socially better on some aspect their own ability or attribute (Collins, 1996; Johnson & Stapel, 2007; Karlsson et al, 2004). This direction of comparison is thought to be ego-deflating since the comparison process would normally make individuals feel worse or undervalued on some aspect of themselves (Tesser, 1988; Wheeler, 1966; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992; Wheeler, 1962), however Buunk et al, (1990) followed by Collins (1996), showed that upward comparisons may also result in positive self-regard. Typical examples of ego-deflating

upward comparisons include comparing one's self to a target person who has performed better on tests, has superior physical abilities such as running speed, or is believed to be of higher economic status. The comparison target may be chosen for many reasons, but generally comparison targets are chosen based on salient features of abilities or opinions, combined with the motive of the comparison process (self improvement, self-evaluation or self-enhancement), and subject to numerous moderating factors.

Downward social comparisons occur when individuals compare themselves to a comparison target whom is perceived to be less fortunate or *worse off* on some aspect (Wills, 1981; Zhou & Soman, 2003). Individuals can increase their subjective well-being and enhance feelings of self-worth through comparison with a less fortunate other (Wills, 1981; 1991). In Wheeler's (1962) classic study, participants took a test and afterwards were given the opportunity to choose to view another participant's score; either one whose score was higher, or one whose score was lower than their own. Overwhelmingly, participants chose to view another participant's test score that was lower than their own in order to enhance self-worth. Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983) and Wood, Taylor, and Lichtman (1985) have demonstrated this downward social comparison process using in-depth interviews with breast cancer patients. Those patients who used downward comparisons often referred to how poorly other patients were recovering or coping in comparison to themselves.

The literature and research to date suggest that upward social comparisons are more fitting to individuals actively competing in order to meet a designated standard, whereas downward social comparisons are fitting to those who believe they have achieved some kind of competitive advantage above and beyond that which has been achieved by others. Within consumer behavior, upward and downward comparisons might reflect pre-purchase and post-

purchase states. For example, consumers may engage in upward comparisons when they observe others owning a product that they also wish to own. Subsequently, they may engage in downward comparisons when they have acquired a product that they believe others may also wish to own, but do not. Potentially, upward comparisons that lead to heightened desire for product ownership increases the likelihood for consumers to experience competitive consumption thoughts and behaviors.

Social comparison motives. Three primary motivations drive individuals to employ social comparisons: self-evaluation, self-enhancement, and self-improvement (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Self-evaluation is a "hypothetical construct representing the relative worth individuals attach to themselves or that they believe others attach to them (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983, p. 672)." It is believed that under circumstances of self-evaluation, comparisons are usually with similar rather than with dissimilar others (Wood, 1989). In contrast, self-enhancement is thought to be prompted by some kind of threat to self-esteem, and thus, is an individual's biased attempt to maintain positive views of him/herself in order to protect or enhance self-esteem (Martin & Gentry, 1997). It is thought that self-enhancement may be best accomplished by downward social comparisons (Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995; Wills, 1981). The third motive, self-improvement, is defined as "an individual's attempt to learn how to improve or to be inspired to improve a particular attribute (Martin & Gentry, 1997, p. 23)." This motive is generally associated with upward comparisons, may be culture specific and is thought to only apply to the comparison of abilities (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

Social comparison direction. There are two underlying and fundamental directions of social comparisons: assimilation and contrast (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000). Assimilations are directed towards evaluating one's self in terms of fitting-in or becoming similar to a comparison

target or targets. Contrast social comparisons occur when individuals conduct a selective search for information indicating differences between a target and the self. Recent research has addressed individual differences in competitive versus cooperative thinking styles in relation to social comparison directions. Preliminary findings suggest that individuals who are competitively oriented focus on contrasting self-evaluative social comparisons while those who are more cooperative focus on assimilative self-evaluative comparisons (Stapel & Koomen, 2005).

In summary, social comparison theory offers a wide range of postulates for which to examine consumer competition, while raising many questions. For example, with whom do consumers choose to compare themselves and why? When do consumers employ upward versus downward social comparison processes, and how does this influence competitiveness in the consumer domain? Which of the three motives are most prevalent to encourage consumer competitiveness? How do consumers evaluate the results of competitive consumption situations in terms of other *competitors*?

Self-determination theory and cognitive evaluation theory

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET; Deci & Ryan, 1985) is a sub-theory to self-determination theory. According to SDT, a need for competence reflects the need to feel effective in one's efforts of achieving desired outcomes. Dealing with the effect of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation, the theory states that humans have an innate need to be competent, effective, and self-determining (Spence & Helmreich, 1983), which is the basis for intrinsic motivations underlying ongoing patterns in which people seek out and conquer challenges (Deci & Porac, 1978). CET argues that social-contextual events, such as feedback or

rewards that lead to feelings of competence during action, can enhance intrinsic motivation for that action (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In short, CET postulates that when considering a task, people evaluate the task in terms of its capability of meeting needs for competency and control. If the task appears to be accomplishable, individuals will be intrinsically motivated to complete it without any external reward. Studies have demonstrated (Fisher, 1978; Ryan, 1982), that feelings of competence lack the ability to enhance intrinsic motivation unless accompanied by a sense of internal perceived locus of causality (deCharms, 1968). Therefore, according to CET, "people must not only experience competence or efficacy, they must also experience their behavior as self-determined for intrinsic motivation to be in evidence (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70)." Sport motivation research that formerly assumed sports participation was motivated by extrinsic rewards of sport behavior (winning), now considers salient intrinsic motivations to be most influential in sport participation behavior.

CET asserts that there are two main ways extrinsic rewards affect intrinsic motivation. First, the extrinsic reward may have a controlling effect if it is perceived as the primary reason for participating in an activity. In consumption situations, there is virtually always some type of extrinsic reward, whether tangible (e.g. product ownership) or intangible (e.g. membership to an exclusive club). Second, the reward may serve as a source of information, which may affect the recipient's opinion of his own competence. For example, paying a low price may serve as a source of information that increases feelings of competency. Most rewards have both a controlling and informational aspect, and the combined effect may serve to either increase or decrease intrinsic motivation. Rewards that have mainly a controlling aspect tend to decrease

intrinsic motivation. (For an extensive review of SDT and CET see Rummel & Feinberg, 1988, or Ryan & Deci, 2000.)

CET can be applied to virtually any consumer behavior. For example, consumer research has employed CET to ascribe consumers' needs for creative experiences (Dahl & Moreau, 2007), and as a consideration for designing effective promotional games like sweepstakes and contests (Ward & Hill, 1991). Ward and Hill suggest that consumers' desires to be effective and self-determining are motivating factors that lead consumers to participate in games and contests, examples of formalized consumer competition.

Summarizing *why* individuals compete

In summary, individuals compete for numerous reasons. From the literature review, the rationale explaining competition participation may be supported primarily through theories of motivations and traits, combined with perceptions of the social world. Those who have high achievement or competency needs, combined with competitive social orientations, may be more motivated to enter and persist in competitions, as well as be more highly competitive in nature. Similarly, individuals who characteristically compare themselves to others may be more likely to compete in consumption contexts because of perceived social inequalities related to acquisition of goods or services. These relationships have not been empirically tested or established in consumer contexts.

When Do Individuals Compete?

Situations that foster competitions are wide-spread. Considering the state-trait relationship of situations and personality, drawing a fine line between *why* and *when* individuals compete is not necessarily required, and there is likely much overlap. However, for the purposes

of synthesizing competition and competitiveness, the distinction can be made. Therefore, this section will discuss situational and contextual circumstances which may foster, encourage, or create competition, as well as activate competitiveness within individuals and/or attract them to particular situations. Additional theories that help describe situations leading to competitive thoughts and behaviors are also presented.

Common goals

People may compete when there is a perceived common goal amongst a population. Students may compete with each other for the best ranking in the class, or to earn an award or recognition. Drivers compete for position on the road, oftentimes resulting in aggressive driving behavior (Bone & Mowen, 2006). In fact, competitive individuals are found to have more traffic violations to be more likely to become hostile while behind the wheel (Galovski & Blanchard, 2002). Thus, individuals compete when they perceive a chance of winning or achieving a goal or outcome that others also desire. In contrast to sporting events or formalized games or contests, exclusivity is not necessarily associated with the outcome, i.e., everyone may be able to reach the same consumption-related goal.

Perceived scarcity

Individuals may compete when they perceive resources to be scarce. Scarce resources have been identified as a primary driver of competition for species' and organizations alike. The discussion on Black Friday shopping and the Running of the Brides suggests that consumers compete when they are led to believe (by marketing communications) that product availability is limited, therefore restricting the amount of product or service to be enjoyed or acquired by everyone who wishes to own or experience it. These examples not only suggest that product

availability is limited, but that an attractive price attached to the product may also be scarce. Both of these tactics (product and price) are frequently employed by marketers (as discussed in chapter one).

Scarcity levels have been manipulated in experimental research, indicating that a scarcity effect can be achieved in several ways based on product type and type of message delivered to individuals (Stock & Balachander, 2005). Scarcity effects have also been shown to influence psychological adjustment, product preference and attitude, and purchase intent (e.g. Eisend, 2008; Lynn, 1989, 1992; Wu & Hsing, 2008).

Personal threat or fear

Individuals may compete when they feel threatened, or when perceiving their ability to choose being restricted. As described in chapter one, consumers may experience threats to personal welfare and safety. Commodity-type products like water, gasoline, milk and bread, necessary for sustenance and safety under conditions of natural disaster, may create circumstances when individuals perceive resources to be in scarce supply, and the probability that there is a common goal amongst a population to acquire these items. If individuals assume that having these items are necessary for survival, they may be more inclined and motivated to compete for them and make greater strides to acquire.

Individuals may also react competitively to situations when they perceive their ability or freedom to choose being threatened, even when unrelated to personal safety. This effect is the foundation for reactance theory (Brehm, 1966), which presumes that when individuals perceive a threat or loss of their freedoms to choose, behaviors manifest that are aimed at restoring the ability of free choice. Competing may be one of these behaviors. Reactance theory is subsumed under the general rubric of commodity theory (described in detail in following paragraphs), by

identifying a mechanism that drives scarcity effects (Brock & Mazzocco, 2003). Reactance theory posits that scarcity leads to increase desire for objects under circumstances where preexisting freedom of choice was in-tact.

Perceived opportunity to be *better than*

Individuals may compete when they perceive a situation to be better than others, or to improve some aspect of one's self. The preceding discussion on formality of the competition is useful here. If a competition is formal, like a sporting event, individuals may be motivated to compete in order to win over others. Individuals may also compete when they perceive any opportunity to be *better than* others, even when other people do not consider the situation to be competitive. Research in personal selling, education, and organizational behavior strongly suggests that individuals with competitive orientations are likely to perceive tasks as competitive and therefore compete with others, whereas individuals with cooperative orientations do not perceive the situation to be competitive (Brown et al, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Tjosvold, Johnson, Johnson, & Sun, 2003). In consumption contexts, individuals may perceive opportunities to be *better than* others by acquiring goods that carry high social status (Veblen, 1899), or when an opportunity to purchase an item at a *better price* than others presents itself (i.e. smart shopper feelings). Perhaps the need to beat or restrict others from purchasing an item is in itself perceived as a means to be *better than*, despite one's actual desire to own or acquire something.

Individuals may also compete when they perceive an opportunity to better themselves (e.g. personal development). When challenges become present, individuals may experience an increased desire to participate despite any participation by others.

Multiplicity of contextual influences

The preceding examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to pose potential examples that spur competitiveness in individuals, most specifically in consumers. Furthermore, these potential contextual influences on competing are not likely to be mutually exclusive. For example, scarcity and threat to choice may be concurrent. When an item is perceived to be scarce, consumers may feel a sense of urgency to acquire it because their ability to choose becomes threatened. Swain, Hannah and Abendroth (2006, p. 523) define *urgency* in terms of time scarcity as "a felt need to initiate and complete an act in the immediate or near future." Scarcity, and opportunity to *be better than,* may also occur simultaneously. Research in scarcity effects indicates that when items are in short supply, consumers perceive them to be more valuable and/or desirable, often times carrying higher levels of social status (Lynn, 1989). Scarcity effects will be addressed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Theoretical explanations

Two theories are particularly appropriate to help explain, contextually, *when* consumers may compete. By positing that individuals make mental predictions about the outcome of a behavior, expectancy theory provides a framework for the rationality individuals employ to determine *when* competing is worthwhile. Within a competitive context, individuals would increase or decrease the amount of effort to reach a desired outcome based on their expectation of the behavior in helping them achieve a desired outcome. Second, commodity theory provides a reason-based approach explaining *when* consumers may perceive situations as competitive. Commodity theory is premised largely on scarcity.

Expectancy theory of motivation

Expectancy Theory (VIE; Vroom, 1964) explains the underlying motivations between decision-making, goal striving, expectations and behavior. VIE has been applied almost exclusively in work-related behavior, however VIE is especially relevant to consumer competitiveness because it provides a lens with which to explore consumer decision making in light of predicted competitive outcomes, or probabilities of success. It can be used to examine decision making and behaviors within any of the situational examples provided above.

In its simplest form, the theory argues that individuals have preferences among outcomes based on three primary beliefs:

1. *(Valence)* People hold emotional orientations with respect to outcomes or rewards. These orientations hold a 'valence'.

2. *(Instrumentality)* Individuals hold perceptions regarding the likelihood of receiving or acquiring a desired outcome given the effort they need to expend. This perception is 'instrumental' in linking one outcome to another.

3. *(Expectancy)* Individuals have different 'expectations' and levels of confidence about their capabilities regarding a course of action needed to achieve an outcome or goal.

Strongly preferred outcomes are positively valent, while those to be avoided are negatively valent. These valences are rooted in individuals' relatively stable motives, which vary in strength within and across persons (Vroom, 2005). Unless individuals perceive or expect that actions will have an influence on attaining a positively valent outcome, or avoiding a negatively valent outcome, these valences will have no impact on a person's behavior.

Behaviorally, VIE states that individuals will act on the belief that increased effort will lead to increased performance. The relationship between outcome, effort, and behavior is shown in Figure 1 (p. 56). Therefore, individuals may compete *when* there is a strong belief that effort

put forth will increase the likelihood of reaching (avoiding) a positively (negatively) valent consumption-related goal.

VIE would suggest that people pursue competitive behaviors (with effort) because they believe them to be instrumental (or increase the probability) to reaching a valued outcome. When an outcome's valence changes, the amount of effort the individual is willing to put forth to reach a goal is reduced.

To further relate to consumer competition, the VIE perspective indicates that individuals will engage in a competitive consumption behavior if, and only if, they see the outcome as rewarding, desirable, and able to satisfy an important need, such that the effort required is considered worthwhile. Therefore, even highly competitive individuals may defer from competition when the value of the reward is not commiserate with the effort required to acquire it. Individuals seeking mastery or personal development competitive goals would engage in behaviors that they predict to have intrinsically rewarding outcomes (like pride or accomplishment) when values placed on these outcomes are high. Thus, VIE requires a degree of saliency for every ascribed situational outcome, regardless of one's competitive nature.

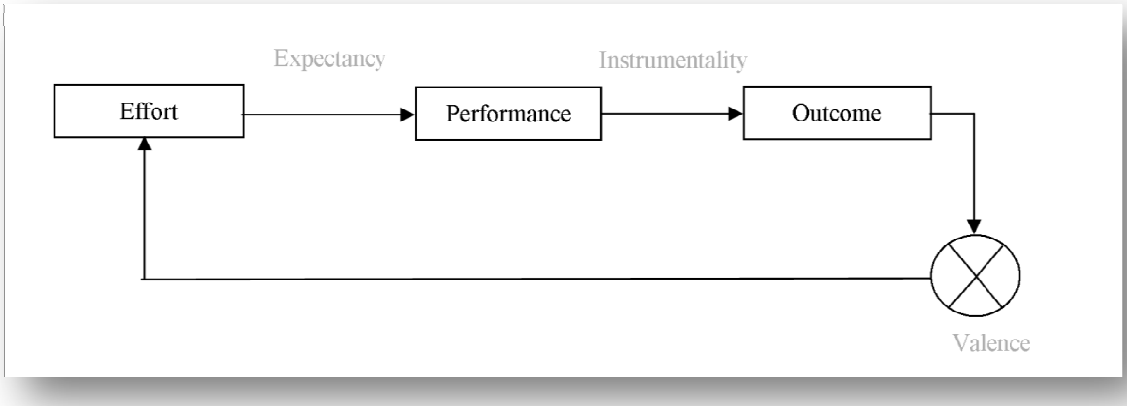


Figure 1. Expectancy Theory (VIE) model

VIE also offers a dynamic framework with which to explore competitive behaviors. Since individuals may re-calculate or modify their expectations (probability of accomplishing an outcome) based on newly acquired information, competitive behaviors and effort may be altered in the midst of a competitive situation.

Vroom (2005) notes that although expectancy theory has been applied almost exclusively in studies of work-related behavior it is sufficiently general to be applied to behavior in other domains. In its original conceptualization, VIE has been subject to many mathematical interpretations and attempts to test the theory. However, Vroom (2005) suggests that expectancy theory need not be applied past its heuristic value of formulating questions about the role of beliefs in motivation.

Commodity theory

Commodity theory (Brock, 1968) considers the psychological effects of scarcity on individuals, positing that any commodity will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable, where value refers to a commodity's potency for affecting attitudes and behavior (Lynn, 1989). The theory is of particular relevance to consumer competition because it provides an "organizing framework for ubiquitous phenomena of increasing interest (Brock & Brannon, 1992, p. 135)," and is seemingly complimentary to the general concept and proposed definitions of consumer competition. When an object is perceived to be scarce (under several possible circumstances) *commodification* of the object occurs. For commodification to be effective the commodity must meet three criteria: it must be useful, transferable, and possessable.

The major focus of commodity theory rests on communication and persuasability of availability messages about goods (objects, messages, or experiences), rather than on goods themselves. The theory is summarized in two major postulates. First, for the scarcity effect on a

commodity to be present a person must have an interest in or see usefulness in the commodity at hand. "Usefulness implies that a commodity is seen by the possessor as having potential relevance to his needs and interests; he is an interested possessor" of objects, experiences, or information (Brock, 1968, p. 246). Second, threats increase commodity-seeking behavior and the tendency to withhold commodities from others. These threats may refer to anticipated loss of personal control over one's physical and/or social environment. Threats to both physical safeties, such as looming hurricanes, as well as threats to one's ego, possibly occurring from decreased social standing, may impact commodity-seeking behavior.

Consumer competition may result from both scarcity effects and threats that increase commodity seeking behaviors. For example, not only is the value of commodities increased by scarcity, but studies have continually found support that scarcity leads to increased desirability for products (Lynn, 1989; 1992, 1992b).

A modern revision of commodity theory (Brock & Brannon, 1992) includes three postulates to encompass theoretical extensions made within its domain. This *liberalized* version of commodity theory (1) extends the domain beyond any conveyable and possessable object (messages, experiences, and actual physical objects) to traits and skills, (2) extends the theory to include negative objects (suggesting people may want to avoid commodities), and (3) identifies cognitive elaboration as a mediator between scarcity and evaluative polarization. A schematic of liberalized commodity theory is shown in Figure 2 (p. 59).

Summarizing *when* individuals compete

From the preceding discussion, individuals may compete under various circumstances. Although several contexts for consumers to compete are evident, there is insufficient empirical

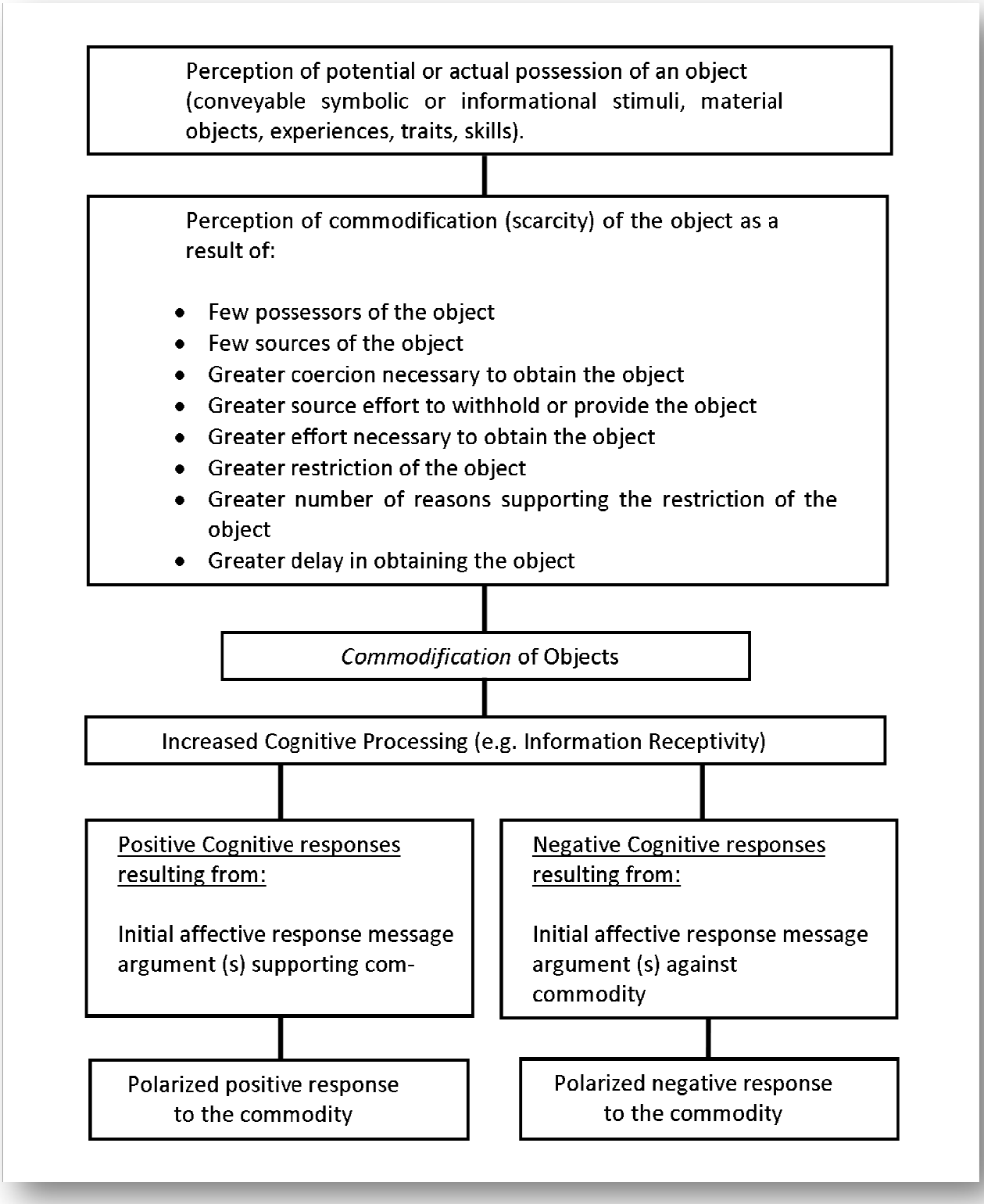


Figure 2. Liberalization of commodity theory (Brock & Brannon, 1992)

evidence delineating which contextual situations are most influential in activating competitiveness and competitive behaviors. From the dynamic interactional trait-theoretic perspective, the case can be made that competitiveness may vary within and between consumers, across competitive contexts. Within these contexts, expectancy theory and commodity theory both presume saliency of the outcome to be a primary contributor to competitive behaviors.

How do Individuals Compete?

Both psychological and physiological research explores how individuals experience competition, and how they undertake the task of competing. This section will address *how* individuals compete by reviewing literature dealing with strategy formation, goals, and the potential for deviant behavior. It will also address how individuals experience competitions by examining its relationship to anxiety. Much of the literature is drawn from the fields of sport psychology and organizational behavior.

Strategy, goals, and deviance in competition

Strategy is a critical aspect of sport competition. Strategies are formed through experience and knowledge of the game and careful analysis of competitors. Strategy can be synonymous with *game plan*; a team's idea of how to play in order to win. The strategy will include courses of action aimed at creating a competitive advantage, or that respond to actions of the competitors. Consumers also devise strategies or game plans. For example, *sniping* is a strategy used by internet auction bidders. Sniping refers to the act whereby bidders place a bid during the final seconds of the auction. In essence, they plan to refrain from participating in the auction (by placing bids) until the auction end is near so that other bidders are not informed

about their intentions and the auction price is not significantly increased (Lucking-Reiley, Bryan, Prasad, & Reeves, 2007). This sniping strategy is actually reported to be more the rule than the exception (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Bajari & Hortascu, 2003; Hossain, 2008; Rasmusen, 2006; Roth & Ockenfels, 2002).

With respect to sales events like the Running of the Brides strategies are appear to be devised and implemented. Recent reports covering the event note that some consumers "couldn't compete with the bridal teams who came prepared with numbers (some groups had up to 8 members), strategy, and matching uniforms (Chernoff, 2009)."

Typically, the strategy and game plan are designed under specified rules or guidelines of commerce or play, however, recent examples from the Olympics and professional sports reveal that fair play is not always the strategy that is followed. Professional baseball players Barry Bonds and Alex Rodriguez have been voraciously accused of using performance enhancing drugs that are illegal in the sport. During the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, accusations swirled regarding the age of Chinese athletes who were believed to be too young to qualify for competition. Some deviant cheating behaviors have proved dangerous and debilitating to others. In 1994 ice skater Tonya Harding conspired with her husband to have her opponent, Nancy Kerrigan, attacked in the knee, an attempt to inflict an injury that would disable her from competing in the Olympic games. Deviant behaviors in sport are easily recognizable and condemnable. Unfortunately, since competition between consumers often exists in informal contexts, these distinctions are not readily identifiable or confirmable.

Consumer goal setting and goal pursuit

Competition goals are traditionally in the form of winning over others, or achieving a higher or better personal performance. Goals play a central role in the behavior of consumers,

influencing decision-making and guiding choice and action (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999). In consumer settings, strategy may be interpreted in terms of goal setting, goal striving and desired end-states. As Bagozzi and Dholakia note, goals are not necessarily closed-ended, but may be loosely defined and open-ended. To contrast, a closed-ended consumer goal may be to *own a new high definition television*. An open-ended consumer goal may be to *maintain a prestigious image*. Whereas a closed-ended goal may be achieved with one transaction, an open-ended goal may persist throughout one's lifetime.

Consumer goals may be competitive in nature; e.g. beat someone to get in line, own a more desirable handbag, get the best table at a restaurant. In order to accomplish these goals, consumers are likely to devise strategies, or action plans. Figure 3 (p. 63) shows the organizing model for goal setting and goal pursuit proposed by Bagozzi and Dholakia (1999). The model suggests that the replication of goal pursuit behavior is affected by one's reaction to the goal outcome, resembling postulates of expectancy theory. Figure 4 (p. 64) displays the same model in terms of the goal process a consumer may experience during a competitive consumption situation such as the Filene's Basement's Running of the Brides.

Deviant behavior in competition

As discussed in chapter one, several sociologists contest the idea that competition is a favorable social phenomenon (Horney, 1937; Kohn, 1986, 1992), arguing that the negative consequences far outweigh any positive ones. Sociologist Alfie Kohn published two books on the subject, arguing in both that competitions are unnecessary and detrimental to society.

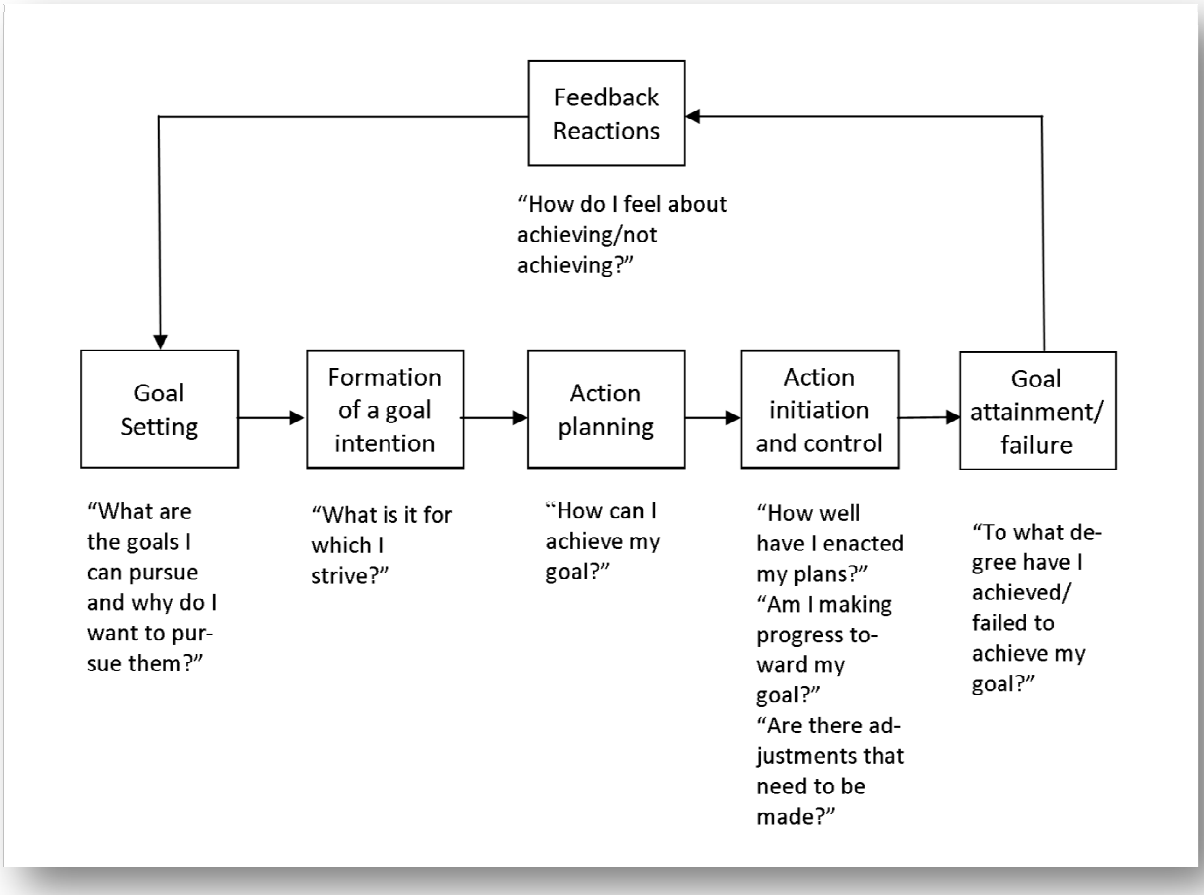


Figure 3. Goal setting and goal pursuit in consumer behavior (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999)

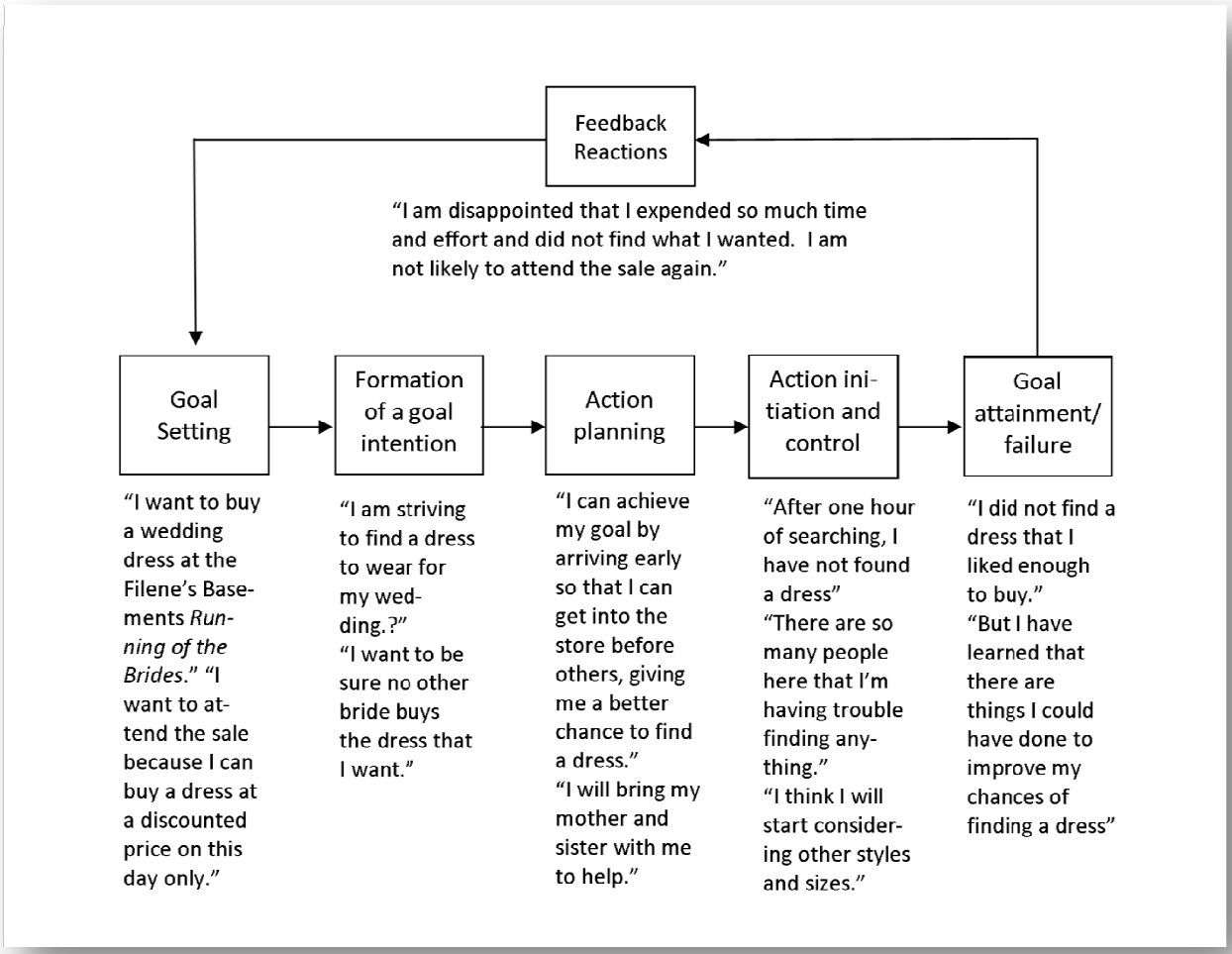


Figure 4. Competitive goal setting and goal pursuit: *Running of the Brides*

Regardless, there is much empirical and anecdotal evidence that exposes individuals as prone to compete by employing unethical or deviant behaviors. Evident in sports, education, and the workplace, cheating and deviance is frequently associated with competitive environments because these situations offer individuals a greater incentive to illegally utilize resources in order to improve their relative positions (Krakel, 2007).

Consequently, consumers are not invincible to cheating. Several contexts within the consumer domain expose consumers partaking in cheating, unethical, or deviant behavior. A predominant example is in the arena of Internet auctions. Auctions are, by design, a formalized consumer competition. In the on-line world consumers are relatively anonymous and may be more prone to engage in deviant-type behaviors in order to win an auction. Nichols and Flint (2010a) found that participants of online auctions bid on several items of interest in order to increase the likelihood of winning, with the intent to pay for only one of the items if more than one auction was won. They also found that bidders attempted to increase the probability of winning an item by dealing outside of the website's rules and guidelines. Bidders attempted to make transactions directly with the seller, instead of through the website, while admittedly aware that this tactic meant "breaking the rules."

But rules are not always clearly defined. During informal-type competitions, like specially-marketed shopping events, what rules and norms of behavior are acceptable and which behaviors are considered deviant or "cheating"? In both the Filene's Basement and Wal-Mart examples from Chapter One, aggression and teamwork appear to be central themes for goal attainment. Managers coordinating these events should benefit from a more holistic understanding of how these behaviors are interpreted by consumers.

Summary

Strategy, goal setting, and goal pursuit assist in describing how people compete and go about the process of competing. This is not to claim that all competitive goals are carefully planned. On the contrary, competitive circumstances may arise spontaneously and individuals may react without conscious thought and planning, instead employing emotionally driven heuristic decision-making processes.

Competition and anxiety

In the sports literature, much attention has been paid to how athletes experience competition. This stream of research offers the most comprehensive literature base from which to draw. Of major influence in the study of competitive arousal is competitive anxiety. Anxiety is an emotional reaction to a variety of stressful stimuli (Nordell & Sime, 1993). Within the field of sports psychology, a common approach to the competitiveness-performance relationship is based on participants' level of competitive trait or state anxiety, measuring an individual's tendency to perceive competitive situations as threatening (e.g. Martens, 1977; Smith, Smoll, & Schutz, 1990). Examining responses of anxiety to competitive sport contests has proven to be a fruitful stream of research, but has nary been applied in consumer research, despite evidence that consumption experiences can be highly emotional and anxiety-laden.

Cognitive and somatic anxiety

There are two main types of anxiety: cognitive and somatic. Cognitive anxiety consists of negative concerns or worries about performance, an inability to concentrate, and disrupted attention to the task (Davidson & Schwartz, 1976; Krane, 1994; Martens, Burton, Vealey, Bump, & Smith, 1990; Morris et al, 1981). Because this type of anxiety diverts attention from the task

and relevant task-cues, it is believed to have a negative impact on performance (Wine, 1980). Somatic anxiety reflects one's perceptions of physical manifestations of an anxiety experience characterized by responses such as sweaty palms, nervousness, and butterflies in the stomach (Martens et al, 1990; Morris et al, 1981). Antecedents of somatic anxiety are thought to consist mostly of conditioned responses to stimuli within a situation, rather than of cognitively evaluated information. Somatic anxiety is believed to have a curvilinear relationship to performance, suggesting an optimum range where performance can peak, but a definitive relationship between cognitive or somatic anxiety and performance has yet to be established (Jones G. A., 1995; Jones & Swain, 1995). (For a comprehensive review of anxiety in sport see Jones, 1995.)

State anxiety and trait anxiety

Following the state-trait concept of personality characteristics, sports psychologists approach competitiveness from both sides. Trait anxiety is a relatively stable individual difference in anxiety proneness (Spielberger, 1971). State anxiety is a transitory emotional state that varies in intensity and fluctuates over time (Spielberger, 1971). Therefore, individuals may differ in state anxiety between one competition event and another even though an overall level of anxiety may be relatively stable across situations. Studies indicate a temporal aspect of state anxiety such that as a competition nears, state anxiety levels intensify (Donzelli, Dugoni, & Johnson, 1990; Husband & McKelvie, 1986). Post-competition, state anxiety levels tend to decrease rapidly (Husband & McKelvie, 1986).

Measures to account for both competitive state anxiety and competitive trait anxiety are extensively employed, including the competitive state anxiety inventory (CSAI & CSAI-2; Martens et al, 1980, 1990), sport competition anxiety test (SCAT; Martens, 1977), the mental readiness form (MRF; Murphy et al, 1989; Krane, 1994), competitive anxiety perception scale

(CAPS; Murray, 1989), sport anxiety scale (SAS; Smith, Smoll & Schutz, 1990) and the state-trait anxiety inventory (STAI; Speilberger, 1966). Because these two facets of anxiety have produced equivocal results corresponding to performance outcomes, possible explanations ensue. First, the manner in which the athlete interprets the anxiety may have a greater effect on how anxiety influences performance. Anxiety may be perceived as either debilitative (hindering) or facilitative (helpful) in reaching performance goals. Jones and Swain (1992) report that athletes who perform better score higher in competitiveness and view anxiety as more facilitative than those who score lower in competitiveness. This follows their research that finds competitiveness and skill level to be the dominant predictor of anxiety.

Summary

By considering competitive arousal, anxiety, and physiological responses in competitive situations these literature streams closely examine emotional and perceived physical responses to formal competition. These types of responses have not been examined within competitive consumption contexts, however, they provide theoretical substantiation for grounded hypotheses regarding how consumers may experience competitive consumption situations. Particularly, research exploring how consumers interpret competitive consumption situations and how/if they experience anxiety as a result, are looming questions. Further, examining whether consumers perceive the anxiety to be facilitative or debilitative in helping them reach their goals should be explored.

Who Competes?

Although the necessity of, and the effects of competing are highly debated, the dominant opinion amongst the layman, researchers and social theorists alike is that virtually everyone

competes in some fashion or another. Considering the level of formality of competitions, we can of course identify athletes and individuals who selectively enter competitions as *competitors*. Similarly, cultural differences in competitive orientations may suggest that certain cultures are more likely to produce individuals who want to compete (Kohn, 1992). The preceding discussion on traits also suggests that individuals who are high in trait competitiveness are also more likely to enter competitions or compete on various levels. Men are thought to be generally more competitive than women, especially in public domains. One question that has yet to be addressed is: *who competes in a consumption domain?* Relying on the state-trait relationship, we cannot assume that individuals who compete in sporting events and other structurally competitive domains will also compete in consumption situations.

One potential avenue for making predictions about who competes is to explore behavioral tendencies within social interactions. One such tendency is that of aggressive/dominant behavior versus or submissive behaviors. Recent research suggests that individuals who engage in aggressive-type behaviors are more likely to engage in competitive tasks, especially when levels of the testosterone hormone rise (Carre & McCormick, 2008). Interestingly, this research did not provide its participants with a clear win or lose outcome, but rather one where they were able to earn a reward irrespective of the performance of others. This might suggest that individuals who are aggressive may interpret situations as competitive more readily than those who are less aggressive. This adds some clarification to Bone and Mowen's (2006) finding that that the win-at-all-costs attitude is an indicator of aggressive driving behaviors. Aggressive behaviors are identifiable in the anecdotal discussion of consumer competitions. Black Friday shopping behaviors, like those that made headlines in 2008, and those observed over the years during the

Running of the Brides, offer anecdotal evidence of aggressiveness in consumer competition contexts.

Conversely, *who competes* in consumption contexts may be predominantly defined by the item of interest and the salience of the product (service, or experience) to the individual. Although males are viewed as more competitive in nature, would males and females differ in their likelihood of competing based on product category? For example, considering the historical emphasis on attractiveness in many Western societies (Hatfield & Sprechter, 1986) appearances often serve as a primary competitive domain for women (Boskind-White & White, 1983; Brownmiller, 1984; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Rodin, 1992). Brownmiller (1984, p. 50) notes that "how one looks is the chief weapon in female -against-female competition. Appearance, not accomplishment, is the feminine demonstration of desirability and worth." Attractiveness, appearance and desirability are qualities desired by all, however, these social norms are observed more strongly in women (Canning & Mayer, 1966) and are expressed more consistently across the lifespan of women (Pliner, Chaikin, & Flett, 1990). These generalizations may indicate that competitiveness in the consumer domain may more prevalent amongst women, especially when vying for products that contribute to outward appearances such as clothing, shoes or handbags.

Competition and Competitiveness in Consumer Behavior

Thus far, the goal of the literature synthesis has been to generate an overall understanding of competition and competitiveness, and to provide extant research to acknowledge what is currently known about (1) competition and competitiveness, (2) why people compete, (3) when individuals perceive situations as competitive, (4) how people go about and experience competition, and (5) who engages in competition. To effectively address the primary subject of

this dissertation, consumer competition, it is important to isolate relevant research within the consumer domain. The following section synthesizes competition from within the consumer realm and identifies three distinct treatments of competition and competitiveness.

Situations and individual differences play roles in consumer behavior. However, research regarding competition and competitiveness in consumer behavior is lacking (Angst et al, 2008; Mowen, 2004). A small body of research addressing competition and competitiveness in consumer contexts is present with respect to three major categories: (1) the competitiveness trait as an antecedent to consumer behaviors, preferences, and attitudes, (2) competition and competitiveness as a response to consumer situations, (3) and competitiveness as a dimension of other consumer constructs. Each category will be discussed in turn.

Competitiveness trait as an antecedent

A small body of literature explores competitiveness as a trait that influences a variety of consumer behaviors, preferences and attitudes. Unless otherwise noted, competitiveness refers to interpersonal competitiveness. Some of this research explores differences based on gender. In a cross-cultural study examining the influence of competitiveness on the valuation of money, Lynn (1993) finds that men were generally more competitive than women, and placed a higher value on money. The study was premised on the theory that the valuation of money can serve as surrogate to a symbol of success, a desirable social achievement for men in many cultures.

In Mowen's (2000) 3M model, competitiveness was examined as a predictor to several general consumer behavior outcomes. The study finds that competitiveness is indicative of sports interest, impulsive buying habits, proneness to bargaining, and attention to social comparison information.

Most recently, attempts have been made to link the competitiveness trait to specific behaviors within a consumption context. In a subsequent set of studies, Mowen (2004) examined the trait of competitiveness and its behavioral consequences in several consumer contexts. The purpose of these studies was to provide a rationale for identifying the contexts in which competitiveness impacts consumer behavior. The rationale identified was that consumers are motivated *to win* and *beat others*. Using structural equation modeling, he finds that competitiveness is positively associated with three broad contexts of "besting others": sports/contests, vicarious experiences (i.e. watching sports), and conspicuous consumption. Although positive support was found for some of these contexts, others were unsupported. For example, competitiveness was not found to predict gambling behavior (a contest) or the conspicuous consumption of automobiles. The relationship of competitiveness to gambling is iterated by other research endeavors (e.g. Parke et al, 2004). However, competitiveness *was* found to influence the conspicuous consumption of electronics. The ambiguous influence of competitiveness on the two types of conspicuous products remains theoretically unexplained. Competing through vicarious consumption was hypothesized to be evident through preferences for movie genres. Mowen proposed that competitive individuals would prefer movie genres of suspense or drama where a character is challenged to overcome an adversary, as opposed to genres like romances. As hypothesized, results indicated a significant positive relationship between competitiveness and the drama-suspense genre, but not to the romance genre.

Last, competitiveness has also been identified as a component of Type-A patterns of behavior (Jenkins, Zyzanski, & Rosenman, 1979). Type-A individuals are noted as being achievement striving, aggressive, and having easily aroused hostility. Noting that time is an important scarce resource for consumers, Marquis, Dube, and Chebat (1994) investigated the

relationship of Type-A consumers to responses of wait time in service encounters. They find that Type-A consumers were significantly more upset than their counterparts (Type-B) when experiencing service delays. Type-A's were also found to have more negative emotional responses to these delays.

Internet auctions

Auction studies often report participants as being competitive, or competing. However, few of these studies focus specifically on individual competitiveness influencing auction behaviors. In the context of internet auctions, it was found that bidders with high trait competitiveness will choose to participate in bidding for items, rather than using a strategic exit (e.g. *Buy in Now*) with a fixed price (Angst et al, 2008). The findings are similar to conclusions drawn by Nichols and Flint (2010a) in their study of eBay bidders. In a grounded theory study, competing emerged as a major theme of bidding behavior. They suggest that the competitive nature of some bidding activity leads some participants (those who are less competitive) to retreat from the auction either by using a strategic exit purchase, or by resigning from purchasing at item altogether.

Angst et al (2008) also find that items sold in the traditional auction format have lower final prices than those offered as *buy it now*, suggesting that price is a possible driver for individuals to act on competitiveness. One flaw to this study was the use of a condensed trait competitiveness scale. The authors employed a four-item scale with items derived from Helmreich and Spence's (1978) trait competitiveness scale. Items were adapted to be relevant to a shopping context and included only statements that referred specifically to outperforming others (e.g. "I enjoy shopping in situations involving competition with others," "It is important to me to perform better than others when I am shopping"). This study, along with other empirical

examples discussed thus far, are potentially problematic because they do not allow for competitiveness to be measured as an intrinsic motivation driven by personal development (task mastery) and achievement goals that are not focused on other consumers. It is plausible that even bidders who are highly competitive find that the *buy it now* feature allows them to meet their goals sufficiently, thus they take advantage of the strategic exit option when available.

Bargaining

Similar to auctions, competiveness may manifest in price-haggling and bargaining. Qualitative research on the motivations for price-haggling and bargaining identify non-economic drivers (Jones et al, 1997). These authors propose that the motivation for price-haggling can be explained by the "trio of needs" theory. This theory posits that all human motivation is based on either the (1) need to achieve, (2) affiliation, or (3) dominance. The need to achieve and dominance appear in the literature as components of competitiveness. These findings support those of Sherry (1990) and Belk et al (1988), positing that consumers do gain a sense of achievement, success and dominance when "beating dealers at their own game" when negotiating and bargaining to a low price.

Summary

The studies discussed thus far are similar in regards to the focal point of competitiveness being placed on the subject or participants in the study. Alternatively, researchers have also found that auction bidders often attribute their opponents' behavior to trait competitiveness, even when they could have attributed it to various others situational factors (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970).

The main contribution of this series of studies to the present study on consumer competition is that it supports the state-trait interaction of individual competitiveness differences. As an antecedent to specific consumer behaviors the influence of trait competitiveness remains equivocal and in need of further consideration.

Competitiveness as a response

What causes competitive responses? The second body of literature reflects on competition and competitiveness as a response or an outcome from exposure to certain situations, such as the presence of other people. Much of this also revolves around research conducted in both traditional and online auction contexts. For example, in a study of live auctions of fiberglass cows Ku, et al (2004) identified four main drivers influencing competitive responses: rivalry, time-pressure, "the spot-light" (presence of an audience), and a combination of the three. The result of these drivers is *competitive arousal*, an adrenaline-fueled emotional state (Molhatra, Ku, & Murninghan, 2008). Interestingly, it was found that bidders became more competitive and placed higher bids when the number of rivals was few, rather than many. Auction participants may be aware of these aroused states. Qualitative research finds that found bidders of online auctions describe bidding against other people as an intense experience, emotionally draining, and resulting in many physiological responses such as sweating, heart-racing, and adrenaline rush (Nichols & Flint, 2010a). These responses reflect both cognitive and somatic anxiety when competing with other bidders.

In line with prospect theory (Khaneman & Tversky, 1979), Ku et al's (2004) bidders predicted having a better chance of winning when faced with fewer opponents. This might also suggest that the more highly competitive bidders are also more risk-averse, choosing to remain in an auction when the chances of succeeding are high, rather than low. Ku et al (2004) introduce a

competitive arousal model of decision-making which suggests that induced arousal will result in impaired decision-making processes and outcomes. It follows extant evidence of the *winner's curse*, a situation where a bidder pays more for an item than it's worth, often times due to heightened competitive emotions and escalation of commitment to the item (Foreman & Murninghan, 1996; Kagel, 1995; Thaler, 1992).

To what else can the winner's curse be attributed besides commitment to the item? Recent experiments investigating the winners curse phenomenon identifies competitive differences with respect to consumers competing and bidding against a computer versus those competing and bidding against other bidders (van den Bos et al, 2008). The findings indicate that when consumers bid against a computer, they are able to use rational decision making processes and rarely overbid. However, in conditions where bidding occurs against other humans, participants were much more likely to overbid and experience the winner's curse. van den Bos et al (2008) suggest this effect is a result of assigning significant future value to victories over humans. An equivalent value is not assigned to victories over computers.

In auction settings consumers may also experience an escalation of commitment to the item for which they are bidding, especially when the competition becomes intense (Ariely et al, 2004). Escalation of commitment is suggested to occur because entry into auctions is often low risk, since prices are low and there are not many bidders. However, after initial entry, individuals can feel a sense of ownership to products (endowment effects), or value in the time already dedicated to it (Ku et al, 2004), resulting in a higher sense of commitment to winning or acquiring the product and outcompeting others.

These examples support the notion that not all consumer goals are carefully set, planned, and pursued. These behaviors may be explained by cognitive evaluation theory or the by

heuristic element of expectancy theory, as suggested by Vroom (2005). In both cases, bidders may have attributed some value to the outcome of the auction or view it as a surmountable challenge such that the behavior of increased bidding is justified.

These research streams pose more questions than they answer about competitiveness. For example, although competitiveness is recognized as a response to varying contexts, the underlying competitive motivations are unsubstantiated. For example, hedonic motives such as the thrill of the hunt (Bardhi, 2003) or price games (Sherry, 1990) can be examined in relationship to competitiveness. Motivations for personal achievement can also be inspected, referring to comments that there is hedonic value when consumers "beat dealers" at "their own game" (see Belk et al, 1988). Competitive arousal also deserves attention outside of the auction domain, as it can be considered a more general type of decision making phenomenon with considerable potential for broad applicability (Ku et al, 2004).

Competitiveness as a dimension of established consumer constructs

Competition and competitiveness is reflected in many consumer behavior constructs. Thus, competitiveness, achievement, or rivalry is viewed as a "part of" or a dimension of constructs including *materialism*, *conspicuousness*, and *smart-shopper feelings*. It also is present in Belk's (1988) concept of products as extensions of the self, where people can use products in order to establish or portray status within their community. Products and brands have the ability to communicate messages to others and can determine how consumers are perceived by others (Angst, et al, 2008; Belk, 1988; Holman, 1981; Solomon, 1983). This is the primary role of conspicuous consumption behaviors. Materialistic values indicate that one views ownership of material things or experiences as a means to reach happiness and as a symbol of success in the

eyes of others, as well as their own. Smart-shopper feelings are reactions to consumption outcomes, frequently price promotions, which induce feelings of victory and competency.

Conspicuous and status consumption

Conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) is the display of material goods for the benefit of others to see. It is defined in modern terms as "the extent of one's behavioral tendency of displaying one's social status, wealth, taste or self-image to one's important reference groups through consumption of publicly visible products (Chen, Yeh, & Wang, 2008)." Further, conspicuous consumption behaviors have been described as a tool to achieve visibility and recognition (Kates & Belk, 2001). Competitive undertones are identified in these definitions, i.e., *achieve* visibility, display…status… to important reference groups. Conspicuous consumption behaviors inevitably result from social comparison processes and the impression that social evaluation will result from outward appearances. Lynn (1990) discovered that people will voluntarily choose to pay more for an item because they want to avoid appearing poor or cheap.

Similar to status consumption, the two have been delineated based on motivations. Whereas conspicuous consumption behaviors are focused on displaying of goods or brands to impress or flaunt to others, as well as to inflate one's own ego, status consumption behaviors are based on attempts to increase one's social status or gain prestige from acquiring status-laden products and brands, but not necessarily for the benefit of showing off to others (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Therefore, conspicuous consumption may reflect interpersonal competitive attitudes, whereas status consumption may reflect personal development competitive attitudes.

Materialism

The concept of materialism also has competitive undertones. Belk's (1985) original conceptualization of materialism treated it as a personality trait characterized by envy, non-generosity, and possessiveness. Later work treated materialism based on a person's values rather than their personality (Richins & Dawson, 1992). A central theme of materialism is the belief that acquiring possessions is essential to achieving satisfaction in life, where happiness is the ultimate motivator for materialistic behaviors (Richins, 2004; 2007). In Richins' view, materialists believe success can be judged by the things people own.

The pursuit of materialistic ideals is both a competitive and comparative process (Roberts, 2000). But as long as relevant others are also attempting to show social power and status through material goods the threshold for reaching these goals continues to rise, creating ever-evolving competitive benchmarks. Holt (1995) describes materialism in terms of what people do with their possessions (i.e. public versus private display), rather than the value placed on ownership, suggesting people can consume in a materialistic style. It appears that individuals who are highly materialistic may interpret consumption contexts differently than those who do not value ownership, display, and possession of objects as intensely. However, materialism and materialistic values are shown to be transitional over one's life-span (Belk, 1985; Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2005). Questions regarding materialism and its relationship to competitiveness are in need of empirical consideration. For example, would materialistic values increase competitive arousal in product acquisition situations? The research foundation would suggest that those who employ material things to achieve satisfaction and happiness in life may go to more radical, potentially competitive, extremes to accomplish this goal. What type of

relationships do competitive attitudes have with respect to materialistic values and consumption? These questions have yet to be addressed in consumer literature.

Smart shopper feelings

Smart shopper feelings are a major component of generating emotional responses to price promotions. Schindler (1989) describes *smart-shopper feelings* as ego-related affects which may be generated in a consumer by price. Ego-expressive smart-shopper consequences have implications on consumers' self concept. Consumers who feel that they have paid a good price may feel proud, competent, or accomplished in thinking that they have been victorious over the seller (Rose, 1988) and have beat the system in some way (Schindler, 1989). Consumers may be more likely to experience smart shopper feelings when they believe that they are responsible for receiving the discount (locus of causality), and that they have received a discount that was not received by other shoppers. Therefore, the desire for smart-shopper feelings may reflect both personal development and interpersonal competitive attitudes.

Summary of competitiveness in consumer behavior

The preceding synthesis indicates that there is a relatively recent interest in consumers' involvement in competitive consumption situations, mainly due to the increasing popularity of online auctions. Mainly, these research streams view consumer competitiveness as a trait that influences subsequent behaviors within auction situations, or other general consumer contexts. However, despite evidence indicating that existing trait competitiveness measures are not sufficiently robust to apply to specific consumer behaviors (e.g. Mowen, 2004), and that competitiveness may be highly context specific, empirical studies in consumer behavior have continued to employ only general measures of interpersonal trait competitiveness.

Further, despite strides made in psychology, sports, and organizational behavior, consumer research has yet to examine how consumers (1) experience competitions, i.e. *what it's like to compete*, (2) interpret situations as competitive, (3) plan for competitions, and (4) use past competitive consumption situations to influence future behaviors. Similarly, consumer research has yet to identify product classes or situations most likely to induce competitive arousal in consumers. Finally, while several consumer-based constructs are defined with competitive undertones, as well as employ measures that include items targeting achievement and comparisons to others, a consumer competition construct has yet to be conceptualized in its own domain.

Is Competition Constructive or Destructive?

From a capitalistic and economic perspective, competition between firms appears to be beneficial to consumers. Consumers have more product choices, better prices, and more outlets from which to buy goods. But what are the social and psychological implications of competition *between* consumers? Several authors contend that the sociological implications of competition have severely negative effects on individuals (Kohn, 1992). Similarly, competition is often viewed as an unnecessary social phenomena; one which, if it's opposite is emphasized instead (cooperation), would be much more beneficial to society as a whole.

Anecdotal evidence portrays competition between consumers primarily as destructive or having negative effects on individuals. Researchers further indicate a negative effect between participation in competitive tasks and self-esteem. Several endeavors conclude that individuals engaging in competitive tasks experience decreased levels of self-esteem (see Johnson, Johnson, & Maruyama, 1983 for a review). Can consumer competition be considered constructive for

individuals and the consumer society at-large? This section will address positive and negative outcomes observed in competition and competitive situations. It will also suggest reasons why some competitions have constructive outcomes and propose several conditions for this to occur. Much of the extant literature on constructive and destructive effects of competition is found in organizational behavior and education.

A large body of work in organizational settings is concerned with group dynamics and cooperative versus competitive attitudes and environments in the workplace, as opposed to inspecting individual competitiveness as the unit of analysis. This stream of research was inspired by Deutsch's (1949) theory of competition and cooperation. Similar to social theorists, there is debate as to whether competitive organizational environments are constructive or destructive. Although many conclude that competition is destructive and should be avoided (Deutch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1974; Mead, 1937; Montagu, 1966), recent organizational research suggests that constructive interpersonal competition in organizations not only exists, but can be a positive influence on performance and long term cooperative behaviors within the organization (Tjosvold et al, 2003). Concluding their study, Tjosvold and colleagues point out that constructive competition may be more likely to occur when employees have built strong ongoing relationships with each other and the competitive task is complex and intellectual.

Other influences on constructive outcomes of organizational competition are noteworthy. It is believed that competitions will be most constructive when (1) there are clearly defined rules of winning that are fairly enforced (Johnson & Johnson, 1974; 1989; 1999), (2) the importance of winning is low so that sabotaging or negative behaviors are not encouraged (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Stanne, Johnson, & Johnson, 1999), (3) there is an equal probability of winning

amongst competitors (Johnson & Johnson, 1974; 1989; 1999), and (4) the competitive task is physical, well-learned, and easy (Jackson & Williams, 1985).

Fundamentally, organizational competition exists at the employee level where individual employees compete for sales bonuses, promotions, recognition or awards. Within the personal selling domain, research indicates that competitions between salespersons can lead to increased performance, as well as deviant behaviors like lying and other misbehaviors (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006). This literature also suggests that individual trait competitiveness has an interaction effect with performance goal setting such that salespeople who are high in trait competitiveness set higher goals (than those low in competitiveness) when they perceive the organizational climate as competitive (Brown et al, 1998). Individuals low in competitiveness set relatively low goals despite the perception of the organizational climate.

From an organizational, sports and education perspective, competitions can easily be perceived as constructive and helpful in motivating individuals to strive for success. Within these same domains, there is evidence to suggest that competitive situations bring out the worst in people (e.g. Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006; Litzky, Eddleston, & Kidder, 2006). In the consumption world, the majority of the attention paid to competitive situations in the popular press is condemning, focusing on consumers engaging in disruptive, deviant or dangerous behavior, and consumers or employees being injured at the expense of product acquisition. In contrast, camaraderie and team building often occur during competitively designed consumption contexts, like Filene's Basement's *Running of the Brides.*

Not only can consumer competition be considered constructive or destructive on the behalf of individual consumers and the consumer society at-large, but consumer competition may have positive or negative effects on the retailer or marketer in terms of brand attitudes and

sales revenue, for example. Questions regarding constructive and destructive effects of competition on both the consumer and the retailer/marketer remain largely unexamined. At this juncture, it is necessary to begin to consider competitive consumption situations in light of constructive versus destructive outcomes for consumers, retailers and managers. The four criteria noted above for achieving constructive competition within organizations provide a baseline for moving forward.

Part-one summary

The preceding literature syntheses accomplished three primary objectives. First, it outlined a preliminary nomological network of the *consumer competition* construct derived from concepts and constructs from multiple fields of study, and suggested situations that may foster competition in the consumer arena (see Figure 5, p. 86). This proposed nomological net falls short of predicting a full set of relationship patterns that permit the naming of a construct (Cook & Campbell, 1979) and examine its relationship to other constructs. Rather, its purpose is to guide the subsequent research in this dissertation and beyond by offering a preliminary integrated set of relationships in need of confirmation or disconfirmation. When this s achieved, creation of potential operationalizations of the construct becomes possible. The research set forth in this dissertation begins this process. This network now serves as a baseline for expanding our understanding competition and competitiveness within the consumer domain. It also suggests that the effects (constructive or destructive) of competitiveness on consumers and society at large are not well understood.

Second, the review of theories served to guide the forthcoming research for this dissertation. The theories reviewed provide guidance to examine both contextual influences and psychological effects of consumer competition. None of these theories have previously been

employed to study competition in the consumer domain, therefore offering new ways the theories may be applied. Third, the review of consumer literature served to confirm that competition and competitiveness in the consumer domain are both highly neglected areas of study. Therefore, many gaps in the literature have been identified, some of which this dissertation research will address. These gaps are summarized as a set of research questions (see Table 4, p. 87). The type of research approach required to address each question is noted. Approaching several of these questions will accomplish the research objectives stated in chapter one, further supporting a mixed-methods research approach.

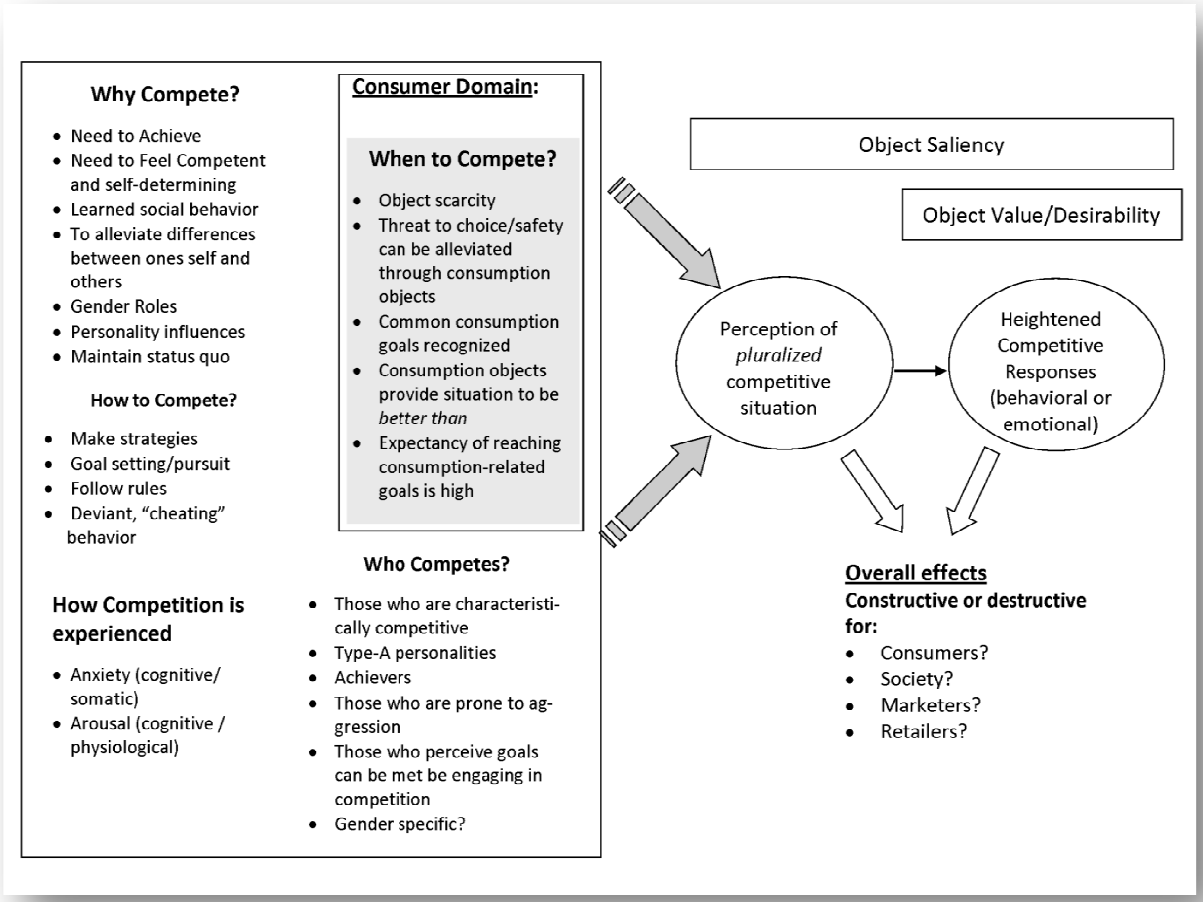


Figure 5. Proposed nomological network of "consumer competition"

Table 4 *Summary of Gaps and Research Questions*

	Address with Qualitative Research	Address with Quantitative Research	
Objective #1	– What does the term *competition* mean to consumers? Does it mean something different from other types of competition? – What does it mean for consumers to engage in competition? – How do consumers feel about competing and experiencing competitiveness? – What problems do consumers face when engaging in competition? How do they deal with these problems? – How do consumers describe the effort needed to compete? How do they interpret the role of effort in reaching their goals? – Do consumers identify "deviant" behaviors in competition? Do they partake in deviant or cheating behaviors? What emotions and reactions do they have to these situations?	– Do consumers perceive formal and informal competitive consumption contexts differently? – How does one's "competitiveness" influence competitive arousal in the consumer domain? – Do existing competitive attitude measures address individual competitiveness within specific consumption domains? Is there a need to create new measures? – Who is likely to compete in consumption contexts? – What contexts are more likely to be interpreted by consumers as competitive? – Do materialists and conspicuous consumers perceive scarcity situations as competitive?	**Objective #4**
Objective #2	– Do consumers demonstrate different types of competitive attitudes in consumption contexts? If so, how, when and why? – How do consumers experience competition? – What processes do consumers engage in during competition? – What role, if any, do consumers' "goals" play in competitive contexts? – What social influences encourage competitive consumption thoughts, feelings and behaviors? – What "rewards", if any, do consumers seek (intrinsic or extrinsic) while competing? – How do consumers interpret contexts as "competitive"? – What attitudes, perceptions and emotions are experienced by consumers who compete?		
Objective #3	– Who are the people involved in competition, as perceived by the consumer? What role do they play? – What thoughts and emotions do consumers experience after competing? – Do consumers reflect on aspects of their "performance" after competing? – How do consumers go about competing?		

PART – TWO: GUIDING THEORY AND ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH PHASE

Part Two Introduction

The final section of this chapter will elaborate on commodity theory. Commodity theory will serve as the primary guiding theory for the subsequent quantitative research for two primary reasons. First, commodity theory is premised on the psychological effects of scarcity. From economics and ecology it is well understood that competition ensues as a result of scarce resources. Second, commodity theory presumes that relevance and saliency are necessary for scarce goods to effect individuals. Therefore, the theory offers boundaries for objects to induce scarcity effects.

In order to build the framework, a more comprehensive review of commodity theory research is provided. This review will serve to identify established scarcity effects on individuals and expose research gaps that can be addressed by considering scarcity and competitiveness in consumption contexts. The review will also expose the manner in which scarcity conditions occur, as well as how scarcity tactics are employed by marketers.

A Commodity Theory Framework

This dissertation will employ commodity theory as the guiding theoretical foundation because the overarching themes (i.e. scarcity, usefulness, ownership) are highly compatible with themes of consumer life. To reiterate, commodity theory deals with the effects of *commodified* objects on individuals. Specifically, the premise of the theory is that any commodity will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable (Brock, 1968). *Objects* refer to tangible and intangible goods, as well as information and experiences. Commodification occurs under multiple

circumstances of perceived scarcity. For commodification to be effective, the commodity must be must be useful, transferable, and possessable to the individual.

Exploring consumer competition within a commodity theory framework provides three primary advantages. First, competitive attitudes, traits, arousal and behaviors can be evaluated within various consumer contexts of commodification. Although commodity theory has gained attention pertaining to some psychological effects of scarcity (e.g. Verhallen, 1982; Lynn, 1989), it has yet to gain attention regarding the relationship of trait or state competitiveness on (a) perceptions of scarcity, (b) cognitive processing and information gathering, or (c) responses to scarcity.

Second, commodity theory posits that the value of scarce objects is directly related to the extent that it is unavailable. Therefore, it is an "organizing framework for ubiquitous phenomena of increasing interest (Brock & Brannon, 1992, p. 135)." This notion of increasing interest suggests that psychological responses, such as competitive attitudes and behaviors directed towards scarce objects may intensify as interest in the object grows.

Third, since competitive situations can be uncomfortable for some individuals, or induce negative attitudes, the liberalized form of commodity theory (reviewed previously) offers explanatory power for why consumers may choose to avoid situations with perceived commodification. As identified in the review of consumer research and auctions, some consumers retreat from competitive situations.

According to Inman, Peter and Raghubir (1997), "while the general role of scarcity has been examined in some depth in psychology, most of the empirical work in this area has either been undertaken with little consideration for how a scarcity tactic would affect choice behavior or has been tested under extreme conditions…" Calls for a more in-depth inspection of the

effects of scarcity tactics in terms of individual differences and psychological traits are still being made (Gierl et al, 2008). Therefore, bridging the gap between natural scarcity conditions, marketer driven scarcity tactics, and individual differences related to perceptions of scarcity and choice behavior are timely. Competitiveness serves as one important point of individual difference.

The remainder of this section accomplishes five primary objectives: (1) further defines scarcity and scarcity effects, (2) identifies scarcity tactics employed by marketers, (3) identifies three main scarcity types, (4) reviews literature regarding cognitive processing of scarcity information, and (5) identifies the "other shopper" effect as a spontaneous signal of scarcity and indicator of competitive arousal.

Scarcity effects and scarcity tactics

"The real price of every thing, what every thing really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it" as influenced by its scarcity."

--Adam Smith, 1776, The Wealth of Nations

Scarcity is both fundamental to classical economic theory and a pervasive aspect of human life (Lynn, 1991). The scarcity effect identifies the tendency for individuals to attempt acquisition of opportunities and resources that are either scarce or becoming increasingly scarcer (Cialdini, 1995). It also posits that consumers exhibit specific behaviors related to the perceived or true scarcity of goods, such as curbing consumption of products when supply is limited because they perceive smaller quantities as having more value (e.g. Folkes et al, 1993).

Brock's (1968) original concept of commodity theory described commodified objects as both tangibles and intangibles such as experiences, or information. Despite the broad view of a commodified object, attention has been paid primarily to tangible goods. This section attempts

to forge a network of commodification situations, including intangibles, where consumers may respond with competitive behaviors, attitudes, or emotions. First, it is necessary to delineate the types of scarcity conditions and identify the roles played by supply, demand, and marketing communications in these conditions.

Scarcity tactics and types

Marketers employ scarcity messages to signal quality or increase desirability of goods hoping that promoting "toil and trouble of acquiring it" will add to its value. Intentionally communicating information about an object's unavailability is considered a *scarcity tactic*. Some of these effects on consumers have been examined. Non-marketer delivered signals related to supply and demand also incur speculations of scarcity, value, and potential hardships of acquisition. These effects have been partially examined as well.

Marketers are well known for using two main types of scarcity tactics: product scarcity and time scarcity (see Gierl et al, 2008). The tactics may be either communicated to consumers via marketing communications, or via signaling an intentional supply restriction. Scarcity is also frequently a result of true market demand and supply mechanisms, as well as accidental scarcity due to retailer stock outs or unfilled shelves. Within commodity theory, product and time scarcity both provide boundaries with which to investigate the likelihood of consumer competition to manifest. These two contexts have received the bulk of attention from scarcity researchers. Two other potential influences on consumer competition are identified in this section: *scarcity of experience*, and the *other shopper effect*. Product, time, and experience are the three main scarcity types.

Product scarcity

Scarcity of product exists when either a real or implied limitation is placed on the number of a given product available to the public for consumption. Sociologist Alfie Kohn (1992) suggests that this can lead to *structural competition*; a situation in which two or more individuals vie for tangible or intangible rewards that are too scarce to be equally enjoyed by all. Product scarcity may be either marketer-driven (through marketing communications or signaling) or market-driven (a function of true supply and demand).

Marketer-driven product scarcity. Black Friday advertisements are prime examples of marketer driven scarcity of product promotions, and the creation of structural competition. For example, retail stores like Best Buy, Wal-Mart, Target and Circuit City, in their 2008 Black Friday newspaper inserts, advertised numerous products that were qualified as "limited quantities available". This tactic is also used by marketers of collector-type items such as coins from the Franklin Mint. Advertisements for the coins communicate that the original molds of coins will be destroyed in order to ensure one-time distribution of the collector items (also promoting their uniqueness). Advertising research has found that, indeed, advertisements with scarcity appeals lead to enhanced value perception and purchase intention (Eisend, 2008; Wu & Hsing, 2008). Retail experiments employing product scarcity echo these findings, noting also that subjects in scarcity conditions are more motivated to think about the scarcity message (Inman et al, 1997).

Product scarcity may also be the result of a restricted supply strategy employed by manufacturers in order to increase the "hype" and excitement about a product. For example, in Fall of 2000, Sony's Playstation 2 was available in very limited quantities. Although the manufacturer blamed supply on component problems, industry observers speculated if the shortage was deliberately created to induce more hype and demand for the product (Stock &

Balachander, 2005). The same effect was observed with the release of Sony's Playstation 3 (PS3) game console in 2006. For the product launch, the company shipped only fifty percent of units to U.S. stores that they had originally announced, spurring a black market on auction websites like eBay where the systems sold for an average of $1,500 for a period of time (Morris C., 2006). During the 2007 holiday season, shortages of the new Nintendo Wii game console also spurred excitement, hype, and many scenarios that led consumers to go to extreme efforts to acquire the product. Again, an inevitable black market of Wii game systems was created. The consoles, normally retailing for $249, sold for as much as $1,000 each on internet auction sites, and were advertised on websites like Craigslist.com for prices more than triple their retail value. Researchers suggest that supply restriction designed by marketers can result in *hot product* signaling, and is an effective method to cue quality perceptions by uniformed consumers (Stock & Balachander, 2005).

Although the product scarcity tactic is well practiced in the United States, researchers have found it to be less evident in other countries that discourage mindless approaches to acquisition, preferring to encourage consumers to be responsible and considerate (Jung & Kellaris, 2004). These findings may suggest a cross-cultural scarcity effect; one which has not yet garnered much attention from the field.

Market-driven scarcity. Product scarcity can result from either excess demand or from low or restricted supply. Premised on the case of bandwagon effects noted in economic literature where consumers desire conformity. *Bandwagon* is defined as "the extent to which demand for a commodity is increased due to the fact that others are also consuming the same commodity (Leibenstein, 1950, p.189)." Logically, when the overall demand for a commodity rises, consumers should suspect that the commodity is becoming scarcer. Drawing from

psychological perspectives on social influence, Leibenstein (1950, p. 189) explained the motivations underlying the bandwagon, or herd behavior, as "the desire of people to purchase a commodity in order to get into 'the swim of things'; in order to conform with the people they wish to be associated with; in order to be fashionable or stylish; or, in order to appear to be 'one of the boys.'"

On the other hand, limited or insufficient supply leads to perceptions of exclusivity or increased uniqueness (van Herpen et al, 2005), such as that garnered from luxury goods. van Herpen et al (2005) investigated the *empty shelf* (a form of insufficient supply) as a communicator or cue of product scarcity and product value, concluding that scarcity due to insufficient supply does in fact signal quality and leads to increased product choice. They also find that when the scarcity is due to intentionally limited supply, or exclusivity, inferences about product quality are enhanced by consumers' need for uniqueness.

Research supports hypotheses that consumers' valuation of tangible goods is higher when scarcity is due to increased demand, rather than by accidental supply circumstances (Verhallen, 1982; Verhallen & Robben, 1994; Worchel et al, 1975). Claiming that a product is scarce has increased the perceived value of a diverse set of products including pantyhose (Fromkin et al, 1971), wine (Lynn, 1989), recipe books (Verhallen, 1984), women's suits (Szybillo, 1973), art prints (Atlas and Snyder, 1978), pastries (Brannon & McCabe, 2001), automobiles, real estate (Cialdini, 1993), car batteries and paper clips (Pratkanis & Farquhar, 1992). Lynn (1992) proposes in his model of scarcity effects (SED; Figure 6, p. 95) that assumed expensiveness has a mediating effect between scarcity, product value, and desirability. He suggests that people have naïve economic theories that lead them to associate scarcity with expensiveness.

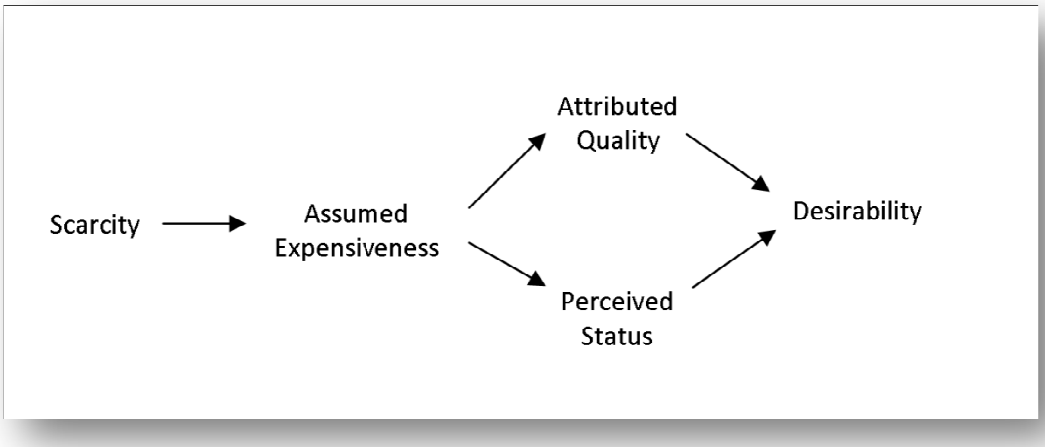


Figure 6. Lynn's (1992) SED model

Extant literature suggests that this heuristic is learned in late adolescence or early adulthood (Fox & Kehret-Ward, 1985; 1990, Murray, 1980).

Although some research finds that the scarcity effect is more frequently observed for specialty and discretionary products, as opposed to staple or new-to the world products (Stock & Balachander, 2005) the ubiquitous effect on both expensive and inexpensive products listed above suggests underlying motivational factors influence the perceptions of value and desirability, rather than a purely rational economic attitude. As suggest in the liberalized theory, perceived scarcity may encourage consumers towards higher levels of product involvement, resulting in increased cognitive processing.

Academics acknowledge the widespread use of product scarcity tactics (e.g. Cialdini, 1988, 1993; Eisend, 2008; Stock & Balachander, 2005) but there is little research in the consumer literature about their effects, such as why some individuals might be more prone to respond, react, or thoughtfully consider these tactics. Most frequently, the need for uniqueness has been identified as a motivation to acquire scarce goods, since it enables differentiation and individuality (e.g. Lynn, 1992a; 1992b). However, most of the studies fall short of following the

scarcity effect past its impact on perceived product value, quality and desirability. Similarly, although the effects of scarcity on perceptions of value have revealed broad empirical support (e.g. Lynn, 1989; 1991, 1992a), the effects of scarcity on consumers' commitment to acquire (escalation of commitment) a scarce good has not. In particular, social marketplace phenomena resulting from scarcity are left unexamined at both the societal and individual level of analysis. Competition is one of these social phenomena.

Scarcity of time

Time scarcity is defined as people's perceptions or feelings of not having enough time to do all they want or need to in a day (Godbey, Lifset, & Robinson, 1998). Social theorists believe that time is socially constructed in order to regulate social behavior (Jabs & Devine, 2006), thus individuals do not perceive time restraint homogenously, especially cross-culturally. Similarly, people's perceptions of time scarcity vary over one's life course and by family life stage (Fast & Frederick, 2004).

Unlike product scarcity situations, where a real or imagined scarcity of a good is inferred by consumers, scarcity of time refers to a real or implied limitation on the duration for which an offering can be purchased, or that an individual has time to purchase. Time scarcity might reflect a period of time for which a sale lasts, or the time available to purchase a product before it becomes completely unavailable. The latter are usually communicated by way of "limited time offers," or "seasonal special editions," respectively. These are considered *time scarcity tactics.* In these cases, time scarcity can only be a result of limited supply imposed by a seller (Gierl et al, 2008). Time scarcity does not directly give consumers information about how desirable the product is by other consumers and may provide less strength for desiring goods or services for reasons of social status or exclusivity. However, Eisend (2008) found that advertisements

including a time scarcity stimulus increased consumers' perceived value of the product and purchase intention.

Time scarcity may also be responsible for evoking fear or threat to consumer choice. In cases when consumers fear "missing out" on an offering, time scarcity may drive consumers to use a heuristic decision process (Whitler, 1994). Mallalieu (2006) suggests that time scarcity can have the most influential effect on consumers who have already collected and processes all relevant pre-purchase information and are on the brink of purchase decision, supporting the heuristic decision process. Feelings of time scarcity can also lead to time-deepening behaviors such as speeding up activities, shortening the length of activities, substituting shorter activities for longer ones, and multi-tasking (Godbey et al, 1998).

Feelings of time scarcity have been attributed to the acquisition of goods and services which require time to obtain, maintain, and use (Ackerman & Gross, 2003), as well as suggested as a reason for the increased proclivity for dining out (Jabs & Devine, 2006). As an identified factor influencing consumer behaviors, several questions surround time scarcity. For example, does time scarcity trigger competitive arousal in consumption contexts? If so, is there an interaction effect between product scarcity and time scarcity on competitive arousal? What cues signal time scarcity other than messages intentionally delivered by marketers? Do consumers perceive time scarcity as a result of product scarcity?

Some marketers have successfully used a combination of scarcity of product and scarcity of time. Home Shopping Network and QVC are prime examples.

Scarcity of experience

Arguably, consumers seek experiences from everything they buy. Other offerings are strictly experiential by nature, i.e. travel, concerts, movies. Experiences are considered to be

potential possessions (Belk, 1983). Brock's original concept of commodity theory relies heavily on experiences in general. "The more a recipient values a prospective experience the more he will seek it out and prefer to have it rather than some other experience (Brock, 1968, p. 247)." In fact, Brock states that the bulk of the pertinent studies forming the theory deal with "informational commodities" rather than "material commodities"; commodities that are not relinquished in a transaction versus those that are relinquished. Further, the theory clearly focuses on the scarcity element of experience: "If an individual is afforded an experience that is withheld from some other interested co-enjoyers of that experience, the valuation of the experience will increase…"

Some consumer experiences can be mutually exclusive in terms of winners and losers. Consumers who play fantasy sports, for example, can achieve a "winning" experience. Each week players face a new opponent where the game results in either a win or a loss. Similarly, the end of the fantasy sport season reveals one winner, and several losers. The experiences of winning the game or the season are scarce ones that cannot be enjoyed by all simultaneously. In fantasy sports consumption, a physical product or service is not involved. It has been recognized that Fantasy sports meet consumers' need for competition through frequent competitive experiences such as weekly match-ups against other team owners in a fantasy football league (Eisend, 2008; Roy & Goss, 2000).

Experiences that are *socially* scarce (Hirsch, 1976), as opposed to materially scarce, may also enhance desirability and activate competitiveness. In reality, these experiences are available to everyone, but in practice, cannot be made available to everyone. Membership to an exclusive club, for example, can be practically available since there is no physical supply restriction limiting how many memberships are available, but the restriction may be imposed based on

social status. The scarcity of experience is supported by the ideal of nonfunctional demand, demand that is not a result of intrinsic product qualities. Although research has indicated that the persuasiveness of communication messages regarding access to an intangible experience like information does not increase when scarcity is due to accidental circumstances, rather than true market circumstances (Worchel, 1992) research regarding scarcity of marketplace experiences (i.e. exotic travel, sporting event attendance) has not garnered much attention.

Availability classifications

Within the scarcity conditions described, current literature suggests three classifications of availability that potentially incur scarcity: (1) restricted availability, (2) limited availability, and (3) conditional availability (Verhallen & Robben, 1995). Restricted availability refers to availability of goods only to those of a specific group or organizations. This type of scarcity gives rise to the value of the good driven by a status or membership motive.

Limited availability refers to market circumstances or forces present because of excess demand or restricted supply conditions. Disparate effects of supply versus demand induced scarcity have been of central concern in behavioral studies, indicating that product scarcity due to supply restrictions increase the value of a good because of exclusivity, or the "snobbery effect" (Van Herpen et al, 2005; Veblen, 1899). This is most strongly supported for conspicuous consumption-type goods (Gierl et al, 2008). In contrast, scarcity due to increased consumer demand leads to inferences of product popularity and quality (Lynn, 1989; Van Herpen et al, 2005).

Conditional availability regards the effort to be made by consumers in terms of time or cost. These goods become available only if certain conditions or task requirements are met (Verhallen & Robben, 1995), e.g. waiting in line, price to be paid, social sacrifice, or effort.

Each of these scarcity conditions is appropriate for consumers to potentially compete. Types of (un)availability and its effect on product evaluation are outlined in Table 5 (c.f. Verhallen & Robben, 1995, p. 372). Verhallen and Robben speculate that the type of unavailability condition will activate specific behavioral mechanisms and product evaluation in individuals. Certain behavioral mechanisms and product evaluations may activate competitive arousal.

Verhallen concluded that "future research should elaborate the behavioural basis for the availability-preference relationship by studying conditions that may arouse other social motives and conditions that influence cost evaluation and consumer choice (Verhallen, 1995, p. 383)." Competitiveness is a social motive that can be examined under competitive conditions influencing cost evaluation and consumer choice.

As discussed, some underlying mechanisms contributing to the scarcity effect have been identified. For example, need for uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), status needs (Lynn, 1992a), and self-enhancement (Wills, 1981) are mechanisms which may trigger scarcity effects in consumers because more value may be attached to scarce objects when symbolic benefits can be achieved. The scarcity-value-desirability relationship is overwhelmingly supported. A logical next step to progress this stream of research is to identify how these types of scarcity situations are interpreted by consumers. Thus, if objects are scarce and individuals attach greater value and desirability, one might also suspect that consumers perceive the objects to be desirable by others, begging the question: *does this create the perception that the purchase situation would be competitive in nature?*

Table 5 *Types of Availability, Behavioral Mechanisms, and Product Evaluation (Verhallen & Robben, 1995)*

Type of (un)Availability	**Description**	**Specification**	**Behavioral mechanism**	**Product evaluation**
Unavailability	(a) imposed by nature	(a) no longer available	(1) reactance	(a) increase
	(b) imposed by regulations	(b) availability blocked	(2) frustration	(b) decrease
Restricted availability	a commodity is available *only for* certain individuals	Only for: group membership		
		(a) no longer available		
		–member	(3) status	(a) increase
		-non-member	(1) reactance	(a) increase
		(b) availability blocked		
		–member	(3) status	(a) increase
		-non-member	(2) frustration	(b) decrease
Limited availability	due to market or nonmarket circumstances	(a) increased demand	(3) social status, need for uniqueness	(a) increase
		(b) limited supply	(4) behavioral cost evaluation	(a) increase
		(c) limited supply and increased demand	(7) altruism	(b) decrease
		(d) accidental		(c) none
Conditional availability	a commodity is available *only if* specific conditions are met	(a) behavioral condition: only if effort	(4) behavioral cost evaluation	(a) increase
		(b) financial condition: only if paid for	(5) financial cost evaluation	(a) increase
		(c) social condition: only if social service rendered	(6) social cost evaluation	(a) increase

Competitiveness and the cognitive vs. heuristic effects of scarcity

Consumers differ in their desires to process and evaluate marketing messages, leading to different levels of information elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Conclusions about information processing related to scarcity are inconclusive. Cialdini (1993, p. 266) concluded that scarcity increases the value of a product and leads to heuristic decisions making because "...scarcity hinders our ability to think...when we watch something we want become less available...a physical agitation sets in....the blood comes up, the focus narrows.... the cognitive and rational side retreats....cognitive processes are suppressed....thoughtful analysis of the situation becomes less available...and brain clouding [occurs]."

On the other hand, researchers also suggest that scarcity has the ability to motivate consumers to process information more thoroughly. For example, Inman et al. (1997, p.68) argued that the "presence of a restriction operates to activate a cognitive resource that is used in rendering a judgment regarding the favorableness of the offering." Suri et al (2007) found through experiments that even in conditions of low motivation to process information, scarcity can induce information processing.

Competing for commodities can be employed to further inspect the use of heuristic versus cognitive processing under scarcity conditions. Although research, such as studies on auction behavior, suggests that competitive motivations may increase heuristic responses to scarcity, it simultaneously suggests that when consumers perceive the likelihood of competitors to be present they form strategies, gather information, execute action plans and create contingency plans in order to win. A notable gap within this literature is within the pre-event, or pre-choice time frame. For example, how does the time between reception of scarcity messages and point of choice or decision making influence cognitive processing and the interpretation of

competitive situations? Under what type of scarcity conditions would heuristic and/or cognitive decision making be heightened?

"Other Shopper" effects

Studies in consumer behavior show that an "other person" effect can be observed with respect to purchase decisions and experience evaluations (e.g. Grove & Fisk, 1997; Luo, 2005; Machleit, Eroglu, & Mantel, 2000; Ramanathan & McGill, 2007). In particular, Luo (2005) finds that the presence of peers influences impulsive purchasing, whereas the presence of family members decreases it. He finds this effect to magnify when there is strong group cohesion and when individuals are high in susceptibility to social influence. Rafaeli and Noy (2005), in a study of internet auction bidding, found that virtual presence and interpersonal information availability produced social influences that affected bidding behavior. Specifically, they found that when virtual presence was high, the number of bids placed per bidder was low, as was the amount of bid price. Machleit et al (2000) explored the effects of retail crowds on shopping satisfaction, concluding that the relationship is highly dynamic based partly on store type, individuals' expectations of crowds, and their tolerance for crowding.

The actual and implied presence of other shoppers appears to create a competitive consumption experience. In both the Wal-Mart and Filene's Basement examples provided in chapter one, it appears that the excitement created by the presence of other shoppers, as well as potentially aggressive behavior exhibited by other shoppers, helped the competitive situation manifest. Research has not sufficiently identified what factors involving the actual or imagined presence of other shoppers might increase the perception of the three forms of scarcity and suggest a competitive shopping environment.

Part-Two summary

This goal of the review of commodity theory and scarcity literature was to consider the potential for scarcity to (1) create competitive consumer contexts, (2) arouse competitive responses in consumers, and (3) influence choice behavior with respect to a competitive environment. Within this synthesis, several gaps have been noted. These are summarized as research questions in Table 6 (p. 105).

Research Objectives

The literature synthesis from Part One confirmed that little is known about consumer competition as perceived by consumers. Before presenting specific hypotheses that can be addressed to fill the gaps in existing literature, a few comments on the philosophical approach to the forthcoming research agenda are necessary.

The author/researcher is approaching the problem of understanding consumer competition in a pragmatic fashion. Under pragmatic knowledge claims, the problem at hand is viewed as superior to the methods chosen. Therefore, a pragmatic philosophy considers all approaches to considering research problems (Rossman & Wilson, 1985), draws liberally from qualitative and quantitative assumptions, and is considered a major philosophical underpinning for mixed-method study (Creswell, 2003). This dissertation will employ a concurrent mixed-methods research approach to the phenomenon of consumer competition. A mixed-methods strategy integrates two or more methodologies with the intention of producing results that are superior in quality and scope, compared to a single method design. This type of approach is

Table 6 *Summary of Gaps and Research Questions*

Gap	Research Question
Psychological commodification effect on individuals	– Do consumers interpret scarcity situations to be competitive? ** If so, does this impact their purchase interest?** – When would competitive perceptions/arousals be most likely to occur? – Does scarcity increase/activate competitive arousal?** – Are competitively oriented individuals more likely to interpret scarcity messages as competitive? ** – Is there a relationship between the need for uniqueness and perceptions of a competitive purchase/consumption context? ** – Does commodification enhance escalation of commitment? Is this effect more notable in competitively oriented individuals?
Scarcity Type (Product, time, experience) effect on individuals	– Do consumers interpret scarcity types differently in terms of being perceived as competitive situations? ** – Which types of scarcity are more likely to activate competitive arousal?** Under what circumstances would this effect be observed? – Does one scarcity type lead to inferences about other scarcity types?** – Does the presence of other shoppers signal scarcity? If so, how many and when? – Within the scarcity type, what effect does the market-driven vs. marketer driven tactic play on perceived context competitiveness? – What attitudes towards the brand or retailer does perceived competitive situations lead to?
Scarcity Tactics	– What attitudes towards the brand or retailer does perceived competitive situations lead to when scarcity tactics are employed? – Who is prone to respond, react and consider scarcity tactics imposed by marketing communications?**

** denotes research questions to be addressed in this dissertation

beneficial for studying phenomena considered to be in infancy stages of understanding because it avoids narrow views of the world that can be misleading, while striving to gain a holistic perspective. It also permits the researcher to incorporate themselves as both objective and subjective observers of a phenomenon. Therefore, the mixed-method approach is useful for research that seeks to explore *and* explain a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). The ability to contribute through exploration and explanation makes a mixed-method approach compatible and desirable for the present research.

Understanding the phenomenon

Little is known about the phenomenon of consumer competition and how it is experienced by consumers. A qualitative research design aims to expose underlying psychological processes and social problems that consumers face while competing. A few remarks on this approach are necessary. Before generating theory about a phenomenon, qualitative research design predominantly calls for rigorously gathering and analyzing of data to avoid drawing conclusions from *a priori* assumptions (Creswell, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba, 1990). Thus, some proponents of qualitative research recommend foregoing a preliminary literature review in order to allow concepts to originate and emerge from the data (Glaser, 1998). It is, however, useful to understand the current state of knowledge surrounding a particular phenomenon so that the researcher may provide insights that are insightful and relevant (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Therefore, the preceding literature review and proposed nomological net are valuable precedents for embarking on a qualitative research program. Within the qualitative approach, no suppositions can be made that the findings will validate or corroborate existing elements of competition and competing that have previously been presented, however, the literature base offers a node of comparison for which to relate the findings.

Three research objectives are set forth to address the exploration of consumer competition. Each is accompanied by a series of research questions.

Research objective 1: To better understand the nature of consumer competition as perceived by those competing.

1. *What does it mean for consumers to compete from the point of view of consumption competitors?*
2. *What processes do consumers engage in as they compete?*
3. *What attitudes, perceptions and emotions are experienced by consumers who compete?*
4. *What problems do consumers encounter during competition?*

Research objective 2: To discover antecedents, drivers of, and motivators for consumer competition.

1. *What attitudes, perceptions and emotions motivate consumers to compete?*
2. *What situations create an environment whereby consumers compete or a feel a need to compete?*

Research objective 3: Given a competitive consumption situation, to explore reflective perceptions about that situation.

1. *Who are the people involved in the competition, from the perspective of the consumer?*
2. *What do consumers report doing during competition?*
3. *What are consumers' perceptions and feelings about competitive situations after having engaged in consumer competition?*

Explaining the phenomenon

A quantitative research design enables the application of existing theory to help explicate some type of "truth" or explanation about a phenomenon. This is appropriate for the current study because, although little is known about *how* consumers experience the competition

process, inferences about the creation of a competitive context can be made by applying existing literature streams and theory. Within these contexts, some hypotheses can be drawn.

Hypotheses have been developed that reflect relationships and theory established in the preceding literature synthesis. From the literature synthesis, it should be clear that the scope of competition and competitiveness is broad and many questions regarding the role of competition in the consumer domain remain unanswered. These questions suggest that the phenomenon of consumer competition is open to many empirical investigations and a lengthy stream of subsequent research. Although a small amount of research has been dedicated to predicting competitiveness as a precursor to specific consumer behaviors (e.g. Mowen, 2000; 2004), it has offered little with respect to establishing context-specific situations which may be interpreted by consumers as being competitive. Therefore, this is deemed to be the thrust of delivering a fruitful programmatic research stream in the broad area of consumer competition.

The present research aims to begin this stream of research by exploring connections between consumer competitiveness with respect to scarcity type (i.e. product, time, experience) and scarcity condition (i.e. degree of unavailability). We know from economic and ecological history that scarcity has the ability to stimulate competition between rivals and rival groups. The relationship between scarcity and the creation of competition is posited to exist in the consumer domain as well. Therefore, the quantitative endeavor seeks first to establish this relationship.

Research objective 4 is two-fold. First, it is to determine the contextual conditions that lead consumers to perceive situations as competitive. To support this objective, the primary research questions are:

Research objective 4 questions:

1. *Does exposure to scarcity information induce perceptions that the purchase situation will be competitive?*
    a. *If so, for which scarcity type is this effect most observable?*

The second element of objective 4 is to determine *who* would be likely to perceive scarcity conditions in a competitive light. Two supporting research questions address and clarify the latter part of objective 4:

2. *Will those characterized by high competitiveness be more likely (than those characterized by low competitiveness) to perceive scarcity conditions as competitive purchase situations?*
    a. *Are global measures of competitiveness applicable in consumption domains?*

3. *Will individuals characterized by high need for uniqueness be more likely (than those characterized by low need for uniqueness) to perceive scarcity conditions as competitive purchase situations?*

Following a trait theoretic approach, some hypotheses regarding the manner in which individuals interpret situations can be made based on individual differences. Much of commodity theory research espouses the need for uniqueness as a moderator of scarcity's effect on the attached value and desirability of commodified objects, noting that those high in the need are typically more sensitive to information about scarce goods (e.g. Lynn, 1989, 1991; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; van Herpen et al, 2005; Verhallen & Robben, 1995). The nature of this need indicates that individuals who employ consumption objects as a means to express their individuality do so in order to confirm or protect their non-conformity self-concept (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Beyond the moderating role to the value and desirability of scarce goods, research has not indicated how those who are characterized by the trait might interpret situations for acquiring the scarce good. This question is of particular interest to the current study because, as the definition of this trait will indicate, those who desire unique products are

reluctant to seek ownership of goods when they are known to be highly desirable or sought out by large groups of consumers, as this might represent conformity. Thus, implications of the need for uniqueness call for further clarification past the psychological effects of increased valuations and desirability.

Preliminary research also indicates that individuals who are competitively oriented, i.e., high in trait competitiveness and/or the need to compete, may be predisposed to enter competitions in the consumer realm (e.g. Mowen 2004). It is unclear, however, if they knowingly associate scarcity of goods as creating situations that are competitive in nature, or as a means through which to exercise their competitiveness.

The relationships of these traits to perceptions of competitive situations in consumer situations are in need of clarification.

Lynn (1989; 1991; 1992a; 1992b) showed that scarcity induces the psychological effects of desirability and value. The present model extends Lynn's (1992) S-E-D model by hypothesizing that scarcity leads to perceptions of competitive situations, likely by way of increased desirability. The model also hypothesizes that individual differences of (1) interpersonal trait competitiveness, and (2) need for uniqueness moderate scarcity's effect on perceptions of competitive purchase situations. Since scarcity's effect on desirability has been significantly established, the present model seeks to address scarcity's effect on perceptions of the purchase situation as being competitive. Figure 7 displays the model and hypothesized relationships. Chapter three will detail the specific research designs that will satisfy the stated objectives. It will also define the hypotheses to be tested.

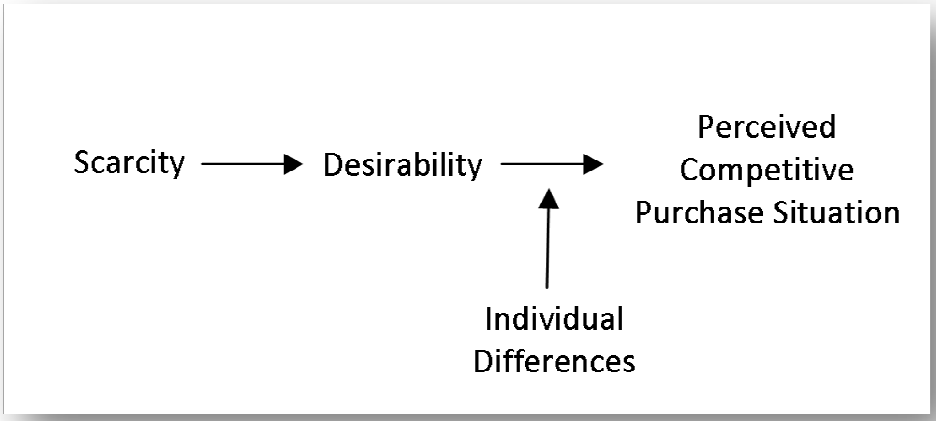


Figure 7. Hypothesized model of scarcity effects on perceptions of competitive purchase situations

Converging the findings

In short, the goal of a mixed-methods design is to emerge with complimentary findings that assist in broadening the understanding of a given phenomenon. Although some social science researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1989) perceive qualitative and quantitative approaches to be incompatible, others (Patton, 1990; Reichardt & Cook, 1979) believe that the approaches can be successfully combined such that the perspectives supplement each other, rather than compete or dominate. There are two main strategies within the mixed-methods approach itself. These strategies indicate the manner in which data is gathered and analyzed: sequential or concurrent. The present research agenda will employ a concurrent mixed-method approach, indicating that data will be collected for both the qualitative and quantitative phases within the same time-frame, and potentially converged upon completion. Chapter three will elaborate on the methodologies.

Chapter Two Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a cursory literature review of competition and competitiveness from several fields of study, supporting the need for exploring the phenomenon within the consumer domain (part one). Some consumer researchers have set out to explain competitiveness and its consumer behavior outcomes, but research has yet to address how consumers experience competing, and what situational circumstances create a competitive attitude in consumption contexts. Part two of the chapter served to synthesize existing literature employing commodity theory. This literature substantiates the base-line for the proposed quantitative study aimed to understand one potential means for the phenomenon to manifest. To address the need to further explore and explain the phenomenon, four research objectives with supporting research questions have been presented. The following chapter will describe the research methodologies proposed to address each objective.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodological approaches that address the stated research objectives. It also describes specifically how each research question will be satisfied.

The present research agenda will employ a concurrent mixed-methods design. The purpose of the concurrent mixed-methods study is to better understand the problem of consumer competition by potentially converging both qualitative and quantitative data. In the present study, consumer competition will be explored using data such as interviews and observations with participants of Filene's Basement's *Running of the Brides*. Observations will be made on-site at various event locales. Interviews will take place in person and via telephone. The qualitative study will address research objectives one, two, and three. At the same time, an experimental design will be used to explain the relationship between scarcity conditions and perceptions of a competitive consumption context. It will also measure and report on the relationships of several individual characteristic variables acting as moderators. The experiment addresses research objective 4. The remainder of this chapter describes each method in detail.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research traditions intend to increase understanding or explanation of a phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary research problem to be addressed with qualitative research here is to discover and learn about competition occurring and experienced by individuals in consumer contexts. Morse (1991, p. 120) iterated that characteristics of a qualitative research problem are those where (1) the concept is immature due to lack of theory and previous research, (2) the notion that available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate,

incorrect or biased, (3) a need exists to explore and describe a phenomenon and develop a theory and, (4) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited for quantitative measures.

Consumer competition is a phenomenon that suffers from a lack of theory and previous research making it unclear whether or not it can be sufficiently addressed by available theory. Although available theories can address various aspects of competitiveness within the consumer domain, a need exists to explore the overall phenomenon of consumer competition and to develop accompanying theories that can support future research streams. Because the nature and facets of consumer competition are relatively unknown it is not desirable to develop quantitative measures of the *consumer competitiveness* construct at this time.

It is possible, however, based on literature reviewed on competitiveness from psychology and sports, to examine individual competitiveness in a quantitative study that applies some of the psychological knowledge about competitiveness. The quantitative study will be reviewed in subsequent paragraphs.

The following research objectives and questions will be addressed using grounded theory.

Research objective 1: to better understand the nature of consumer competition as perceived by those competing:

1. *What does it mean for consumers to compete from the point of view of consumption competitors?*
2. *What processes do consumers engage in as they compete?*
3. *What attitudes, perception*s and emotions are experienced by consumers who compete?
4. *What problems do consumers encounter during competition*?

Research objective 2: to discover drivers of/motivators for consumer competition

1. *What attitudes, perceptions and emotions motivate consumers to compete?*

2. *What situations create an environment whereby consumers compete or a feel a need to compete?*

Research objective 3: given a competitive consumption situation, to explore reflective perceptions about that situation

1. *Who are the people involved in the competition, from the perspective of the consumer?*
2. *What do consumers report doing during competition?*
3. *What are consumers' perceptions and feelings about competitive situations after having engaged in consumer competition?*

Grounded theory

The exploratory study will employ a grounded theory tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a discovery-oriented, predominantly qualitative research methodology that is useful for building theory from field data on a core social phenomenon which involves problematic situations for people. It is recognized as a practical method for conducting research that focuses on the process of interpretation by analyzing the "the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings (Gephart, 2004, p. 457)."

Grounded theory is not a method in the true sense, but is a style of conducting qualitative analysis characterized by several distinct features (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sampling, the constant comparison method, and in some cases (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1990) the use of a coding paradigm, help distinguish it from other qualitative "methods." Grounded theory's original developers, Glaser and Strauss, eventually had a falling out over Strauss' coding paradigm and other structured tenants he proposed. As such, there are two predominant approaches to grounded theory being practiced today, one which can be referred to as the Glaserian method and the other the Straussian method. This study intends to follow the more

open Glaserian method, which is similar to Strauss' earlier work prior to the rift (Strauss, 1987), and allows for less force-fitting of predetermined concepts and categories.

By focusing on personal experiences of participants and utilizing field data to understand social problems, activities, and processes, grounded theory research strives to synthesize and abstract qualitative field data to a higher level by developing a theoretical framework that emerges *during* the research process. This is the essence of the constant comparative technique, i.e. data are collected and analyzed simultaneously. This abstraction facilitates theory construction of problematic, dynamic, social processes. The social processes are assumed to be complex and highly variable, therefore, grounded theory seeks to discover and link the many concepts that relate to the primary phenomenon.

Unlike quantitative methods, grounded theory does not seek to verify, generalize, or test an overall theory; although, provisional "testing" of working hypotheses within the study are quite common. It is used to explore, describe, organize, and propose relationships based on raw field data (Stern, 1980; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Though interpretivistic at heart, grounded theory strongly embraces explanatory aspirations via an integrated framework that may be used to explain or predict phenomena (Glaser &Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, because researchers can conceptualize data, grounded theory is both inductive and deductive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 137). Thus, grounded theory "findings" can be ripe for application into more deductive, positivist-type research programs. Moreover, grounded theorists stress the importance of giving the "practitioner understanding and some control of situations" so that theory and subsequent hypotheses may be operationalized in appropriate quantitative studies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.3).

Given the introductory examination of the phenomenon, and the dearth of existing empirical consideration, a qualitative approach to uncover "ground level" experiences is deemed appropriate. The grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was chosen in order to facilitate theory construction using interview and other sources of data. According to Hirschman and Thompson (1997, p. 46) grounded theory methods are "especially appropriate when the objective of the research is to discover consumer-based theories and constructs."

The grounded theory method involves a dynamic set of data collection, data coding, and data interpretation activities. These will be described within the appropriate section detailing the methods of the proposed study. Finally, grounded theory research is both specific and flexible to the researcher. Although some guidelines for study are described here, a true grounded theory study must be able to adjust with the direction of the data, allowing for unexpected interpretations. This is the foundation of *theoretical sensitivity*. Theoretical sensitivity is concerned with careful application of the researcher's existing knowledge base to the phenomenon under study. The researcher should be aware of potential theories that can support emergent findings, but also help protect against premature suppositions.

The writings in chapter two provide precedent evidence of theoretical sensitivity. Chapter Two provided a sufficient overview of "competition" and "competitiveness," while presenting gaps in the consumer domain aimed to support the precedent for studying the current phenomenon. In order to move forward with an exploratory study, an abbreviated review of this literature was necessary, whilst still allowing for a cursory understanding of the overarching phenomenon of "competing." Therefore, the present qualitative study can be carried out with limited interjections and influence of pre-existing theoretical biases, allowing for abandonment

of pre-existing concepts if the present data and emergent concepts avert the researcher in an alternative direction.

Study context

There is a great propensity of consumer situations that can be deemed "competitive." This was established in chapters one and two. However, in order to facilitate the exploration of consumer competition, a context that has garnered attention for its competitive atmosphere is most appropriate. Glaser (1978), in his description of theoretical sampling, commented that it can be appropriate for researchers to begin their sampling by approaching groups that are believed to maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on the research problem.

By selecting a context that is believed to be competitive, participants may be more easily identifiable and able to meet the requirements needed for the study. Filene's Basements' bridal gown sale event, *Running of the Brides*, was chosen as the specific domain for the present research because a somewhat narrow initial focus of competitive context provides a means of data and interpretive saturation, a necessity of concluding grounded theory research. These events have garnered significant comments from the public, the press, and the company itself for its competitive nature. As such, many rich consumer competition experiences are expected to be readily available for study. Moreover, the bridal market is a multi-billion dollar industry. Therefore, examining how bridal consumers experience aspects of wedding preparation should be of great concern to many retail managers.

Preliminary interviews were conducted with six women who had attended a Running of the Brides sales event at the Atlanta, Georgia location. The interviews confirmed the researcher's presumption that the participants experienced competitive thoughts and feelings as

they described the day's event. Therefore, the context is deemed appropriate to study the phenomenon more closely. Below are quotes from two of the women interviewed.

> There were some people that were just I mean, just being completely rude you know and inconsiderate to other people … like when I first went in there was this lady she had her arms as far as her arm span could reach around a whole bunch of dresses on the rack…I would say probably 20 dresses in her arms I just thought it was inconsiderate but then again that was kind of the point of going you know grab as many dresses as you can and then start trading, and it says so online I mean that's basically how it works, you just grab as many dresses as you can and go from there… I mean it wasn't competitive to the point of you know 'I win, you lose' kind of thing but it was competitive just to who could get in there and get the most dresses at one time. [Participant 1]

> That was the worst part, once you got into the store, you had girls who would just pull 30 dresses off the racks and were laying on top of them right in the entry way and trying to lay over it so you couldn't even try to take anything, so that part was the worst. … Whereas for some people it was 'do or die', they were doing it you know. I also thought walking in panicked me. I was like 'okay we're not like this' we can just turn around and go. It's like I do think it was really good that we're in a team because my first thought was like okay I don't know if we should be in here, then you had somebody else say okay, okay here's a plan and kind of kept us together between the 5 of us we all had a, someone started feeling that this was too much, someone was like, 'we're okay.' [Participant 2]

Sampling and description of informants

Participant informants should report attending and partaking the *Running of the Brides* within the past one year. Brides-to-Be will be selected for study because the usefulness of the consumption object (wedding gown) should be highly salient. The study informants will be recruited primarily on-site by the researcher. In-person interviews are desired and all efforts to secure this type of interview format will be made. However, due to the sometimes intimate nature of the event with friends and family, and the distance from home brides and their party often travel to attend, this may not always be feasible. It is important to avoid being perceived as intrusive by the participants, therefore measures should be taken that make potential participants as comfortable and accommodating as possible. The researcher plans to recruit participants by

approaching them while they wait in line prior to the store opening. Typically, brides and their party begin to line up as early as 11am the day prior (Thursdays) to the start of the sale (8 a.m. Fridays). This presents one opportunity to capture the "pre-event" competitive spirit or competitive arousal that may exist. The researcher hopes to conduct interviews with the same participants upon their leaving the event. This would capture the "post event" competitive spirit as well as the freshest, richest, and most descriptive accounts of the experience. It will also allow the researcher to note facial expressions and body language. Offering incentives should help secure these interviews.

A snowballing technique combined with theoretical sampling may also be used to determine if individuals other than the brides can add richness to the data. Snowballing is the practice of requesting potential respondents from the primary respondent. This will be done when/if the potential respondents are believed to assist in reaching theoretical saturation.

Additionally, traditional theoretical sampling will be employed. Theoretical sampling is a data collection process that combines data collection, data coding, and data analysis which leads the researcher to determine where and when to turn next for data. Theoretical sampling is an emergent process, such that the direction for new data collection *emerges* from the current data and interpretations of those data.

Data collection

Grounded theory permits the use of many sources of data. Interviews, field observations, and information gathered from the public domain can be effectively used to form an understanding of a phenomenon and generate a substantive grounded theory (Strauss 1987). In fact, numerous qualitative researchers advocate using an array of data sources to combat "gaps" that may surface when relying only on a single source (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Denzin &

Lincoln, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maxwell J. A., 1996). Interviews will be conducted with participants described above. If possible, each interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed into text. A preliminary interview guide will be used to facilitate the post-event interview process. This interview guide provides a starting point for conducting the interviews, but as Maxwell (1996, p.114) points out, interviews should be "flexible, informal and interactive." Therefore, deviation from the interview guide is likely, and evolution of questions may also occur during the study.

Interviews are critical to understanding the phenomenon, but the interviews also serve a distinct purpose in grounded theory study. Interviews will seek to elicit "thick, rich description" (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomenon in the participants' own words, which should provide a glimpse of "the mental world of the individual" and "logic by which he or she sees the world (McCracken G. , 1988, p. 9). Interviews are intended to elicit information on the social situation at hand, but are not necessarily the primary form of data, compared to phenomenological studies.

By attending the events, field data such as photos, marketing material, and personal notes will also be collected and analyzed. Observational notes and personal records will be gathered and analyzed. Finally, since the bridal event is publically promoted and frequently covered by news media, some publicly gathered data may also be useful. Some of these sources may include television reports, newspaper/blog/internet, and comments from chat rooms and web postings. These sources may also provide quotes and descriptions from event participants other than those the researcher was able to personally recruit.

Interviews and data collection will cease when theoretical saturation, or "categorical saturation," seems to have been reached. Theoretical saturation occurs when new data ceases to contribute anything new about the key category identified. It is also a primary means of

provisional verification in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). McCracken (1988) suggests eight interviews as a common point of reaching conceptual saturation in qualitative research, but others merely surmise that the richness of data diminishes after the first several interviews (Krueger, 1994). Creswell (2003) suggests that the typical grounded theory investigation requires 20 to 30 interviews. In effect, there is no definitive cut-off point and every grounded theory study differs in this respect.

Data analysis

For appropriate data analysis to occur, the researcher must become "immersed" in the data (Langley, 1999). Within the immersion, a critical aspect of data analyses is for the researcher to account for their role in the process. The researcher must engage in ongoing self-reflection in order to ward off potential personal biases, world-views and preconceived assumptions. All collected data will be analyzed according to the systematic constant comparison method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and several of their subsequent texts. This approach requires texts, notes, and other artifacts to be analyzed meaning unit by meaning unit (i.e., line by line, phrase by phrase), while continually comparing immediate data with data previously analyzed. This activity has been described as "analytic induction"; a process whereby the researcher moves between induction and deduction (Suddaby, 2006). Constant comparison must be a continuous activity during coding procedures.

Coding. Grounded theory data is analyzed with *coding* activities. Coding is used to uncover "meaning units" of experiences that emerge from the data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). These meaning units are then clustered or organized into categories or themes (Polkinghorne, 1989) where the goal is to find patterns in the data. The present study will employ Glaserian coding methods. Glaser (1978), as opposed to Strauss and Corbin (1998), describes coding as an

open and researcher-directed set of activities, rather than a strict set of rules to be followed. This coding style allows for a more emergent and flexible style of data analysis. The Glaserian coding paradigm includes open and selective coding. Open coding is the basis for theoretical sampling. In this phase, categories begin to emerge, which drives new sampling selection and eventually theoretical saturation. The emerging categories eventually converge on a core category. A core, or key, category is the theme to which all other sub-categories can relate. Selective coding then focuses on this emerging core category and limits the researcher's focus only on the variables that relate significantly to the identified core category (Glaser, 1978).

Evaluative criteria for qualitative research

The trustworthiness of the data will be assessed using a set of well accepted qualitative research criteria. These are credibility, transferability, comfirmability, and fit (Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002; Hirschman, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss& Corbin, 1990). Credibility is the extent to which the results represent the data. Transferability is the extent to which the findings might apply to alternate contexts. Confirmability means that the interpretations result from the participants and the phenomenon, rather than researcher bias. Fit indicates how well categories are indicated by the data, and how well the findings integrate with the substantive area under investigation.

Quantitative Research Approach

The fourth research objective seeks to determine situational conditions that lead consumers to perceive consumption contexts as competitive, i.e. exhibit evidence of competitive arousals. In this study, the perception of a competitive shopping situation is measured in terms of an attitude regarding a specific situation. Guided by commodity theory, four research

questions seek to examine variation among consumers' interpretations of competitive shopping situations with respect to two scarcity types: product or time scarcity. This requires a controlled experiment resulting in data that can be analyzed with statistical methods.

Research objective 4 seeks to determine the conditions (contextual and individual) that lead consumers to perceive consumption situations as competitive. This objective is supported by three specific research questions:

1. Does scarcity information lead consumers to perceive purchase situations as competitive?
    a. If so, for which scarcity type is this effect most observable?
2. How do individual differences affect this perception, if at all?
3. What effect, if any, does the perception of a competitive purchase situation have on purchase interest of a scarce good?

Commodity theory

Commodity theory presumes that any "thing" will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable. Things can be messages, information, experiences, or objects that meet the requirements of being potentially possessable, useful to their possessors, and conveyable from person to person. The theory states that commodities meeting these criteria "will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable [scarce][1] (Brock, 1968; p. 246)," where value refers to the object's potency for affecting attitudes and behaviors (Lynn, 1989). The present study evaluates the potency of the scarcity-value relationship to influence particular attitudes and behaviors;

[1] Caption added to clarify the synonymous meaning of *unavailability* and *scarcity*.

namely competitive attitudes towards the consumption context. In light of the influence perceptions and attitudes can have on purchase intent, the present study will also explore the potential relationship that may manifest between perceptions of a competitive context and purchase intent.

Revisiting the S-E-D model

The model presented in chapter two signifies the proposed relationship of scarcity to perceptions of competitive contexts. This model is an extension of Lynn's (1992) model of scarcity effects, or S-E-D model (scarcity-expensiveness-desirability). The model represents the established connection of scarcity to consumers' proclivity to assume scarce goods are also expensive. Through the assumed expensiveness of goods, scarcity leads to heightened desirability of those goods because people will attribute expensiveness to either high quality or perceived status of ownership. Lynn described the connection between scarcity and assumed expensiveness as one resulting from individuals' naïve economic theories pertaining to things that are relatively unavailable. These claims are supported by experimental endeavors (Lynn, 1989; Verhallen, 1982; 1984) that further confirm that the scarcity effect is more powerful when it is due to true market (demand) conditions rather than nonmarket (restricted supply) scarcity. Lynn's (1992) evaluation of the role of assumed expensiveness also indicated that scarcity's effect on desirability is enhanced when participants were primed to think about the price of a good in general, prior to being exposed to it (they were not informed of actual price). To control for the influence of the naïve economic theory of assumed expensiveness, Lynn (1992) suggests specifying the price of products when market scarcity is manipulated.

The present research does not seek to reestablish these conclusions, but to extend the implications of scarcity and its psychological effects on consumers. Chapter one's discussion on

Black Friday and the *Running of the Brides*, as well as chapter two's review of scarcity conditions are particularly important at this juncture. Given the complexity of scarcity conditions, the role of price, and the established function of market (demand and diminished supply) versus nonmarket scarcity effects, examining all of the potential combinations that may lead to inferences of competitive perceptions requires an intricate and lengthy program of research. The aim of this study is only to begin to delineate the potential effects of scarcity on people's competitive arousals, and draw preliminary conclusions about its relationship to purchase intent. Therefore, a simplified experiment focusing on a small number of components will be able to realize the research objective.

Study focus

The purpose of the quantitative study is to address the fourth stated objective. The study will focus on examining the effects of two types of scarcity (product and time) that may lead to perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This poignantly addresses Houston et al's (2002) call for research exploring contextual influences on competitiveness. It is assumed this relationship is mediated by desirability. Thus, although desirability is not a key dependent variable, the mediating role of desirability will be examined within the model.

The fourth objective also seeks to explain how individual differences may interact with scarcity conditions to predict perceptions of competitive consumption contexts.

Variables, measures, and hypotheses

Independent (Manipulated) variables

Scarcity condition. Scarcity condition refers to the degree of availability or unavailability of a commodified object. An object that is highly unavailable is scarce. An object that is widely

available is not scarce. Therefore, scarcity exists when resources are in limited supply, or are believed to be in limited supply.

Scarcity type. Scarcity type serves as the second independent manipulated variable. Scarcity type pertains to *what* is believed to be (un)available. Product scarcity refers to the relative unavailability of a tangible consumption object. Time scarcity refers to the relative unavailability of the duration for which a tangible or intangible consumption object can be acquired. In this study, time scarcity refers to imposed restriction set forth by a retailer, rather than that imposed by individuals' unique situations. This allows for comparisons between the effects of two scarcity "tactics." Therefore, the scarcity is technically supply-oriented.

Hypotheses. Although not supported through empirical tests, evidence from advertising and marketing scarcity tactics suggests that there could be a relationship between time scarcity and product scarcity. When time to acquire a commodified object is perceived to be scarce, individuals may make assumptions about how other consumers will respond to the scarcity condition and may infer product scarcity as a result. The reverse may also occur: when product scarcity is inferred, consumers may also assume time to acquire the commodified object is scarce as well. Therefore, the following hypotheses are offered:

H_{1a}: When products are perceived to be scarce, due to exposure of product scarcity tactics, time will also be perceived as scarce. Therefore, product scarcity and time scarcity should be positively correlated.

H_{1b}: When time perceived to be scarce, due to exposure of time scarcity tactics, product supply will also be perceived as scarce. Therefore, product scarcity and time scarcity should be positively correlated.

To test these hypotheses, a measure of inference will be included. Two one-item measures will be capable of indicating the relationship of the scarcity types. In the product

condition, participants will be asked to indicate how quickly they would have to act in order to purchase the focal object. In the time condition, participants will be asked to indicate how much product they believe is available. Responses will vary from (1) there is plenty of product/time available to (7) there is limited product/time available.

Dependent variables

One primary dependent variable is of interest: *perceived competitive purchase situation.*

Perceived Competitive Purchase Situation (PCPS). PCPS is a belief regarding the competitive nature of a consumer situation. Beliefs "refer to a person's subjective probability judgments concerning some discriminable aspect of his world (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; p. 131)." In classical belief-attitude network models, beliefs are the building blocks of attitudes, providing the basis for attitude formation, and frequently the route through which an attitude is measured or inferred (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Beliefs are typically measured along a continuum of a probability dimension that indicates the strength of a belief. Although attitudes towards objects have garnered significant attention in behavioral research, attitudes towards situations have shown to have significantly more predictability to behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Rokeach & Kliejunas, 1972). Therefore, establishing beliefs about a particular situation in lieu of measuring attitudes towards a commodified object is particularly relevant as a precursor to examining purchase intentions. (The scale item list can be found in Appendix G.)

Under conditions of scarcity or increasing unavailability, it is predicted that individuals will believe the consumption context to be more competitive than under non-scarce conditions. Thus, the scarcer an object becomes, the more a person should believe that the situation is to acquire it is becoming competitive. The following hypotheses reflect this assumption:

H_{2a}: People exposed to product scarcity messages will be more likely to perceive a competitive purchase situation for that scarce good, compared to those who are not exposed to scarcity messages about that same good.

H_{2b}: People exposed to time scarcity messages will be more likely to perceive a competitive purchase situation for the related good, compared to those who are not exposed to time scarcity messages about that same good.

Two secondary dependent variables are also of interest. Desirability will be measured to test replication of the scarcity effect established in extant literature. The effect of scarcity on desirability should be present before PCPS (not shown). Purchase intent will be examined for exploratory purposes. Figure 8 (p. 130) depicts both the hypothesized and exploratory relationships to be evaluated.

Desirability. Desirability refers to the interest one holds in owning an object, and scarcity has overwhelmingly been shown to increase desirability for commodifed objects. Following the measures employed by Lynn (1989), desirability will be measured with two items using Likert type response scales: (1) how desirable is *object x* and (2) would you be willing to trade *object x* for *object y*? (This will be described further in the procedures.) An unwillingness to trade a scarce good for a non-scarce good further reflects the interest one holds in owning it.

Purchase interest. Purchase interest is an attitude directed towards acquisition of a good or service. Purchase interest is important because it gives marketers an indication of the population that will adopt a product. Without establishing the relationship of scarcity to perceptions of competitive purchase situation, it is premature to make formal hypotheses about PCPS relationship to purchase interest. Therefore, this variable is included for exploratory purposes only and the following proposition is offered:

P_1: PCPS should influence purchase interest.

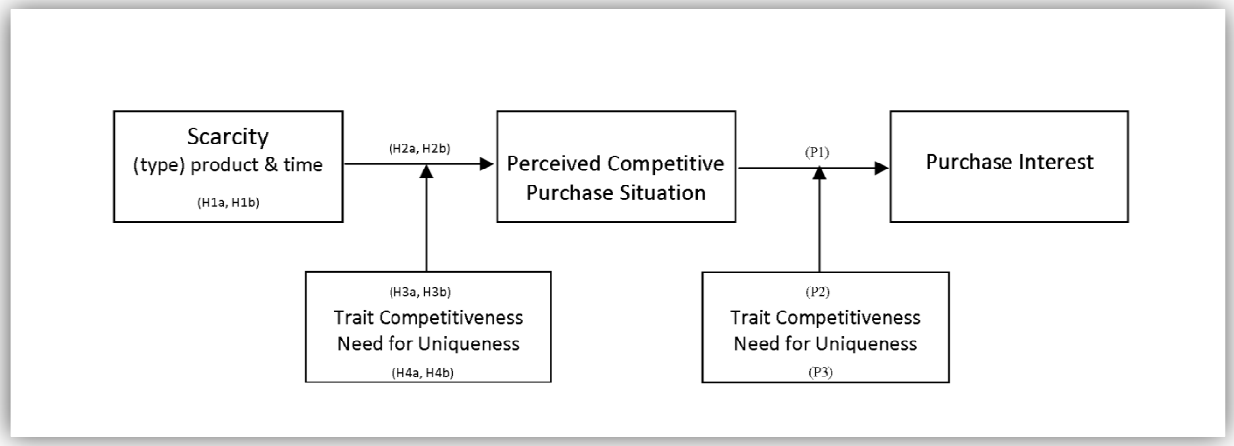


Figure 8. Extended exploratory model

Moderating independent (measured) variables

Moderating effects of two individual difference characteristics (traits) are hypothesized to influence the relationship between scarcity and PCPS.

Interpersonal trait competitiveness (IPC). The definition of interpersonal competitiveness is adopted from that of Griffin-Pierson (1990), Hibbard (2000), and Smither and Houston (1992). Interpersonal competitiveness refers to a disposition to desire to win in interpersonal situations. Houston et al (2002) warn that using an "inappropriate measure of competitiveness could lead to erroneous conclusions that may stifle further research (p. 296)." Since this study is not operating with overtly aggressive conditions for participants, the HCA was deemed not to be particularly relevant. PDCA was excluded because the purpose of the study was to examine interpersonal competitiveness in scarcity situations. Therefore predictions are made solely regarding the relationship of *interpersonal competitiveness* as a moderator of PCPS. The following hypotheses are offered:

H_{3a}: When exposed to product scarcity messages, high trait competitiveness should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce product condition.

H_{3b}: When exposed to time scarcity messages, high trait competiveness should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce time condition.

Based on the previous literature review, the pervasiveness of traits to influence behaviors across situations, the following propositions are also offered:

P_2: In general, high IPC should strengthen the relationship of PCPS to purchase interest.

Consumers' need for uniqueness (CNF). The review of scarcity literature positions the need for uniqueness as a mechanism responsible for the effect of scarcity on increased desirability. Consumers' need for uniqueness is defined as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image (Tian et al, 2001)." The trait manifests in three behavioral dimensions: creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice conformity, and avoidance of similarity. In essence, individuals high in CNFU turn away from consumption objects that are perceived as being mainstream, popular with the masses, or incapable of allowing creative differential expression. CNFU is believed to be consistent over time and capable of predicting consumer behaviors within a two year period over a broad range of consumer contexts (Tian & McKenzie, 2001). The following hypothesis is offered:

H_{4a}: When exposed to product scarcity messages, a high CNFU should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce product condition.

H_{4b}: When exposed to time scarcity messages, high CNFU should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce time condition.

Although desirability of scarce goods may be recognized in those who are motivated by uniqueness, these manifestations suggest that individuals characterized by the trait also interpret scarcity situations as those that are increasingly attractive to many people. Therefore, these individuals may not only consider commodified objects as desirable for themselves, but also recognize that others will also find commodified objects desirable (an element of the competitive context). Thus, scarcity should have an interesting impact on these individuals.

Since consumers' need for uniqueness is viewed through the lens of counter-conformity, a scarcity effect should be observed as an increased perception of a competitive consumption context. However, it would likely decrease the desire to own or purchase the commodified object. Therefore, the follow proposition is offered:

P_3: In general, high CNFU should attenuate the relationship of PCPS to purchase interest.

Planned analyses

Hypotheses testing will include a series of one-way ANOVA, linear regression, and moderated multiple regression analysis using SPSS statistical software. Main effects and interaction effects with respect to the independent variables will be of interest in the ANOVA and regression tests. In this experiment, there are two discreet factors and one continuous response variable. Therefore, to ensure accuracy of ANOVA and regression tests, three assumptions of the dependent variable must first be met: (1) the data should have a normal distribution, (2) observations must be independent, and (3) variances of the populations must be equal. A relatively equal sample size in each cell is also desired to guarantee orthogonality. When testing for interaction effects, Tukey's adjustment will be made to protect against Type-I errors.

Experimental design and sample size

To test the predicted hypotheses, a controlled experiment will be conducted. The first factor, scarcity type, will be manipulated with two levels: (1) *product* and (2) *time*. The second factor, scarcity condition, will be manipulated with two levels: (1) *scarce* and (2) *not scarce*. A third factor is represented the moderating independent trait variables. These levels will be examined as continuous variables resulting from the psychometric scales described previously. The design results in a 2 x 2 x 2 between subjects factorial design. Using the following formula to calculate sample size for multiple regression, $N > 50 + 8m$, where m is equal to the number of independent variables, a minimum sample of 98 is needed (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). A larger sample (40 per independent variable) is required to account for a skewed dependent variable or to conduct stepwise regression techniques. Based on these recommendations, a minimum sample of 240 is desired.

Manipulation check and pretest

Pretests will address two major concerns. First, manipulation checks are necessary to ensure that the treatments are received and processed as intended. A manipulation check will be conducted in a pre-test study, as well as during the formal study. Two manipulation check questions are required. In the product scarcity and non-scarcity treatments, participants will be asked to indicate how available they believe the products are that have been described or shown. In the time scarcity and non-scarcity treatments, participants will be asked to indicate how quickly they might have to act in order to purchase the product described. To assess the success of the manipulations, t-tests will be conducted. The manipulations will be supported if individuals receiving the scarcity treatments rate the product (time) as less available than those in the non-scarcity treatments ($p < .05$).

The second concern is to ensure validity and reliability of the dependent measure. A pretest using undergraduate will test the scale for reliability, readability, and purification of items. The pretest will also assess readability, validity, reliability of the established measures. To proceed with the study, mutli-item scales must exceed coefficient alpha values above 0.70 to ensure internal reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Procedures

Participant sample and recruitment

Participants will be comprised of members of a consumer panel who meet the requirements of age (over 18), involvement in the product category, and who have internet access. A generally homogenous sample allows for a higher propensity for the participants to consider the product in the experimental materials to be considered "useful" and "potentially possessable," a necessity under the commodity theory framework. Homogeneity of the sample also serves as a control mechanism for the experiment.

Materials

The study will be carried out via a web-interface. The web-interface provides several benefits to the researcher and to the participants. Participants benefit from being in their own natural setting while answering questions, some of which may be personal in nature. It also avoids imposing time pressures or interviewer biases that may result from direct interface with the experimenter or being placed in a laboratory setting. The researcher benefits from reducing the propensity for data entry error that can occur from paper and pencil tests. Web-interface designs collect responses directly into statistical analysis software, such as SPSS.

Once directed to the website, participants will be given a brief overview of the study's purpose and the researcher will be indentified. Participants will be told that the study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Tennessee, and is intended to better understand their attitudes towards new product advertisements. They will be notified that some questions will address aspects of their own personality. A confidentiality statement will conclude the introduction.

Next, participants will be presented with one of the four manipulated treatments. Following exposure to the treatments, participants respond to the dependent measures and manipulation check questions. An erroneous study will separate the items related to personality measure in order to help disguise the personality items from the treatments and dependent measures. General demographic data will also be collected in order to better understand our sample and potentially test for covariate influence. The study will conclude by thanking the participants for their participation and debriefing them on the purpose of the study and manipulations.

Chapter Three Summary

This chapter provided a detailed account of the research methods planned to address the stated research objectives and questions. Two methods were described. A qualitative study will employ grounded theory in an attempt to build a workable theory of consumer competition from the ground up. Simultaneously, a quantitative study will employ an experiment to test effects of scarcity messages on consumers' perceptions of a competitive purchase situation and purchase intentions. Planned procedures and data analyses for both studies were described. The findings each study are reported in two separate manuscripts that follow this chapter.

Possible converging of data

A final research objective is to integrate, when/if appropriate, data collection and analyses achieved under research objectives one through four. While no preliminary accounts can be made for this to be plausible, the concurrent mixed-methods approached is designed so that synergistic findings may be identifiable.

CHAPTER FOUR – MANUSCRIPTS

QUALITATIVE MANUSCRIPT

Creating Memories and Bonding through Competitive Shopping:
A Theory Building Study of Bridal Gown Shoppers

ABSTRACT

This study reports on qualitative data collected to better understand the experiences of people who engage in a competitive retail shopping event. It describes how consumers employ competitively-oriented shopping contexts to facilitate interpersonal bonding and create memories that are meaningful to the people involved. Within this process, distinct dynamic environmental conditions appear to dramatize and intensify emotions, influence changes in relationships between shoppers, and promote the evolution of competitive social structures into cooperative ones. A substantive theory of creating memories within competitive shopping experiences is extrapolated from the findings. *Creating memories* surfaced as the dominant phenomenon that describes consumer experiences. Bonding surfaced as the core category in the creating memories process, and is the category to which all other categories, concepts, and codes relate. The key phenomenon and core category addresses the questions: what is happening in competitive shopping situations and, what are people doing while engaged in a competitive shopping experience? Based on a wide range of data sources, the theory presented in this paper explains the process of how people initiate, enact, and solidify meaningful memories within a competitive shopping context. Implications for retailers and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Introduction

Since the dawn of man humans have competed with and against one other. Much competing has evolved from acts of necessity to acts of enjoyment. Today people spend numerous hours partaking in leisure-type competitions like sports, *fantasy* sports, gambling, and video games. Why do people enjoy competing and playing games so much? Playing games and engaging in competitions bring two main elements into consideration: first, playing games is experiential and inherently "fun," and second, the competition aspect of games typically result in "winning" or "losing," which is a finite outcome of the experience. B.F. Skinner (1969) proposed that the reward system of the brain is what keeps people engaged in the fundamentals of competition and game-playing. People enjoy competing and playing games because winning or achieving something activates the pleasure center of the brain, releasing neurotransmitters, like dopamine, that encourage repeat behaviors (Schultz, 1998). Despite a win or lose outcome, fun can act as positive reinforcement, allowing people to enjoy the experience in a manner that motivates participation in similar behaviors at a later time.

The act of competing is considered an experiential attribute that is (and has the potential to be) present in many shopping and consumer behavior situations. Although researchers have identified personality traits and situational circumstances as drivers of general competitive consumer behaviors (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Ku, Malhotra, & Murninghan, 2004; Mowen, 2000; Nichols & Flint, 2010a), competitive shopping itself has not garnered significant attention. As such, the purpose of this study began with the goal to better understand the motives, nature, and nuances of competing in the retail domain; e.g. engage in consumer competition (Nichols & Flint, 2010b). Drawing from a sample of informants who were engaged in a competitive shopping experience, the hope was to learn more about the phenomenon and enrich our

understanding of the processes that people go through while competing. However, because the grounded theory method advocates the importance of emergent themes, the careful and systematic analysis of the data led to the conclusion that the main phenomenon incorporated aspects of competing, but that what really was happening was that people were *creating memories.* At the heart of creating memories is the process of bonding. Specifically, *bonding through competitive shopping* incorporates the nuances and meaningful role of the competing experience, and contributes most to the phenomenon of creating memories. Therefore, this study concludes that bonding, within a competitive shopping context, is the prevailing theme that emerged from this study of consumer competition - which ultimately describes how people employ retail experiences to create memories.

What kinds of consumer experiences are memorable and meaningful? Retailers capable of foreseeing and providing opportunities that enable memorable customer experiences to form should benefit from a distinct positioning in the minds of consumers. But how do consumers come to value these experiences in a meaningful way? Despite numerous studies regarding *experience-seeking* consumers and experiential market offerings (e.g. Babin et al, 1994; Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Sherry, 1990), there is little research that examines how and why these experiences become meaningful and memorable. The findings reported in this paper begin to fill this gap.

In grounded theory tradition, the literature review was conducted during and following data interpretation, rather than prior to collecting data. Some of this literature is summarized up front in order to guide the reader, and will further integrate literature and theory where appropriate within the discussion of the findings. This integration led to the identification of several aspects to which consumer research has given little attention. These aspects (individually

and holistically) can enrich and fill several knowledge gaps in consumer behavior, and specifically in shopper behavior and motives. They should also enrich the retailers' understanding of how psycho-social phenomena could be integrated into promotional techniques.

These issues are important because consumer memories can have longstanding effects on outcomes like brand loyalty, brand awareness and recall, and positive word of mouth. Understanding the memory creation process can also help the retailer learn how to build more meaningful relationships with customers and become integrated into the memory. Current research is concerned mostly with the general shopping motives that include experience-seeking and other social motivational aspects of shopping (like gift-buying and leisure), but stops short of identifying how the experiences and social rewards are utilized and reflected upon by consumers themselves.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, a brief review of literature in the areas of competitiveness and competition, experience-seeking, retail memory, and social impact is presented. Next, the grounded theory method and activities employed in data collection and analysis are presented. Next, the model and findings are explained, integrating additional literature where appropriate. The paper concludes with managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Research on competition and competing

Many agree that competition is deeply ingrained in American culture and society (Horney, 1937; Mowen, 2004) and accepted in many forms. From a psychological standpoint, competition is characterized by two primary types of competitive attitudes: interpersonal and

personal development competitiveness (Ryckman et al, 1990; Ryckman, Thornton, & Butler, 1994; Griffin-Pierson, 1990). Interpersonal competitiveness refers to an enjoyment of striving against others, a disposition for superiority, or a way to gain superiority over rivals for limited resources (Hibbard, 2000). It is characterized by a desire to win in interpersonal situations (Smither & Houston, 1992), a need to feel superior to others in order to feel good about one self and affirm one's self-worth (Spence & Helmreich, 1983; Kayhan, 2003). Personal development competitiveness focuses primarily on enjoyment and mastery of tasks, rather than on winning over others (Ryckman, Kaczor, & Gold, 1996).

Extant literature indicates that competitiveness influences consumer behaviors such as bargaining (Jones, Trocchia, & Mothersbaugh, 1997), sports interest (Mowen, 2000), auction behavior (Angst, Agarwal, & Kuruzovich, 2008) and conspicuous consumption (Mowen, 2004).

Only a small body of work specifically discusses consumers acting out competitive behaviors in order to acquire products (Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Nichols & Flint, 2010a; Heyman et al, 2004; Ku, Malhotra, & Murninghan, 2004). Following Goffman's (1982) deprivation-compensation theory, some researchers suggest that competitive behaviors surface in consumer contexts because they pose opportunities for people to exercise competitive instincts that most of modern society has diminished (Parke, Griffiths, & Irwing, 2004). Other research and theories suggest that the real or implied scarcity of commodity goods influences people to have a heightened desire for increasingly unavailable goods, and as a result, manifest certain behaviors aimed to restore freedom of choice (Brehm, 1966; Brock & Mazzocco, 2003). Competing may be one of these behaviors.

Despite the absence as an empirically examined construct or phenomenon, the consumer competition phenomenon certainly exists as psychologists portend that competitiveness is a

relevant personality factor that is relevant every time individuals interact (Smither & Houston, 1992). Anecdotally, we see evidence of consumers actively competing with each other in contexts like Black Friday shopping and internet and live auctions. In fact, researchers find that participants in online auctions overwhelmingly perceive other bidders as "competitors," and refer to bid outcomes as winning or losing (Ariely & Simonson, 2003). These examples are common in Westernized marketplaces. Competition amongst consumers may prevail in differing forms within various types of market societies.

Recently, researchers have called for more research to explore contextual influences in competitiveness (Houston et al, 2002), as they specifically acknowledge that research regarding competition in consumer behavior lacks rigor (Angst et al, 2008; Mowen, 2004). These calls have remained largely unanswered.

Research on experience-seeking and social shopping

Marketers have learned to use consumers' motives of variety, novelty, and adventure-seeking to attract shoppers. Predominantly, these motives have been of interest to experiential intangible market offerings (e.g. concerts, amusement parks, promotional games, skydiving). The retail world has yet to fully utilize or understand the experiential aspects of shopping in terms of novelty-seeking motives. For what purpose(s) do people seek out novel and adventurous shopping experiences? Current literature streams point to several rationales. One is that people are inclined to prefer novel and adventurous experiences (Hirschman, 1980; Faison, 1977). Others suggest people seek adventurous and novel experiences in leisure activities because of the society with which they live (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993). Celsi et al (1993) propose that adventure-seekers in Western cultures operate within the cultural framework of a *dramatic worldview*. This view "pits protagonist against antagonist in a structured and discrete

context that progresses temporally through periods of tension building to *denouement* (climax) and *catharsis* (an emotional result; p. 2)."[2]

Experiential aspects of consumption can be driven by the product class, product usages, and general mental constructs (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) which together provide examples of hedonic types of consumption. Unfortunately, academic research in the retail sector has been slow to investigate the hedonic reasons people go shopping (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). They have, however, recognized the value and importance of the entertainment and emotional worth that can be attributed to shopping experiences (Babin et al, 1994; Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Consequently, the field of consumer behavior has recently come to suggest a *strategic marketing logic of experiences*. This logic is "based on the assumptions of symbolic resources, engaging transactions, and internalized value (Lanier & Hampton, 2009, p. 11)" that meets customers' desires through symbolic practices. These practices should stimulate the customer and leave a lasting impression.

Studies indicate that shopping itself can be intrinsically rewarding due to the enjoyment and excitement experienced during a shopping trip (Hirschman, 1983; Rook, 1987; Schindler, 1989), particularly when shopping is motivated by social motives (Tauber, 1972). This is because shopping can serve as a social experience which enables people to interact with others and increase levels of involvement and stimulation during shopping (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Shopping has been categorized as a 'social event' (Buttle & Coates, 1996), the motives of which

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[2] Parentheses added

are contextualized within life script, lifestyle, relationships, gender and location (Buttle, 1996). In line with the social aspect of shopping, Fischer and Arnold (1990) expose people's expressions of excitement, arousal and deep sense of enjoyment when shopping for others. Other studies report on consumers' enjoyment of having to bargain and haggle with sellers (Sherry, 1990). To summarize this area of work, Sherry (1990) notes that experience-seeking can be a far more significant motive for shoppers than the acquisition of goods themselves. The present research makes similar conclusions with this regard.

Burgeoning research on memorable experiences and retail memory

What aspects of market or retail experiences are memorable? Memory reflects two primary responses associated with any human experience: emotional and/or rational responses. To achieve customer delight, researchers suggest that the elements contributing to both emotional and rational experiences be balanced because the kind of experience impacts the type of memory a consumer forms (Honebein & Cammarano, 2009). Honebein and Cammarano (2009) contend that exceptional customer experiences are memorable when emotional parts of the experience are memorable and the rational parts are not. To create memorable customer experiences that are profitable, they further stress the importance of involving the customer in designing the experience. Involving the customer is a key tenet of the co-creation of value proposed by the service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Research interested in memory and its connection to experiential aspects of consumer behavior has recently infiltrated the retailing domain. Retail memory is defined as "all the psychological processes by which consumers store knowledge related to their retail shopping experiences," including the processes of developing, adjusting, and coding these processes into associative networks (Babin & Borges, 2009, p. 164). Customers' memories result from the

totality of interactions that constitute a shopping experience, not only the products that they purchase (Babin & Borges, 2009). Babin and Borges (2009) emphasize the need for research into memory in retailing studies, as well as specific mechanisms by which customer memory may link to value. This study links the process of creating memories in the retail setting to the value for which consumers attach to the memory. Specifically, findings suggest that the symbolic nature of wedding gowns and wedding gown shopping enhances memory creation and the intrinsic value of the retail experience.

Beyond the experiential nature of market offerings in general, and retail memories linked to a time and place (both emphasizing finished objects), the holistic processes through which experiences are generated and remembered lacks rigorous empirical support and theoretical platforms. This paper begins to fill this gap.

Social impact, crowding, and emotions

The phenomenon of competition suggests a real or implied presence of others within a particular domain. Social Impact Theory (SIT) proposes that people are impacted by the real, implied or imagined presence of action of a social presence (other people or groups of people) (Argo, Dahl, & Manchada, 2005). Three principles describe the theory. First, the impact of a social presence's social force increases when the social presence is large (compared to small), is in close proximity, or is high in source strength (i.e. importance) (Latane & Wolfe, 1981). The second is concerned with the relationships between social forces. It suggests that the "influence of a social presence is a multiplicative function of the forces with the greatest impact, occurring when there are several people in close proximity and in high source strength (Argo, Dahl, & Manchada, 2005, p. 208)." The third principle presumes that a social presence's influence will be divided between the number social targets present, i.e., the size of the crowd.

These propositions are supported through research on stage fright, showing that increases in audience size lead to participants experiencing more negative emotions (Jackson & Latane, 1981). Increases in the number of people in the crowd have a negative effect on peoples' feelings of comfort and affect (Griffit & Veitch, 1971). However, these studies are concerned with non-interactive social impact; i.e. the crowd and the participants do not engage in purposeful personal social contact.

On the other hand, research on crowding and crowd density in hedonic experiences (e.g. amusement parks, concerts) suggests that crowding may actually enhance the consumer experience (Brown, Van Raalte, & Andersen, 2000; Holt, 1995). Social density can produce positive emotional and behavioral effects in particular service settings (e.g., a bar), but also lead to negative effects in other settings (e.g., a bank) (Hui & Bateson, 1991). In most circumstances, people tend to protect their own space and appreciate the ability to move freely. A number of qualitative studies suggest that in crowded leisure settings (e.g., sports bar, disco, rock concert, markets) people tend to look for, and actually value, the lack of personal space (sharing their space with others) and the diminution of their freedom of movement. This is because they consider others to be integral in shaping the experience (Eastman & Land, 1997; Holt, 1995; Price, Arnould, & Deibler, 1995; Sherry, 1998; Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 1999).

In the retail environment specifically, research has found an inverted relationship between non-interactive social size and emotions such that being alone in a retail setting produces negative emotions, as does the presence of two or more people (Argo et al, 2005). The researchers qualify the findings by suggesting that people have a strong need for interpersonal association such that when in the presence of only one person in a retail environment, consumers desire interpersonal attachment. However, as social presence increases, beyond the comfort of

one person, consumers react negatively. Prior to conducting interviews, it was unknown the manner in which participants would interpret crowding, or if crowding would serve to elicit positive or negative emotions that would affect other aspects of the consumers' experience. In general, it was found that perceived social size did influence participants' experience, affect emotions, and contribute to dynamic social interaction.

The literatures reviewed shed light on some of the concepts and themes present in the findings. In the next section, the methodological components of the study are described.

Method

Overview of Grounded Theory

Because of the lack of theory and empirical research in the area of consumer competition, the use of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is appropriate. Grounded Theory (GT) is a discovery-oriented, predominantly qualitative research methodology that is useful for building theory from field data on a core social phenomenon which involves problematic situations for people. It is a practical method for conducting research that focuses on the process of interpretation by analyzing the "the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings (Gephart, 2004, p. 457)," while providing flexible guidelines for constructing theory 'grounded' in the data. According to Hirschman and Thompson (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997, p. 46) GT methods are "especially appropriate when the objective of the research is to discover consumer-based theories and constructs."

By focusing on personal experiences of participants and utilizing field data to understand social problems, activities, and processes, GT research strives to synthesize and abstract qualitative field data to a higher level by developing a theoretical framework that emerges *during*

the research process. GT involves a dynamic set of data collection, data coding, and data interpretation activities. A true GT study must be able to adjust with the direction of the data, allowing for unexpected interpretations.

Study Context

To facilitate the exploration of consumer competition, a context that has garnered attention for its competitive atmosphere is most conducive. It is appropriate to begin sampling by approaching groups that are believed to maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on the research problem (Glaser, 1978).

The context chosen to study the phenomenon of consumer competition was a series of bridal gown sales: Filene's Basements' *Running of the Brides* (herein*, ROTB)*. These events were chosen as the primary sampling contexts for several reasons. First, one sale event was likely to be very similar in structure to the next. Therefore, theoretical saturation could be reached. Second, the events are a long-standing tradition dating back to the 1940's, providing a context that has proven to be a successful selling strategy for the retailer over an extended period of time. As such, it is possible that the findings may be representative of consumer experiences in similar retail situations. Finally, ROTB has been characterized by consumers, the retailer, and the press as competitive in nature. Given this, many rich consumer competition experiences were expected to be readily available for study, and participants were expected to be easily identifiable and able to meet the study requirements. Preliminary interviews with women who previously attended a ROTB event confirmed this presumption and the context were deemed appropriate to study the phenomenon more closely. An elaboration on the context will be provided in subsequent paragraphs.

Sampling and Description of Informants

Key informants participated in a *Running of the Brides* event. *Brides-to-Be* were originally selected as the key informants for study however, after completing the initial analysis, it became evident that much of the competitive activity was being performed by the brides' team members. Therefore, using theoretical sampling and a snowballing technique, the informant base was expanded to include both brides and team members who participated in the event. It was believed that the inclusion of these informants would help us reach theoretical saturation, especially as the core category began to emerge. As data collection continued, it was confirmed that these informants were necessary for theoretical saturation.

Informants were recruited on-site by the researcher and through the snowballing technique. Interviews were conducted both on-site (in-person) and via telephone. Due to the intimate nature of the event with friends and family, and the distance from home brides and their party often traveled in order to attend, post-event interviews took place over the telephone in order to avoid inconvenience and intrusiveness. The researcher recruited informants by approaching them while they waited in line prior to the store opening. This allowed the researcher to capture the "pre-event" experience, including the competitive spirit or competitive arousal that potentially existed. Most pre-event interview informants were later involved in post-event interviews occurring within one week after the sale. Some also participated in follow-up interviews several months later. Informants were given cash and gift card incentives.

Traditional theoretical sampling was employed. Theoretical sampling is a data collection process that combines data collection, data coding, and data analysis which leads the researcher to determine where and when to turn next for data. Theoretical sampling is an emergent process, such that the direction for new data collection *emerges* from the current data and interpretations

of those data. Theoretical sampling played a major role in the present research, as it became clear, through the comparative coding and analysis process, that the original phenomenon of interest was not the central theme emerging from the data. Thus, as analysis and interpretations continued, the direction of the interviews and new data collection evolved. Sampling ceased at 23 informants, as it became clear that redundant data were being collected. This redundancy suggested that the breadth and depth of phenomenon understanding that was desired had been captured. Table 7 (p. 151) depicts the informant profile and number of contacts with each person. The data collection methods are described next.

Data Collection

Grounded theory permits the use of many sources of data. Numerous qualitative researchers advocate using an array of data sources to combat "gaps" that may surface when relying only on a single source (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). A preliminary interview guide was used to facilitate the interview process (see Appendix A). The guide provided a starting point for conducting the interviews, but interviews should be "flexible, informal and interactive (Maxwell, 1996, p. 114)." Therefore, deviation from the interview guide occurred frequently as evolution of questions occurred based on previous interviews and the direction of each unique interview. For example, the first few post-event interviews began by asking participants to describe their experience at *ROTB* from beginning to end; i.e. preparations, the people involved, competing with other teams, and other aspects of the actual event.

Table 7 *Informant Profile*

Pseudonym	General Informant Role	Relationship to Bride	City of Participation	# Interviews
Allie	Bride		Atlanta	2
Brenda	Team member	Sister; MOH	Chicago	1
Cassidy	Team member	MOH	Washington, DC	2
Delaney	Team member [Tamara's Team]	Cousin	Washington, DC	2
Erin	Team Member	Best Friend	Washington, DC	1
Felice	Team Member	Bridesmaid	Chicago	2
Grace	Team Member	Sister; BM	Washington, DC	2
Hollie	Team Member	Good Friend	Chicago	1
Isabel	Team Member [Allie's Team]	Good Friend	Atlanta	3
Jen	Bride & Team member	Best Friend/ BM	Atlanta	2
Kristin	Team member	BM	Chicago	1
Lauren	Team Member	Mother & MOH	Atlanta	1
Mandy	Bride		Atlanta	3
Nancy	Bride		Chicago	2
Olivia	Bride		Atlanta	3
Paige	Bride		Chicago	2
Quinn	Bride		Atlanta	1
Rachel	Bride		Chicago	1
Sondra	Bride		Chicago	2
Tamara	Bride		Washington, DC	1
Vivian	Bride		Atlanta	1
Whitney	Team member	BM	Washington, DC	1
Yvette	Team Member	MOH	Chicago	1
			Total Interviews	**38***

The interviews incorporated the ethnographic technique of *grand tour*, which allowed the informants to let the researcher "walk in their shoes." Specific experiences were probed further to gain insights into responses that were below surface level, allowing the researcher to reach higher levels of abstraction in later analysis. Because informants tend to relay experiences that dealt with a very dynamic environment, responses tended to be made in terms of what they were "doing." The probes were used to access responses dealing with feelings, emotions, thoughtful and behavioral processes, causes of behavior and thoughts, and detailed descriptions of activities. Interview lengths averaged 10-15 minutes for pre-event interviews, and ranged from 40 minutes to 1 ¼ hours for post-event interviews. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed by the lead author.

Additionally, several informal interviews were conducted as the researcher acted as a participant observer engaging brides and their teams in general conversation. For ethical reasons, these conversations were not digitally recorded, but were summarized in extended field notes (written and/or verbally recorded).

By attending the events, field data such as photos, marketing material, and observational notes will were also collected[3]. Finally, some publicly gathered data was also useful to the interpretation. Some of these sources included television reports, newspaper/blog/internet stories, and comments by participants from chat rooms and web postings. These sources provide quotes and descriptions from event participants other than those the researcher was

[3] Due to store policy, no photographs were taken inside the store, however many photos are available through various media sources.

able to personally recruit. They were used primarily ad-hoc to help confirm the findings that emerged during formal data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to the systematic constant comparison method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This approach requires all data to be analyzed meaning unit by meaning unit (i.e., line by line, phrase by phrase), while continually comparing immediate data with data previously analyzed.

Interpretations of all data sources were based on multiple readings of each data piece in order to capture a holistic and grounded image of the informant's story or experience. Interpretations were continuously compared to each other, as well as to the whole. This procedure was facilitated by qualitative data analysis software (QDA-Miner), where hundreds of concepts were coded and categorized. Transcripts ranged from approximately 3,800 words to 11,000 words and averaged twenty pages of text per participant (apx. 400 pages total). Interpretive analysis took place over a period of fourteen months (2009-2010), requiring an estimated 300 hours of analysis. The codes, categories, and emergent themes were eventually integrated into the theoretical framework presented in this paper.

Coding

Each interview was entirely transcribed into text. The data were then analyzed with *coding* activities. Coding is used to uncover "meaning units" of experiences that emerge from the data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). These meaning units are then clustered or organized into concepts, categories and themes (Polkinghorne, 1989) where the goal is to find patterns in the data. Glaserian coding methods were employed in data analysis. This method allows for a

more emergent and flexible style of data analysis and includes *open* and *selective* coding. The direction and nature of the interviews evolved due to the emergent categories and themes. The emerging categories eventually converged on a core category, which selective coding helps the researcher by focusing on specific emergent themes that are central to the phenomenon. The core category pulls together all the selective codes and strands in order to offer an explanation of the processes and behavior under study (Goulding, 2000).

In Glaserian tradition (1978), the codes and concepts were evaluated and organized based on appropriate coding families that became evident in the data. The coding families serve as a reference point to understanding the relationships of the codes and concepts. Several coding families emerged as important classifications of the data. These coding families were *condition, causes, process, consequence, unit,* and *culture*. Using the coding families assisted the data analysis by helping the researcher better understand the nature of the data and the relationships between the incidents, codes, and concepts. Along the way, descriptive memos were written to elaborate upon each category of themes, and were then sorted to create the main theory around which all themes were related.

Evaluative Criteria

The trustworthiness of the data was assessed using a set of well accepted qualitative research criteria. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, comfirmability, and integrity (Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002; Hirschman, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Overlapping GT criteria of fit, generality, understanding, and control were also addressed (Flint et al, 2002). A description of the actions taken to extensively address the trustworthiness of the study and its findings are provided in Table 8 (p. 156).

Contextual Description

To fully grasp the findings and participant quotes reported in this manuscript, it is necessary for the reader to understand the environment and circumstances in which informants were operating. This summary should provide a basis to which the findings were grounded. Similar to phenomenological studies, the findings presented are considered figural to the ground (or common circumstances) in which they occur.

Running of the Brides®

Filenes Basement is a large Boston-based discount retailer of high fashion brand apparel. Dating back to 1909, the retailer is well-known in the New England region and presently operates twenty-four stores across the Eastern and Midwestern regions of the United States. Eight locations presently host a *Running of the Brides* event.

The sales events contextualizing the study took place on four Friday mornings throughout 2009 and 2010. Stores were located in either downtown city shopping districts or within shopping malls as a major flagship store. Each sale officially began at 8:00 am on the respective Friday morning, boasting from 1,300 to 2,500 gowns marked at three price-points: $249, $499 and $699 (at the time of the study). Original retail prices ranged between $900 to more than $9,000. The gowns were from various designers which, like the styles, colors, fabrics and sizes, were undisclosed to the public. The gowns were hung in transparent garment bags on dozens of racks in one designated area of the store. They were not organized in any particular fashion. These are common characteristics of each *ROTB* sale.

Table 8 *Assessing the Trustworthiness of the Study and Findings*

Trustworthiness Criteria	Method to Address the Trustworthiness
Credibility	• Lead researcher spent over one year collecting data and finalizing analyses • Lead investigator interacted with advisor and committee members throughout data collection and interpretation – additional and more comprehensive insights and interpretations of data were acknowledged and used to refine the analysis • A one-page open-ended questionnaire was sent to participants that was specifically designed to probe on the core category and its supporting categories. Informant responses added rigor to the findings.
Transferability	• Conducted theoretical sampling – participants' role in the experience varied, as did their ethnic backgrounds and life-stages. Participants were also from a variety of geographic regions in the US.
Dependability	• Had participants reflect on many experiences covering recent events as well as similar events that occurred up to 5 years prior to the interviews. (e.g. Participants often commented on the similarity of the event to Black Friday shopping, but had limited vivid memories of Black Friday other than negative aspects). Some participants had previously been involved with ROTB and commented on these experiences as well.
Confirmability	• A one-page open-ended questionnaire was sent to participants that was specifically designed to probe on the core category and its supporting categories.
Integrity	• Interviews were conducted professionally, and in non-threatening manner. Informants received detailed outline of anonymity processes and privacy of responses.
Fit	• Addressed by trustworthiness methods of credibility, dependability, and confirmability
Understanding	• A one page summary of the findings, along with the figures, was presented to a set of participants. Participants confirmed that the interpretation reflected their worlds.
Generality	• Ensured sufficient length and openness of interviews so that many complex facets of the phenomenon and its concepts could be obtained.
Control	• The participants were able to control most aspects of their experience and were free to elaborate on any of these aspects during the sequence of interviews.

Attendees of the sale always included one key person: the bride-to-be. A key feature of this event is that she is (typically) the sole gown consumer per group. In most cases, the bride was accompanied by at least one other person, and sometimes up to twenty-five accomplices. Brides and their accomplices (herein, *teams*) began lining up at the store as early as twenty hours in advance. An extended detailed account of the primary researcher's observations of the events can be found in Appendix B.

Findings

This study began as a means to examine the phenomenon of consumer competition. While competing surfaced as a major thread within various aspects of the interpretations and findings, an alternative dominant phenomenon was identified that more accurately captures "what was happening" for our *ROTB* participants.

The major findings of the study revolve around an emergent phenomenon called *creating memorie*s and a core category called *bonding through competitive shopping*. The bonding category is nested within a supporting category termed *performing and competing*, as it provides a backdrop to which the core category is framed. *Performing and competing* represents decisive actions and strategies in which the participants engaged. Bonding (shortened gerunds will be used to reduce redundancy) represents the basic social process (BSP) that surfaced through the data analysis. In Glaser's (1978) view, the goal of GT is to generate theory that accounts for a pattern of behavior that is relevant and problematic to the people involved, and which normally accounts for a basic social process. BPS's are summaries of the patterned systematic uniformity of social life which people experience and which can be conceptually captured (Goulding, 2002). As stated, the basic social process of initial interest was that of competing, however the data

suggest strongly that bonding is the predominant BSP and also the core category central to the phenomenon of creating memories. It is important to note that BPS's can be a starting point for analysis, or an emergent theme.

Thus, the phenomenon of creating memories will be described largely by the core category and its main supporting category. Two other important categories highlight antecedents and consequences of bonding, and complete the framework of creating memories. This phenomenon exists within a set of specific conditions that help contextualize the phenomenon and the categories. The paper continues by describing the emergent phenomenon, followed by descriptions of the conditions. Next, the stages involved in creating memories are explained. These stages are the antecedent stage called mobilizing, a second stage encompassing the core category of bonding and its main supporting category, and a consequence stage called preserving. Figure 9 (p. 159) depicts the process, concepts, and context related to the theory.

In addition to the main process depicted in the model, several changes occurred during the process of creating memories. These trajectories are noted in Figure 9 and will be discussed towards the end of the manuscript.

Emergent Phenomenon: Creating Memories

Creating memories emerged as the true phenomenon of the study which describes what was really happening for our study participants. The theory presented in this paper explains the processes involved in creating memories within the context of the Running of the Brides, a competitive shopping event. In this case, participants were engaged in a novel, unique, and competitively-oriented shopping experience that contributed interpersonal bonding and to the creation of memories. Contextually speaking, the competitive nature of the shopping event

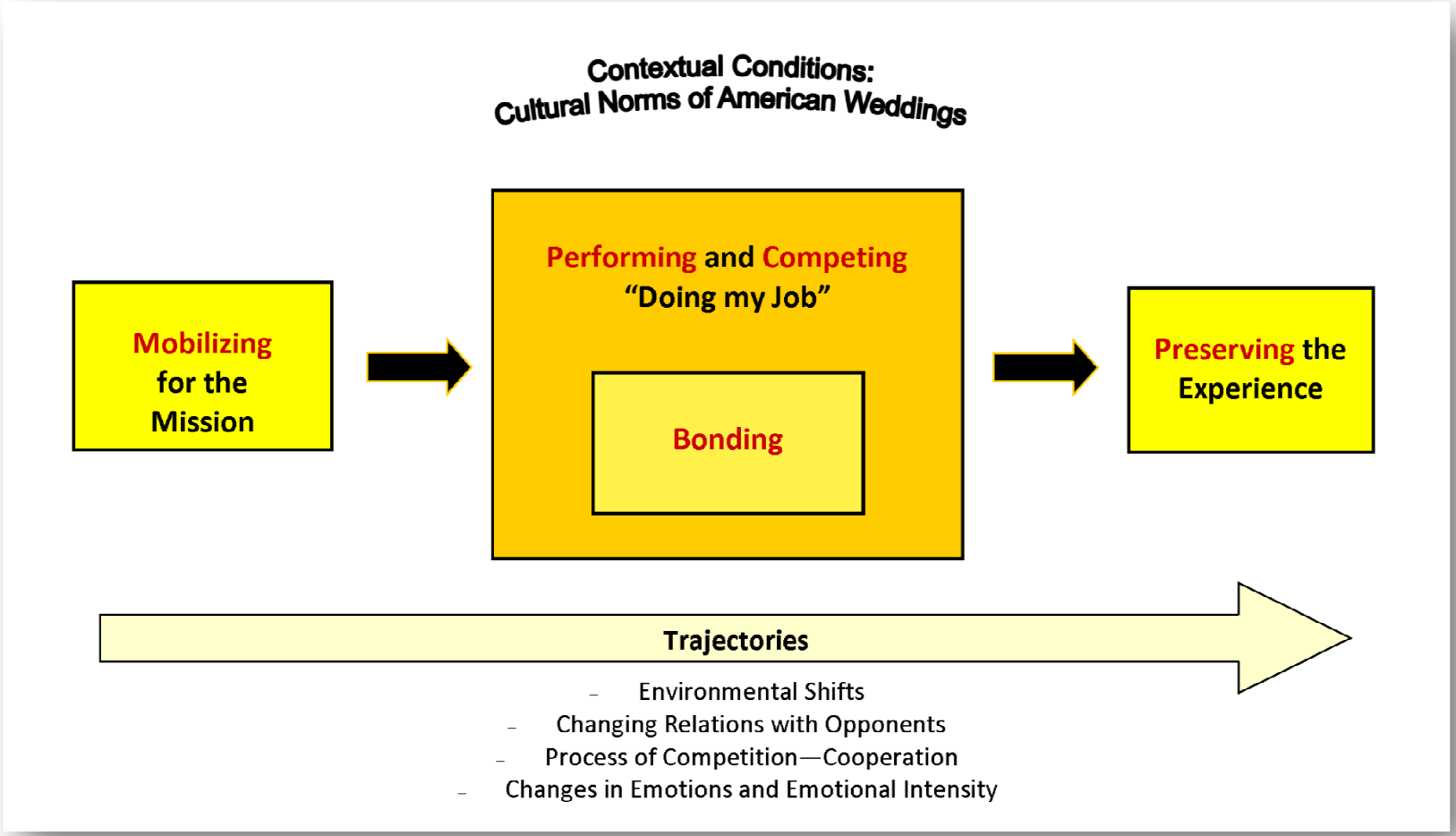


Figure 9. Process of creating memories in competitive shopping

allowed participants to create memories that were a direct reflection of the interpersonal bonding that took place. For some participants, the notion of creating a memory was reflective, meaning that only after the experience did they refer to it as a "great memory," "something to remember," or "something to always look back on." This was normally indicative of a greater sense of uncertainty and a limited view of the experiential expectations. In such cases, people did not consider the memories being created *during* the event because they were highly engaged and experiencing "in the moment" emotions and thoughts geared towards finding a dress and managing the competitive landscape. There are many reflections of having good memories of the experience. For example:

> I'd say the funniest memory was running towards the door. I was with two of my best friends that I've known since 6th grade and we were laughing so hard because everyone would run and then stop and slam into each other. We did that like 3 times before we were in the door. I also loved that the smallest person on our team got a dress. She came out of the crowd clutching it with a huge smile on her face. But, I'd have to say the happiest memory is when my friend that got married six weeks before me found her dress. [Jen]

> I don't know if I'll make a wedding scrapbook but it's something that I'll always remember and always cherish the fun pictures of us that we have, because it really was, I tell people that it's the girliest thing I've ever done because I'm not a girly girl, but it was really, really, really fun. [Allie]

> It still comes up. Whenever anyone asks about my wedding dress or my wedding comes up in conversation I have to tell the story. People are fascinated by the thought. We tell my friends who have gotten engaged that they have to do the Running of the Brides! It also comes up when we are all together at family functions. [Paige]

For most participants, being involved in the creation of memories existed at a high level of abstraction and above their level of awareness until later, when the experience could be replayed in their minds and considered in a more holistic sense. While some participants were

clearly able to see the value of the experience in terms of a meaningful memory, like Jen and Allie, the language participants used to express this varied and sometimes indicated that it remained at a level of abstraction. This is evident in Paige's quote above.

For some participants a shift occurred in their mentality once they became materially involved in the event. This shift moved them psychologically from the key objective of finding a dress to realizing that the experience itself would be important and memorable. Delaney, who was very competitively natured, centered most of her interview on the competitiveness of the event and strategic actions with her team and other teams geared towards accomplishing her "mission" of finding her cousin a dress. But she does finally offer a glimmer of shifting from task-oriented motives to realizing that she had been involved in something more meaningful.

> After Tamara got her dress…It's funny I felt like mission accomplished, successful. Another thing that I, I actually said this to my mom - it was really nice because people say, again I've never experienced it but you know it sounds like a cliché: *oh you just know when you find your dress*, but I witnessed that. Tamara started crying when she tried on that dress. I wanted to help her, it was an experience I had not had before so I'm always open to new experiences. [Delaney]

On the other hand, many participants recognized early in the preparations and involvement with the *ROTB* that it would be worthy of being memorable, and that they desired to have the memory. For example:

> I had second thoughts about going anyway because I was afraid I wouldn't like any of (the dresses) and end up kind of wasting (my team's) time. We decided that even if we didn't find one it would be fun and a neat experience. [Sondra]

> So once they said go, I ran in there I really don't remember too much of it to be honest…I had my little sister there just to like take pictures of the event just because we wanted to have memories of how funny that was. [Tamara]

Although Glaser (1978) vehemently contends that verification has no place in GT and should be left to subsequent quantitative empirical investigations, other GT paradigms (i.e.

Straussian paradigms) take the position that GT findings have implicit verification because the theory is grounded in the data, and one need only look to the data for verification. Depending on the level of abstraction, it can be difficult to convey these implicit data pieces. This description of the emergent phenomenon and supporting representative quotes offer the reader "evidence," or a degree of verification, that the phenomenon is grounded in the data. Representative quotes will be employed throughout the remainder of the manuscript for the same purpose.

Conditions: contextual, causal, and intervening

Within the central phenomenon, *bonding through competition* is the core category to which other categories, concepts, and codes relate. This core category addresses the question: *what are people doing who attend a competitive shopping event?* Before describing the core category, the conditions that support the phenomenon of creating memories are explained. This will help the reader to understand the entire scope of the phenomenon and how the categories are representative of stages in the creating memories process.

In Strauss and Corbin's (1998) paradigm of GT, conditions explain the situation or context in which a phenomenon occurs. They can be contextual, causal, and intervening. Although Glaser's coding techniques were employed for much of the data collection and analysis, contextual, causal, and intervening conditions are important to dispel for a rich understanding of the phenomenon and its categories.

Contextual conditions

Contextual conditions are the specific sets of conditions, or patterns of conditions, that intersect dimensionally at a time and place to create the set of circumstances or problems to which people respond through actions/interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In Western

societies, like many cultures, weddings are symbolic ceremonial rituals that transcend generations, religions, and other inter-cultural differences. The wedding symbolizes commitment and shared love between two people. The wedding ceremony itself is frequently considered a "rite of passage" into adulthood (Baker, 1990, p. 48). Weddings are also an example of the commodification of ritual elements of social life in western cultures (Currie, 1993).

In 2008, the average American wedding cost $29, 334. The average cost of a wedding dress was $1,032, a 22 percent decrease from the prior year.[4] The symbolism of wedding rituals and wedding-related rituals contextualize the people, the language, and the experiences of the study informants. Because a wedding is typically (or hoped to be) a one-time event, the wedding dress itself carries significant symbolic meaning, especially to the American bride. It can also carry significant meaning to the people who are involved in preparing for and celebrating the wedding, including her parents, siblings, close friends, and relatives. In American culture, it is traditional for the bride's mother and other female members of her family, as well as close female friends to accompany the bride to gown "fittings" in order to help her choose her dress. These significant others contribute to the cultural and ritualistic nuances of modern American weddings. Researchers have commented on the ability for weddings to promote situations during which family membership and ties are affirmed and renewed (Currie, 1993).

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[4] Source: www.theknot.com 2008 Wedding Survey

Cultural aspects of weddings are integral to the present findings, highlighting the movement of meaning from the culturally constituted world, to the product, and finally to the individual (McCracken, 1986). It also highlights some tenets of consumer culture theory (CCT). CCT is a platform employed by theorists and researchers as a means to integrate multiple theoretical perspectives and contextually diverse studies that "address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, marketplace structures," and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 129) that explores the heterogeneous and overlapping of cultural groupings that span socio-historic frameworks (rather than maintain country-specific nuances, for example).

These contextual conditions provide a ground to which the findings are figural.

Causal conditions

Causal conditions represent a set of circumstances that enable a phenomenon or process to take place or begin. They can be viewed as general motivating forces that exist within the consumers' environment. On the surface, discount pricing appears to be a driving force enticing brides and their teammates to consider attending a *ROTB* event. Not surprisingly, many of the brides described the pricing in relation to the overall value scheme of the wedding.

> Plus me and my fiancé are paying for the wedding ourselves so that was a big factor as well considering... So once I saw the prices were marked down so much - you know I thought that actually maybe it would be a really good idea to go there. [Tamara]

Promoting the "designer" aspect of the sale magnified the price motivation for the brides as well, although some admittedly acknowledged their naivety of specific designers. The opportunity to purchase a reduced-priced designer gown is considered a causal condition that initiated and enabled the process of creating memories and the bonding that ensued.

Further, the brides confessed multiple times throughout the interviews that although they were motivated to attend *ROTB* in order to purchase a dress, having a team of supporters was a requirement for their attendance. Therefore, another causal condition was the ability for brides to bring an unlimited number of companions. Of course team members would not have attended without being asked or invited by a bride, someone in need of a wedding dress.

It also appears that the experiences were capable of being memorable because the participants anticipated the event to have qualities that invoked "different-ness," "uniqueness," and "fun." Therefore, the notions of novelty, adventure, and fun are considered causal conditions that enabled participation, began the process of memory creation, and ultimately allowed bonding to occur. For example:

> I was like you know it would help to get a discount dress, but it was more for me for the experience. If I left without a dress I wasn't gonna be devastated, it was gonna be 'okay we'll now go look at dresses in the stores.' Really I think what my family went for was for the experience, we were just looking to have a good time and to try something new... [Quinn]

A final causal condition was the perceived opportunity to spend quality time with important people in their lives that many of the participants identified. This causal condition lends itself strongly to both the core category of bonding, and the phenomenon of creating memories.

Intervening conditions

A set of events/experiences/processes becomes a grounded theory when data representing incidents in reality can be fitted to the central emergent story. Cases within the data not fitting the storyline may then, if they offer significant explanatory power to the theory, be considered intervening conditions, which can be viewed as moderating factors (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In

this study, the intervening conditions moderate or mediate strategic actions, which include both behavioral actions and psychological considerations (e.g. deciding to participate, engaging in competitive behaviors, specific task performance, determination to succeed, degrees of bonding, activities geared towards preservation) that can influence the consequence of the process. Here, the strategic actions result in the creation of memories. Discovering these outlying cases and building explanations into the theory for them increases the explanatory power of the theory (Goede & De Villers, 2003). Intervening conditions can encompass space, time, culture, history and other broadly defined concepts.

Within the phenomenon of creating memories and the core and central category of bonding, several intervening conditions are noteworthy. The intervening conditions described here pertain to the broad structural context of the core category: bonding through competitive shopping.

An important intervening condition is that of time. The amount of time, or enduring involvement, the participants spent both collectively and individually in preparation for the event, being physically present at the event, and reflecting on the event afterwards is pertinent to the phenomenon of creating memories because time or enduring involvement with the context enriches the memory and the degree of bonding capable of taking place.

A second intervening condition that broadens the scope of the theory is primary group size, or number of people within each team. The number of people involved in the experience can significantly alter the dynamic of inter-and intra-group relationships that contribute to the intrinsic characteristics of the memory, the type of bonding that occurs, and the value participants may attach to these bonds. For example,

> Some of the girls I didn't really know but I think having more people did make it more fun because more people could do the trading for the dresses, there were more dresses to try on, more people to get excited, more people to say that's not a good dress, or that's a good dress and so it was more fun just because of the number of people we had. [Grace]

A final intervening condition pertinent to the phenomenon of creating memories is related to an individual's values for ritualistic events. This speaks to the degree of personal meaning and importance of the experience, including meaning and importance one holds for weddings, rituals, family time and other ceremonious events in general. Salient events in peoples' lives tend to have mainstay properties in one's memory. Broadly, variations in personal meaning would influence how and to what degree the participants would believe or hold the experience as something that can become integrated into their life-story[5]. Although consistency is found across the data suggesting that each informant was involved in creating memories, their personal values and belief system related to ritualistic events may vary, which, it is surmised, may affect long-term storage and retrieval of certain aspects of the memories.

The following quotes provide evidence of personal meaning and importance, and the manner in which it may vary from one participant to the next.

> I think it will be so cool to know that I got such an expensive dress for so cheap and you know and then I got to share that with my closest friends and family. I mean just the overall feeling that you got when you got the dress and you know your closest people next to you and that's probably mainly what I would take away from it. [Nancy]

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[5] The term *life-story is* used in a general sense to refer to the contribution the experience will have on one's self-interpretation and life history. Readers interested in how consumption integrates into the life story of consumers should reviews works by McAdams (1993/1996) and Baumgartner (2002).

> I'm not sure there was really something I took away from the experience aside from the fact that it was just a lot of fun. I met new people and had a great time in a city I had never been to before. [Felice]

These intervening conditions can interject to the core category of bonding and classify the general phenomenon of creating memories within the competitive shopping context. They delineate how and why the phenomenon of creating memories could differ from person to person by indicating that the content, strength, and saliency of the memory can and is likely to vary.

Antecedent to bonding: mobilizing for the mission

Mobilizing refers to the initiation of the memory creation phenomenon, and a precursor to the basic social process of bonding through competitive shopping. Mobilizing is classified by the processes (psychological and behavioral) that occur prior to participating in the ROTB event. The term "mission" is indicative of the task or goal-oriented aspect of the ROTB, and it also represents an in-vivo term used frequently by the informants as a synonym for "finding a dress." The category is an important antecedent to bonding because it initiates the informants' expectations of what they will be doing, mentally prepares them for competing and teamwork, contributes to identifying the intrinsic value of working together and being able to spend time with one another, all of which become components of the memory. The category is characterized by two main properties: *committing to the cause* and *organizing.* "Properties" are characteristics that are common to all concepts in a category. Delineating the properties defines and gives meaning to the category. The degrees, or dimensional ranges of a property enrich grounded theory findings by further elucidating the category and showing the range along which the property may vary (Mello & Flint, 2009). Identifying dimensional ranges is typically

associated with the Straussian GT paradigm when used in the coding process. In this study, some dimensional ranges are indentified only to help the reader better understand the nature of the data.

Committing to the cause

Because these events took place on Fridays, commitments were established by agreeing to take a day off from work, or by saving money to pay for the trip (many participants traveled a great distance). Committing symbolizes a pledge of involvement that reflected a) the nature of one's relationship to the bride, or b) the bride's commitment to her team and the task at hand, i.e. finding a gown. For team members, committing is characterized by feelings of duty, love, or degrees of relationship intimacy with the bride or other team members. Quinn explains her commitment to the cause and the people she wanted to be involved:

> Yeah but I've a friend who had been talking about wanting to do it and I had told her 'no I can't' because it was something I had talked about doing with my family, my sisters and my cousin and my mom and so I knew it was coming up, so when I got engaged I was like we're doing it, everybody get ready. [Quinn]

Similarly, team members expressed how their relationship with, and feelings of duty and love to the bride motivated them to commit and participate in the event.

> I did running of the brides for my sister, I would never have done it for myself, that's the only reason I did it was because I love my sister. [Grace]

> I think because the Running of the Brides was you're doing it for your friend and you're really like this is an important thing, it's not just like something [pause].. Black Friday is more like, you know, if you don't get it you don't get it. But this was like a competition for her, so it was intense. [Cassidy]

An aspect of committing is "rallying the troops," which reflects the manner in which people are recruited and become committed to participate. It similarly reflects the duty, love,

and intimacy to the bride, and also gives us insights into the perceptions people held with respect to how their own personalities would match with the social environment.

> I can work remotely and I stayed with his family in Chicago and **rallied up my friends** and his family to participate. [Rachel]

> It meant something to [my sister] in that she loved seeing everyone she loves come together for this. Also, as her sister and maid of honor, neither of us even questioned my participation – I even flew across the country to join her. So, I was willing to participate because I love my sister and love any opportunity to see family. Also, I thrive on crazy situations like this. Sprinting in, essentially fighting for dresses, and then negotiating all day long – it's like what I do for a living! [Brenda]

In absence of committing, participants would not be fully engaged in mobilizing for the mission and would not be a formal member of a team. While many participants had made commitments to participate for months in advance, others jumped on board only one or two days before the event.

Organizing

Organizing represents both the organization of people and the organization of thoughts. Along with committing come certain organizing responsibilities and tasks to be completed prior to the event like making uniforms and signage, researching the event, making logistical travel arrangements, and coordinating the group for various activities. Therefore, organizing includes the aspects of "planning" and "strategy" associated with the experience. Organizing activities also dealt with pre-delegation of tasks and team members taking on specific roles and responsibilities that were enacted during the event itself. Sometimes these roles reflected *life-roles* played by the participants, as is suggested when Tamara's father is described as a guardian or protector.

> Tamara's dad, who has a bad back, he pretty much had the role of **guarding the dresses** and he actually only had to scold one person. Someone tried to pick up from her pile. [Delaney]

> I think people just kind of knew what to do I mean I guess we had talked about it, we had said that the moms would stay with us and kind of help us try on dresses. [Jen]

The property organizing often reflected expectations regarding the event itself, as well as the predicted outcome. While some informants admitted to conducting research and learning about the process, others did not. Regardless, verbalized expectations frequently referred to the atmosphere of the event. Informants used words like "crazy," "chaotic," "different," and "interesting" to describe what they expected the atmosphere to be like. Predicted outcomes were another aspect of the expectation of participation. These anticipated and predicted outcomes helped shape the organizing activities as teams devised strategies. Felice explains how one of her teammates strategized using her prediction of what it would be like when they entered the store:

> Myself I was kind of thinking we weren't going to [find a dress], but Kay - the bride - she was like when we get there all the dresses are going to be off the rack so we're gonna have to start bartering right away. [Felice]

Mobilizing incorporates the motivational aspects driving people to engage in the competition and gives insights to the question: *what would drive people to engage in competitively- oriented shopping experiences and to actively compete in order to acquire a product?* The findings support the notion that peoples' desire to spend time with loved ones (committing) encourages them to organize and coordinate themselves to serve the purpose at hand.

Aspects of mobilizing and its respective properties, is explainable partly by role shopping motivations (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Role shopping categorizes the motive whereby people enjoy shopping for others. Typically this is used to describe situations involving gift buying. However, it is founded in McGuire's (1972) collection of identification motivation theories whereby people are motivated by the perceived roles they may be playing at any given time. In essence, people seek enhancement to their self-concepts by acting out the responsibilities of satisfying roles. In the *ROTB* event, there is evidence that participants acted out the responsibilities of one or many roles that were representative of both their "life role" and their "team role." These perceived roles began to take shape in the mobilizing stage, which, along with aspects of organizing (i.e. strategies), are further enacted in the performing stage.

The role playing aspect of the *ROTB* participation supports Westbrook and Black's (1985) notion of role enactment, which describes the motivation and drive people feel to fulfill culturally prescribed roles with respect to shopping. Many of the team members felt a "duty" to participate in the ROTB shopping activity, whether as a mother, sister, or close friend. This duty was often closely related to their life role and relationship to the bride. In Western cultures, longstanding traditions of wedding gown shopping involve the mother, sisters and other close female relatives. Interestingly, many men were observed participating in the *ROTB*, which perhaps is evidence of the changing family landscape, or transitioning of traditions, in modern American households.

Essentially, the mobilizing stage relates to the phenomenon of creating memories and the process of bonding because it represents the foundation of interpersonal relationships that exist prior to the experience, shapes the inter-team dynamic that subsequently develops, and

constitutes the degrees of meaning that ultimately generate a desire for informants to preserve the memory.

Main supporting category: performing and competing: "doing my job"

Performing and competing refers to activities and behaviors that participants act out during their physical time spent at the *ROTB*. It represents activities required to "get things done." These *things* include all respective jobs that are considered essential in helping the bride find her dress. They include duties like driving to the store, bringing needed provisions (food, blankets, etc…), grabbing dresses, trading, helping the bride try on dresses, and any other activity that was felt to be required. The category of *performing and competing* is highly reflective of the competitive nature of the event because many of the activities and behaviors were a direct result of this environment. Cassidy explains the how competing drove her performing activities, while Hollie explains how social roles were enacted:

> For me, the beginning of everything was a competition in my opinion, the fact of being there, getting there in first place and then the whole run, to make sure you run to grab the most dresses to me that was all competition. Then the strategy of trying to find the right dresses, yeah there was a lot of competition in there. [Cassidy]

> … there was someone who was going to be helping her try on the dresses, like zipping, unzipping. There was someone who was a designated photographer so going into it we weren't sure what the mirror situation was going to be and we decided we didn't want to try to transport a mirror in so someone was going to be taking pictures so that she could see all the dresses that she tried on, what they actually looked like on her as well as just general picture taking of the event. And then there was someone who was going to be, two some ones I guess who were going to be like guarding her and guarding the dress and then the rest of us were supposed to be going out and doing the trading. [Hollie]

While many of the performing activities specifically reflect the competitive nuances, others are indicative of social roles, such as those noted in the mobilizing category. Thus, while some "performed" duties within the competitive context, not all of these duties were competitive in nature. Others performed duties that inherently required competing activities. Here, Tamara describes her job:

> People were trying to swap with me personally and I was just trying on the dresses; **that was my job.** Like everybody was designated to do something so you know for me I was telling people what I wanted. I was like, it was weird, I felt like the boss, y'know I was like "don't want this, do want that," just trying on dresses. A lot of people were coming up to me I guess because they saw me trying on dresses wanting to swap and I had to tell them to stop asking me questions because **that wasn't my job**, so I had to tell them to talk to the other people (on my team). [Tamara]

This supporting category is characterized by two main properties**:** *competing and adapting* to the situation**,** and *affective responsibility and determination.* These properties are indicative of social cooperative activity, rather than in an individualistic sense. From this type of social cooperative behavior similarities are evident to those in animal sciences, namely bee colony behavior where worker-bee activity is founded in the interest of the Queen. The Queen herself has limited responsibilities and remains in the hive, as indicated by Tamara's quote above.

Competing and adapting

As specified earlier, this research was undertaken in order to understand how consumers experience competitions and go about competing. It should be noted that although participants described the event as competitive, this in itself does not definitively suggest that they actively engaged in competitive behaviors. However, through data analysis, competing and adapting-

related thoughts and behaviors emerged in the process of creating memories as a property of performing, indicating that they did in fact engage in competitive activities. The category emerged with respect to performing because competing and adapting reflected the performance of team duties.

To better describe the property, a descriptive account of the competitive environment is helpful. This account describes the types of competition participants were involved in. As anticipated, the participants collectively used vivid descriptions that explained many of the competitive activities and nuances associated with the experience.

First, teams compete for a place in the queue by arriving early. Arriving is one of the first "duties" to take place. While some teams arrived as a collective group, others had delegated the arrival task to specific members of the team. In these cases, the team members' job was to hold the place in line. It is clear that the participants believed, in general, that being one of the first in line provided a competitive advantage.

> Basically if you're not willing to wait in line overnight and get a good spot in line, there's really no point in going in the morning. Come back when all the dresses are back on the rack because that's where the game is, you know, it's all about bargaining and so if you have no chips you're not gonna be able to get anything. [Rachel]

As Rachel's comment suggests, getting a large number of dresses from the run is thought to create the next competitive advantage. By having a large number of dresses, bargaining power is realized.

Typical of sporting competitions and war, defensive actions were sometimes required. Teams accepted the fact that those who preceded them in line had earned a competitive advantage, but they were unwilling to allow others who did not have a claim with a particular

group in front move ahead of them in line. In several cases, informants described situations where people attempted to advance through the line. These attempts were blocked by defensive actions that escalated the competitive mood.

> People were upset and I actually told them [the line cutters], and she was like, 'well I'm not moving.' I was like, 'oh that's okay because you're gonna have a whole mob after you,' and I made an announcement: 'okay we have girls that wanna skip, we don't really care but anybody that's behind us should really be concerned.' And I kinda set the whole mob on them. It's exactly like the lunch line. I think those are the only rules that apply in this competition where you are in line and you pay your dues and you're in line and you're tired, cranky and you haven't showered you're not gonna skip me. Whether you get your dress or you don't get your dress you're not gonna skip me. [Delaney]

Delaney's comments show that she was displaying defensive competitive and adaptive behaviors. Other mini-competitions within the event included competing for a "spot" or area in the store. Some areas were coveted because they were more private, thus teams could successfully hide out with their stash of dresses. Areas with access to mirrors were also highly coveted. Sometimes competing for these coveted areas resulted from adaptations from original plans.

> My friend saw that there were no dresses and that everybody was scrambling for dresses and so she just went to the dressing room and held it down for me. [Allie]

Because the racks were cleared in less than a minute, most teams competed for second-round acquisition, i.e. dresses that had already come into one team's possession, but because they did not fit the brides' guidelines, were ready to be released. This often involved competing with other teams who also were searching for their first dress with which to barter, but also competing with those who already had bargaining power, or many dresses with which to trade. The scarcity of the dresses, once cleared from the rack, did lead to some instances of deviant adaptive behavior, such as stealing dresses from other teams' piles.

> And so we got inside and sure enough all the dresses were off the racks and everyone is just running, like all chickens with their heads cut off everyone is just running around frantically trying to get something. And so we just started going around and poaching dresses where we could. My mother actually just ran over to a pile grabbed some and ran. There was like a pile there and no-one was guarding it and I went over and found a group who had over fifty dresses at least…When I was at that group who was giving away their unwanted dresses there were like 3 other women with me who were standing there taking them. We weren't exactly just politely every other dress like giving them to each other. We would like reach out and yank them. [Brenda]

Another form of competition was exhibited in the trading and bartering activity. Often, participants competed with one or more members from other teams to trade for a dress being held by a third party. Each participant wanted to bring the particular dress back to their bride because it matched her requirement in some way: style, color, designer or size.

Each of these competitive situations is accounted for within the category of competing, as are the competitive nuances described in the queuing behavior.

The competitive nature of the *ROTB* is a key characteristic of the sales event, one that has received little attention in the retailing or consumer literature to date. In this study, competing begins when participants arrive on-site. This study finds that, until they leave, *adapting* refers to adjustments in strategies and plans due to both circumstantial changes and interpersonal relationships. Much of the adaptation was instigated by high levels of uncertainty regarding the process of competing. Adapting behaviors are evident in passages that describe how and why informants changed their competitive processes. Brenda's description above regarding her mother stealing dresses from a pile is an example of adaptation. Many informants describe how adapting was required in order to successfully trade.

> My sister in law was yelling at the top of her lungs that she had a $6,000 gown. Well no-one seemed to like pick up on it but I think she was thinking you know maybe someone would buy this just because it is that expensive of a dress.

> Everyone else is yelling sizes so I think she was kind of trying to do a different spin on it, and maybe start saying something a little different than just like a size. [Jen]

Adapting also characterizes how participants learned to "deal" with opponent teams and individuals. This was a vivid aspect of the event since much of the activity revolved around interpersonal interactions among participants and other teams, especially when bartering and trading for gowns.

Adapting relates to the second property of performing, affective responsibility and determination, such that participants were willing to adapt to circumstances or deviations from plans because of their feelings of responsibility and focused determination to successfully find a gown for the bride. The brides seemed to experience less adaptation due to their role once inside the store (primarily trying on dresses).

Affective responsibility and determination

Because of the duty, love and intimacy that influenced participation, team members often felt a sense of responsibility to successfully find the bride her dress. Similarly, the bride felt a sense of responsibility to her team to choose a dress, and expressed worry that she would be "letter her team down" if she did not buy one. This affective responsibility served to motivate the participants to engage in competitive behavior and adapt to dynamic situations. It also created a sense of determination for both the team members and the bride to successfully find a dress that suited the bride. The following quotes represent affective responsibility and determination from both a teammate and a bride perspective.

> So I mean I'm pretty good friends with the bride so I wanted to try and find the kind of dress she was looking for, so I was thinking, okay get as many dresses as you can and if not you've got to do something so that you can eventually get that dress. I was just worried that we weren't going to find her a dress that she actually liked. [Hollie]

> Right when we walked in and we saw how crazy it was, once we started trying on dresses we were like "no- in my head it was no, were not leaving until we're done." But right when we got in there and how crazy it was I was like oh I don't need to get a broken nose, you know it's fine if we just all leave and then my mom was like alright you go back there, I'll get everybody over here and we'll start going out [to find dresses] and that's how it happened. I would have felt bad had we not, I guess if we hadn't found a dress I would have felt a little bad with everybody traveling out there to kind of do this with me, I think that's why I was kind of repeating, it's okay if you don't find one, it's for the experience and I felt a little bit of pressure that I really did want to find one but it was okay if I didn't - but I really did. [Quinn]

This property can be enriched by considering psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995). Psychological contracts "…refer to beliefs that individuals hold regarding promises made, accepted, and relied upon between themselves and another (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p. 466)." In short, it is a set of beliefs regarding the reciprocal obligations between two parties (people, organizations, etc…). Typically a theory used in organizational behavior, we can view each team involved in the *ROTB* as a unique and independent organization. In this organization the bride can be viewed as the manager. These psychological contracts influence feelings of responsibility to the bride and the determination that ensues to acquire a dress.

> I got really nervous like oh my god what am I getting myself into kind of, because it was an unknown experience, so it had a lot of highs, and there was a lot of high expectations and I had asked a lot of favors of people coming out my sister wanting to meet me or the younger sister Mary to have her wait all night with me, so part of me just wanted to find a dress so I wouldn't disappoint the people who I came out with, so I think that's kind of where the nerves came from. [Rachel]

The category of *performing* is also indicative of social cooperative activity. Beginning in the mobilizing stage, and flourishing in the performing stage, the individual and team activity can be classified as social cooperative activity (SCA). Three main characteristics of SCA are: 1) mutual responsiveness: responsiveness to the intentions and actions of others, 2) commitment to

the joint activity: each person has an appropriate commitment to the activity and their mutual responsiveness, and 3) commitment to mutual support: commitment to supporting the efforts of others to play her role in the joint activity (Bratman, 1999). SCA is also characterized by *shared intentions*. A shared intention is a "state of affairs consisting primarily of appropriate attitudes of each individual participant and their interrelations (Bratman, 1999, p. 111)." In the case of the *ROTB* participants, the shared intentional activity is evident with the use of plural pronouns (e.g. "we" and "us") when reflecting on the *ROTB* experience.

Core category: bonding through competition

In the description of the emergent phenomenon quotes from participants indicate that creating memories was sometimes desired a priori, and sometimes only realized ad hoc. The same can be said for the core category of bonding. Although evidence for the desire to bond and have the opportunity to bond was found in the mobilizing stage, the bonding process itself took place against the backdrop of the performing and competing stage, as it provided purposeful activity for participants to work together, strengthen and nurture relationships, collectively celebrate successes and failures, and ultimately share an experience with meaningful outcomes.

Felt responsibilities, as well as the competitive and adaptive behaviors that characterize the performing and competing activities (the main supporting category) acted as cultivating agents for team bonding. It was apparent that bonding itself took place against the backdrop of the performing activities previously discussed.

For many of the informants, the time spent at the *ROTB* was sacred time, juxtaposed to the cultural norms of the American wedding. It represented a chance to be together with loved

ones and fostered the bonding opportunity. Indeed, shopping places and time spent shopping have been characterized as sacred (O'Guinn & Belk, 1989).

Bonding through competing, as experienced by the informants in this research, is primarily characterized by one property: the *degree of relationship connectedness* gained between one's self and other members of the respective team. Bonding, and the feelings related to bonding, were often reflected in brides' descriptions of what it meant to have her team members' support, or the feelings she experienced when reflecting on the participation of her team members. Team members also expressed how the event was a bonding experience. Feelings of nostalgia are apparent in many instances.

> In the middle of the night, while sleeping on the streets, my mom and I looked at each other, she winked and I smiled. My cousin and aunt were huddled together sleeping on blankets. My sister was asleep lying on my mom. My other cousin was asleep on my shoulder. Mom and I didn't sleep. I looked around at everyone and it was like it was when we were much younger. [Paige]

> It was definitely a team bonding (experience). One of my younger cousins who lives in Chicago came with us, she is like 17, but she was overwhelmed because she was so tiny in that big crowd. It was fun to do something like that with her. [Brenda]

The core category in GT studies are often highly abstract and above the participants' level of awareness. In this study, many of the participants were able to recognize, on some level, the bonding that took place. These two captions show how the process of bonding occurred for the participants, and also eludes to when participants may have recognized the experience as one in which bonding had occurred. Like Paige, when emotions were less intense and the environment was subdued, some could pinpoint bonding moments.

For the bride, bonding through competition and the sense of connectedness was accentuated by "feeling loved," as she associated her team's participation and effort as a symbol of their love for her. Researchers have highlighted how, for some consumers (particularly women), shopping is an expression of love (Miller, 1998; Otnes & McGrath, 2001). This study illuminates how the brides interpreted competitive shopping behavior as expressions of love that contributed to bonding.

> It just meant a lot to have such a great group of people there with us to go through this experience together. I think what I'll hold in my heart the most is having all these amazing friends and family around me who were willing to get up at 5 in the morning just to try and find a wedding dress. It really makes you appreciate all the amazing and fun people you have in your life. [Jen]

> I mean once I started thinking about how everybody else stayed overnight, like other people had cots and tents and we weren't really prepared like everybody else. I had people basically sleeping on the sidewalk, I mean we had like a sheet but like my family was basically sleeping on the sidewalk to help me out with this, so I was really happy and I was really appreciative and I have oh my gosh I have one picture of my cousin like her shirt is drenched in sweat she was running all over the place for me, all of them were. So it was a nice feeling that they did that for me. [Tamara]

Within the performing stage, many informants experienced what we would consider "extreme conditions," in the retail setting. These conditions included competitive anxieties, stress, chaos, crowding and discomfort. It has been demonstrated, through studies and interviews with soldiers and Holocaust survivors, for example, that extreme situational conditions promote interpersonal bonding, especially when survival motives are present (e.g. Charny, 1992). In fact, Davidson (1984) surmised that interpersonal bonding is a key essential source of strength for adaptation to occur. Studies of war veterans (e.g. Little, 1964; Marlow, 1985; Moskos, 1970) emphasize the role of shared combat experiences for primary group

bonding, where the presence of an enemy produces pressures to unify in a common effort (Manning, 1994). Theoretical support on bonding from military sciences is especially noteworthy as metaphors of war and battle were frequently employed by the *ROTB* informants. For example: (see Appendix C for an extended list of representative quotes).

> I mean, it's crazy - these women would sit in the corner and wouldn't let anyone touch them. So I wasn't surprised. I know Bridezilla's, how they get, and I definitely expected that there would ***be a war out there***, so it was definitely crazy. [Grace]

> The group in front of us, the bride's sister had done the event two years before so she kind of gave us a little hope that **everybody did come out alive..**. [Tamara]

Bonding seems to be of primary importance to the informants when taking place between one's self and their bride or other team members. However, there is also evidence that degrees of interpersonal bonding takes place between the informants, their respective team, and other teams. These instances of inter-group bonding also contribute to the memorable experience of *ROTB*. This is elaborated upon later in the discussion of trajectories that are observed over the course of the creating memories phenomenon.

Social bonding and attachment theory

The notion of bonding was largely developed by Bowlby (1969; 1982), who asserted that people have an innate desire to have interpersonal bonds, and this desire is a natural part of the human condition. His bonding theory stems from the infant-caregiver bond that is an integral component of the attachment process. The attachment process includes feelings of affection between the infant and caregiver, and which would be strengthened when the infant felt threatened – increasing the need for attachment and eventually bonding. Bowlby proposed that attachment provided a foundation for feelings of security. Due to the competitive nature of the

ROTB, the uncertain environment in which participants were operating, and the need for support the bride and team members often verbalized, it is not surprising that bonding took place. This need for support from others was echoed across all interviews as informants expressed strongly that the *ROTB* experience was not one in which they would embark alone.

In marketing literature, *social bonding* has been described as an influence on a customer's tendency toward relationship maintenance (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). This view, however, uses general language to refer to the types of relationships customers may desire towards service providers or other people involved in a market exchange. Based on the present study findings, the term social bonding should be expanded upon as to consider customer's tendencies toward building, maintaining, and solidifying personal relationships between consumers.

In general, Hirschi's (1969) social bonding theory concentrates on the integration of individuals into groups, and how this affects deviance or delinquency from group norms. He maintained that people commit deviance when their bonds to conventional groups are weakened. For the purposes of the present findings, a focus on Hirschi's four main elements of the social bond is relevant. These elements are, 1) attachment to conventional others (i.e. stronger or weaker ties of affection and close relationships to parents, peers, and others), 2) commitment to conventional goals and activities, 3) involvement in conventional activities, and 4) beliefs in conventional values. Social bonding theory is made from the perspective of larger societal bonds, not small group bonds, however many of the same tenets are in place. The present findings support the importance of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief structures as components of team and interpersonal bonding.

Social bonding and leisure activities

Kyle and colleagues (Kyle et al, 2007) suggest that social bonding is a facet of enduring leisure involvement, especially when one's individual involvement with a leisure activity is socially derived (McIntrye & Pigram, 1992). While the *ROTB* experience may not be considered a situation conducive to longevity of leisure involvement, one can look beyond this particular day itself and consider the involvement the participants have with the wedding festivities in general, or other important marketplace experiences that can be shared. Similarly, involvement with the bride in the long-term may be considered a type of leisure activity. These notions rely on those that consider some leisure interests as *social worlds* based upon the formation of social networks. These social worlds "represent a unique scheme of life in which members share in a special set of meanings…and in which various cultural elements – activities and events…conventions and practices…are created and made meaningful by social world members and serve to set the social world apart from other social worlds (Scott & Godbey, 1992, p. 49)." For the *ROTB* participants, the social worlds from one informant to the next appeared to vary based on the degree of intimacy with the bride. This was seen in the participants' expressed level of determination and psychological investment in successfully finding a dress by the end of the day.

Kyle et al (2007) propose that enduring interest in a leisure activity is strengthened by the activity's personal relevance to the individual, and the relationships one shares with significant others who also participate in the activity. For example, the facilitation of social bonding has been identified as a primary loyalty and retention factor for health club memberships (Campbell, Nicholson, & Kitchen, 2006) because people who regularly exercise together may develop social ties and friendships that can bind them to each other and the respective fitness center (Zeithaml

& Bitner, 2000). These authors propose that bonding customers to each other, by mutual enforcement of social relationships, will lead to positive word of mouth and create a barrier of exit other than that of membership fees and pricing structures. These studies from the leisure and services domain begin to suggest how customers bond with one another, and the significance that bonding opportunities may present for people in the consumer and retail domain. In essence, social bonding can assist in creating unique customer experiences that become an integral part of their memory.

Further, the bonding process was facilitated by the quality of the interaction between collective members of a team. Interaction quality has been proposed to facilitate interpersonal and social bonding in the services sector (Auh, 2005). The *ROTB* experience appears to have provided a platform for high interaction quality.

The phenomenon of bonding in consumer research has previously been inspected with respect to consumer-product bonding (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003; Mugge, Schoormans, & Schifferstein, 2009), retailer-consumer relationship bonding (Liang, Chen, and Wang, 2008; Liang and Wang, 2007), service provider bonding (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997), social bonds as a motivator of gift shopping behavior (Fischer & Arnold, 1990), and cultural influences of firm-consumer bonding (Dash, Bruning, & Guin, 2007). It is well established that, in exchange relationships, people derive utility not solely from the products and services they receive, but also from interpersonal relationships that develop during the exchange process (Wathne, Biong, & Heide, 2001; Frenzen & Davis, 1990). As such, the relationships developed between customers and service providers, and the value received by both parties, has been of great interest in the services literature. The present research suggests that within some exchange

circumstances, "utility" can be derived from the interpersonal relationships and primary-group bonds fostered by the exchange context.

Although consumer researchers have acknowledged the possibility for social bonding to both motivate shopping activity and develop during shopping experiences, an in-depth exploration of how bonding occurs under varying shopping conditions has not been approached with much rigor. Specifically, social bonding that occurs through shopping that is either symbolic (like shopping for wedding-related items), or mundane can be explored deeper.

The properties associated with performing point to the unique and novel types of activities in which the informants were engaged (including team-based shopping, competing, and bartering) and some of the emotionally symbolic nuances of the situation. This study portends that the emergence of these two properties, combined with bonding, cohesively serve to increase the saliency of the experience that ultimately contribute to vivid memories and reflections of the experience itself.

Preserving the experience

Preserving refers to the solidifying thoughts and behaviors related memorializing the bonding experience. In the absence of preservation, memories are lost. However, degrees to which preserving manifests are found. Preserving is supported by two primary properties: *documenting* and *episodic significance*.

Documenting

Documenting includes a variety of activities that help the informants recall, remember and relive the *ROTB* experience. Much of the documentation was formal in nature and included photographs and memorabilia (uniforms; posters taken from the event, etc…), representing

tangible memorable symbols of the *ROTB* event, the brides' wedding, and sometimes the bonding that took place. The degree to which documentation occurred varied among the informants. Whereas some participants made scrapbooks and posted photos or videos on social media websites (e.g. Facebook, Youtube), others preserved the memory through personal interactions, reminiscent storytelling and recollection of the experience.

> Oh yeah I'm making a scrap book of everything from the beginning from when I get my dress all the way through and you know the reception I'm doing in a scrapbook, so years down the road when I look at it I'll have all those memories of how I got the dress and everything like that, how much fun it was, even probably the little annoying things too I'll remember… Well a picture probably brings a thousand memories so it's always good to take pictures. [Nancy]

> It's just a fun experience, you know it's not like something you do every day, we're all out there for several hours, you can always look back and say you know remember when we did that, and you know we have pictures and all of that so... [Jen]

Episodic significance

Episodic significance refers to the degree to which people hold the experience as one that is important in their life-story or schema, and to their self and social identity. Dimensions of episodic significance include aspects of the feelings of closeness and heart-felt reflections the participants have with respect to the experience, largely characterized by their relationships with members of their team. For the brides, the experience was directly related and an important aspect of wedding preparation, where the wedding itself is a central part of her life-schema. It was also an important experience shared with loved ones that reinforced self and social identity. On a dimensional range, the brides, and the teammates who have the closest personal relationship to her, may have deep feelings of episodic significance, compared with those who

are more peripheral in the lives of each bride. As such, the brides and her close teammates may make greater strides to preserve the memory.

> We all had such a great time, we kept talking about it all weekend. I still have people coming up and asking me about it because they knew I was going. It's definitely something that if you're looking for a different experience to try out, because it was so much fun. Yes it's crazy but planning a wedding is crazy I mean the whole everything can get so chaotic with just that this was just one thing added that makes a fun story and you know it's a fun memory to have. [Quinn]

> I have made a scrapbook of my whole engagement including a couple of pages of Running of the Brides to remember the experience. [Olivia]

> …we got to do something as a mother daughter event and we thought even if we did not find a dress it was something that you may only get a chance to do once in a lifetime. [Lauren]

The significance people hold for events or objects implies a degree of attachment to those objects and the people involved in the event. It also suggests the strength of bonds between the people involved in an experience. Many believe that as the time of ownership of an object increases, so does the emotional significance of that object (Ball & Tasaki, 1992). This view is extended to consider the episode of, and experience in, *ROTB* as an object to which the participants attach degrees of emotional significance.

Cameras, of course, have long been used to document important moments in peoples' lives. Today, people have instant access to their digital photographs, as well as instant sharing of the images through the internet and social networking websites. Social uses of personal photographs indicate their uses for personal and group memory, and creating and maintaining social relationships (House, Davis, Ames, Finn, & Viswanathan, 2005). Beyond representing a tangible record of events, photographs are employed to reinforce social connections and nurture relationships when shared with others, and to preserve and relive precious moments in common

experiences (Huang & Hsu, 2006). The *ROTB* participants frequently described how they used photographs to preserve, share, and relive the moments of the *ROTB* experience.

Summary of creating memories

Collectively, this study portends that the BSP of bonding was founded in the mobilizing stage, cultivated in the midst of the performing stage, and is reflected upon later in the preserving stage. The four categories and their properties that comprise the process of creating memories represent the emergent themes of informant experiences from four *ROTB* events. The process of bonding significantly contributed to the saliency and meaning of the memory of the experience. These experiences are contextualized by the symbolic nature of American weddings and wedding gowns. The categories are supported by properties that are both behaviorally and affectively-based.

Although there are advocates from the "experiential-view" for the consideration of consumer experiences to include aspects of fantasy, play, and emotional responses (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989), there is little empirical or theoretical literature of substance in the marketing, consumer or retail domain that specifically inspects the significance of memorable consumer experiences (and events) in peoples' lives, or peoples desires or behaviors intended to preserve and document these experiences. This is surprising given the vast array of experiential consumption opportunities in the marketplace. Disney World and other theme parks, as well as niche restaurants like Chuck E. Cheese are founded on the premise that experiences will be memorable and contribute to brand familiarity and repeat patronage. Not only do they rely on these memories, the stage these memorable events and incorporate it into their business model. What current literature is lacking is the integration of

memorable consumer experience that combines the presence of *experiences* (events), companion shopping, and goods and services, as the *ROTB* does.

While informants were involved in bonding and creating memories, a set of trajectories were also in motion. These trajectories demonstrate changes that occurred over the course of the memory creation process.

Trajectories

Four main trajectories (changing or evolving phenomenon) emerged during the data analysis. These are 1) atmosphere changes, 2) emotional shifts, 3) the process of competition - cooperation, 4) and evolving relationships with opponents. All four trajectories are interrelated.

The evolution of relationships between the informants and opposing teams, the evolution of the participants' self-identify within their own group, and meaning of the team to each participant is prominent in the data. These relationships and identities evolve as a result of the dynamic and changing atmosphere and environment in which the participants are operating. The dynamic atmosphere, extended from the mobilizing phase through the preserving phase, contribute to emotional shifts that also vary in intensity. Together, the atmosphere, emotions, and changing identities contribute to the changing relations with opponents demonstrated through the process of competition - cooperation. Figure 10 (p. 193) portrays these dynamic processes.

Atmosphere shifts, classified as *impersonal, chaotic,* and *egalitarian*, describe the general social environment. The inside and outside labels of the triangles represent two fundamental changes occurring throughout the atmosphere shifts. The outside labels of the triangles represent 1) how opponents are perceived (top), 2) feelings towards opponents (left), and 3) activity

centered focus (right). Inside each triangle represents the change related to how the participants view themselves (bottom) in relation to both opponents (left) and other members of their team (right). Next, the general process of competing--cooperating is depicted as it relates to the other three trajectories. The bottom of Figure 10 depicts the patterns of emotional intensity or arousals that, from the data, appeared to follow the shifts in environment.

The types of emotions and arousals our informants experienced varied, but we found consistency in the intensities of the emotions and arousals within each atmosphere. For example, in the "impersonal" atmosphere people experienced anxiety, excitement, or nervousness directed towards uncertainty about *what would happen*. However, they tended to be less intense than the same emotions or arousals experienced in the "chaotic" atmosphere. Not surprisingly, intensities were heightened during the "chaotic" atmosphere. Emotions and arousals in the "chaotic" atmosphere were those of stress, anxiety, excitement, and sometimes fear that related predominantly to the presence of or behaviors other people (or opponents). The chaotic atmosphere closely mirrored much of the competitive activity and the erratic decision-making that could result.

> Walking in panicked me. I was like, 'okay we're not like this we can just turn around and go.' I don't know if it's an individual thing I think it's more of a society thing really where people when they get into certain situations just this animal can come out of them that you didn't even know they had. So I think it definitely is a high stress situation just because of how many people there are and you're all looking for the same thing. I think in situations like that you're always gonna have people who have attitudes and who have their own agenda and too bad for the person behind them. [Quinn]

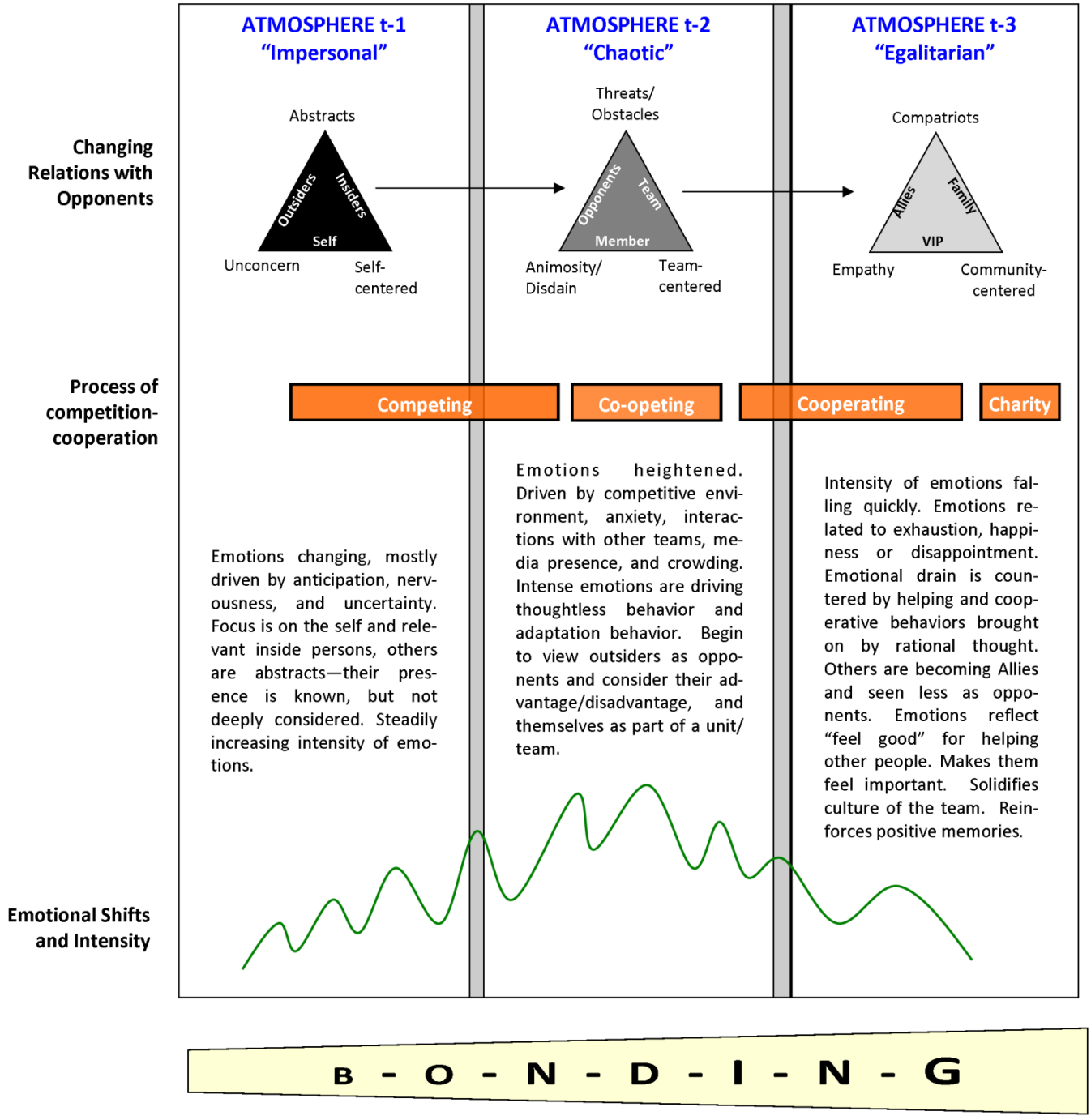


Figure 10. Model of Interrelated Trajectories

> It sort of makes you feel like you're going back to like caveman days or something like that you know like where it's like people are acting like these 500 [pause] - I don't know how many dresses were there but it was like it was their only food supply for like the next six months and gather, gather, gather and keep it all and it was like survival of the fittest you know. It was definitely kind of crazy behavior…it just so happened that once the chaos calmed down and (my sister) was able to kind of think more rationally and relax and make her own decision it was a much more comfortable environment. [Erin]

In the "egalitarian" atmosphere, the intensity of arousals and emotions declined, and were often those of exhaustion, happiness, or relief. This atmosphere mirrored the time period when competing generally subsided and cooperative, helpful, or even charitable behavior took its place. Allie's and Grace's comments summarize the three trajectories:

> I mean it was definitely like a ton of energy but it was a lot of fun, like it was a really great positive energy, running in there and everybody had all this momentum and was so excited to try everything on. And I think as the hours went on people got more and more like tired and so it was a little bit more calm and subdued and there wasn't really any like fighting over dresses….people just sort of like just still trying things on and walking around and you know it was chaotic but then it seemed to get tamer as like the time passed from when they opened. [Allie]

> Then when at the end people start finding dresses and they end up being 500-600 dresses on the rack that we could just go through, we didn't have to trade for anymore. It wasn't that fun at the point, like the excitement of it [died down]. I mean it was still fun but it wasn't the excitement of having to trade for dresses and having to like really be competitive - like that part was kind of over and so it wasn't as exciting, I should say. It was still fun it wasn't as like your adrenaline wasn't popping as much because you didn't have to go the extra step to get that perfect dress [Grace].

It is important to note that participants did not uniformly interpret the shifts in the environment. While some may have forged cooperative relationships and felt less competitive pressures within a short amount of time, others maintained a competitive mind-set and still felt the chaotic nature of the social environment. For example, Sondra explains how she made

decisions based on the competitive nature of the environment four hours after she started trying on dresses. In this passage, she is explaining how she decided to purchase her gown before leaving for lunch, rather than waiting and thinking it over.

> Well like I said it took 4 hours and we were all hot and tired and thirsty and we were actually getting ready to leave and we were just gonna go have lunch, get a drink and then we were gonna come back a little later. If it weren't such a competitive thing we probably would have still left and came back to it, just to kind of give ourselves a break and look at it again with a fresh feeling but we couldn't really do that because you risk losing it or someone else taking it. [Sondra]

This section focuses largely on the trajectory of competition-cooperation due to its theoretical implications in consumer behavior and centrality to the phenomenon of creating memories and core category of bonding, as it was reflected in much of the data.

The competition – cooperation trajectory

The competitive activities that take place and contribute to interpersonal bonding and the memory creation process have been previously discussed within the property of competing and adapting. However, the change from competitive to cooperative social structures is found to contribute to the theoretical implications of this study. The evolving competitive-cooperative structure helps to characterize the phenomenon and processes involved in creating memories because it became evident that the changing structure of interpersonal and intergroup relationships contributed to several facets of creating memories and bonding. Some of these facets directly relate to intervening conditions (i.e. social size, crowding, enduring involvement, personal meaning). Some facets can be related to specific properties and categories (e.g. performing, adapting). Since a great deal has been said about competing and the competitive

nature of the event, this section begins by discussing the second phase of the trajectory: co-opetition.

Co-opetition

Co-opetition refers to situations "where competitors simultaneously cooperate and compete with each other (Bengtsson & Kock, 2003)." Coopetive relationships emerged in the data through participant descriptions and reflections on intergroup social interaction. The development of these spontaneous relationships was also was observed by the researcher.

Unlike research on co-opetition business models, which describe this function as a forethought strategic relationship between two firms who have traditionally been competitors (Rademakers & McKnight, 1998), co-opetition for the informants emerged through the dynamic interactive experience of the day. Meyer (1998) contends that coopetive relationships are beneficial to competitive alliances because they increase added value to each party, help each party secure contracts, improve productivity and access to materials, and reduce individual firm risk. Many of these same advantages were described by the participants. Grace and Paige commented on the coopetive relationship with other teams (other supporting quotes can be found in Appendix C.

> That's kind of what our strategy was it was almost like let's team up with some people that we thought were looking at similar styles and then obviously if we have some of those similar styles we could, you know we had something that they were interested in trading with, so yeah we did almost try to make some friends… [Grace]

> The bartering and forming alliances just kind of evolved throughout the morning as we met people and people started being more nice because they knew they wouldn't get anything from us if they didn't help us out. [Paige]

When groups worked together by integrating and contributing similar resources, they acknowledged the capability of achieving advantages, similar to the concept of "scale alliance" (Mitchell, Dussauge, & Garrette, 2002) or "coopetive advantage" (Dagnino & Padula, 2002). For firms, coopetive advantages are frequently expressed in terms of economic performance, ROI, or information flow. For the *ROTB* participants, coopetive advantages primarily took the form of resource acquisition, e.g. access to a wider number of gowns for the bride to try on.

Frequently, coopetive relationships evolved into cooperative ones. This occurred when it became clear that the two groups, though both searching for a dress, realized that the styles they needed were very different. At this time, competitive attitudes towards other groups subsided and a cooperative relationship could be developed.

Cooperation

The extent of coopetive activities among the informants varied, but consistency is found in the data indicating that cooperative social structures procedurally emerged. The associated cooperative behaviors are seeded in acts and feelings of reciprocity between teams. In social psychology, reciprocity refers to responding to a positive action with another positive action, and responding to a negative action with another negative one. Reciprocal actions are important to social psychology because they help explain the maintenance of social norms. The following quotes suggest cooperation between teams. They suggest that cooperation was viewed by participants as an allegiance or alliance formed with another team.

> We formed an alliance with this other big group and this girl she was I think my same age and size. She tried on a dress and then it didn't fit her and she'd let me try it on and that was the dress I actually got. [Paige]

> Anytime you were able to help a different bride it seemed like they were usually willing to reciprocate. If I was able to find one that was beaded I would take it over

> to them and say you know "here you go, I know you were looking for this," kind of a deal in which case then most [of them] were running over to us if they were able to find one that was fit-to-flare style, which was what we were looking for. [Hollie]

What conditions must be present for the transformation of competition or coopetition to cooperation? According to Axelrod (1984, p. 4) "For cooperation to prove stable, the future must have a sufficiently large shadow . . . the importance of the next encounter between the same two individuals must be great enough to make [non-cooperation] an unprofitable strategy."

The present study serves as evidence that a more rigorous research agenda on coopetive consumer relationships may also be a fruitful exploration of the conceptual domain. In light of this, the emergent data from this study indicates that participants believed that projected attitudes towards other teams and brides played a key function in developing the needed relationships. Having a good or amiable attitude was a condition for cooperative relationships to fully forge. For example:

> Whereas one of my friends, she is quick to have an attitude so she tried to go for a time but then she got really mad so she came back and stayed there. She was one of the people who we originally thought would barter but she was too quick to get angry so we were like no, you stay here because you're gonna end up making everybody mad and then we're screwed, you know. [Felice]

> But some brides were like super nice about it, so I don't know if other brides were pre-dispositioned to be bitchy or… but then there were other groups that like worked with each other and helped each other out. [Kristin]

When firms engage in cooperation and competition, advantages may be present for the consumer as well as the paired firms. In the present research, evidence suggests that intergroup cooperative functioning is advantageous to the participants and their task at-hand, but also appears to be a key marker for enjoyment of the event and contributes to favorable memories, both of which are important benefits to the retailer.

Despite evidence of competitive-cooperative relationships, especially in organizational themes, research in the area of coopetition is relatively limited and is identified as an under-researched theme (Dagnino & Padula, 2002). Recently, Walley (2007) argued that the domain of coopetition be extended beyond that of industrial organizational firm-firm relationships. He argues for the enrichment of coopetition in several organizational, inter-firm, and commercial activity contexts. He also briefly extends his argument to the consumer-consumer platform by noting that "there would appear to be evidence that consumers compete among themselves. What is harder to establish is the existence of a cooperative aspect to the purchasing behavior of consumers." He goes on to state, "in order to understand coopetition among consumers, there is a need for further research into the situations in which consumers adopt cooperative or competitive behavior, the products and situations that stimulate coopetition, the tendency for different individuals and groups to adopt coopetive behaviors, and the strategies that companies may adopt to exploit it. This research would have to be sensitive to the subconscious as well as conscious adoption of coopetive behaviors and would probably be best undertaken by using in-depth interviews or group discussions."

The present study elicits the need to further address coopetive alliances in the consumer domain, but importantly presents specific evidence, grounded in the experiences of consumers themselves, that coopetive behaviors in the consumer world do exist.

Charity

Upon reflection, there appear to be longer resonating advantages to coopetive and cooperative relationships that contributed to the overall satisfaction and "fun" of the event. For example, when participants felt that they had contributed and helped someone else, a sense of

personal satisfaction was created– almost to the extent of a charitable action. There is evidence that the extreme egalitarian atmosphere fostered behaviors characterized by acts of charity.

> Well like for example we were in the dressing room and one girl came up and said "can I come in and use your dressing room?" and I said okay but only you. And then another girl came into the dressing room and she said "can I just come in and try on one dress?" and I said okay and my friends would come back with dresses for me to try on and they're like why do you keep letting people into your dressing room? I was like well I just feel bad you know I want them to be able to see in the mirror and I wasn't trying anything on at the moment. [Allie]

> I felt happy because I could give that one dress that I had in my *maybe* pile…I said 'oh you can just have it I'm getting this one' and she was so excited, so I did **feel good** about that because I did give a dress that she really wanted and she kept it. It wasn't anybody that I had initially said that I'd help them out, it was just something random, so... [Nancy]

Some informants, who proceeded into fully cooperative performances with other teams or brides, began to feel that reciprocation was no longer necessary. In such cases, informants went beyond their own call of duty and later expressed, like Nancy, that it made them "feel good" to be able to help someone else. In some cases, informants were both the charitable givers and the beneficiaries of charitable acts.

> And so the girl agreed (to let my sister try on the dress) and so she finally takes it off, my sister puts it on and we all just kind of freeze, and like we can't even talk. My sister says 'I have to take it off because if I keep wearing it I'm gonna fall in love with it and I'm gonna be crushed if you decide to take it.' So she starts taking it off and the girl looks at her mom and her mom looks at her and they say you know what this is your dress you can have it. We all just started bawling, we could not stop crying, we were like oh my god this is the dress, and 5 minutes before we were making fun of girls who were crying with their dresses, and then here we are crying because we knew this was the dress and it was like so amazing and her sister hadn't even arrived yet so her sister hadn't seen it, and she just said this is it, you can have it I know this is your dress and it was absolutely amazing, it was like the best feeling ever, we could not stop thanking her, we took pictures of her, it was just amazing. So yes my sister got the absolute perfect dress and we all cried like babies. I mean it was pretty generous of her just not even saying 'wait til my sister

> comes in I'll give you a definite yes', she just said no this is it, I can tell this is your dress and you can have it. [Grace]
>
> Well another thing that just touched back on me that made it like a nice experience was I know that there were 3 or 4 girls that ended up taking the dress that we had (given away) and it's like you get this feeling of you're giving this girl her wedding dress and that's definitely an amazing feeling. But it was an amazing feeling that this girl picked this dress that you had and you kind of gave her the opportunity to get that by agreeing to a trade or a couple girls we just gave it to and so that was definitely nice. [Grace]

This section has described how aspects of the informants' experience in the *ROTB* changed and evolved over the duration of the memory creation process. It served to describe how *ROTB* participants made skillful adjustments to interpersonal interactions based on the environment with which they were operating, the emotions they were feeling, and their self-perceptions with respect to relationships with others. In short, when the informants enjoyed their shopping experience due, in part, to the interaction with other shoppers and the evolution of a competitive to cooperative structures with others, it became more vivid, salient, and contributable to the holistic memory. It also appears that these trajectories contributed to experiential value-creation, value-enhancement and other value-related aspects of the retail memory.

These trajectories are important because they demonstrate how the shoppers relate to their social environment, and how this relation contributes to the creation of memories. The perspective of symbolic interactionism helps us consider the main trajectory of competition-cooperation. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is founded on premises that describe how people interpret their social worlds, create meaning during social interaction, present and construct the self, and how they define situations of co-presence with others. A central idea of this perspective is that people behave based on how they define situations. Although this

research was not embarked upon by viewing the informants' experiences through the lens of symbolic interactionism, it appears to be a useful tool through which to view the trajectories previously described.

Discussion

Limitations

This study has its limitations. Primarily, it is limited by generalizability. Although the study participants hailed from cities across the United States (offering a degree of intra-cultural generalizability), it lacks global insights from a diverse set of cultural backgrounds. Although it is believed that theoretical saturation was achieved, expanding the cultural background of the participants could enrich the findings and potentially identify new categories. Second, the events and participants under study were involved only one product: the wedding gown. The symbolic nature of this product gives insights into people's behaviors, emotions, and thought processes for competitive shopping situations involving other symbolic-typed products, but the context under study may an extreme example of consumer competition that is an entirely unique situation that cannot be replicated.

Despite these potential limitations, this research offers significant contributions to various practical and theoretical domains in marketing, retailing, and consumer behavior.

Implications for retailers

This study has several implications relevant to retail managers. First, retailers wishing to duplicate this type of competitively natured event may be under the impression that deep discounting and high quality products are the main drivers of participation and patron turn-out. On the contrary, these motives were subsumed by the opportunity for people to rally together,

bond, and remember the experience favorably. Researchers have suggested that perhaps firms do not adequately create strong emotional bonds with their customers (Fournier, Dobscha, & Mick, 1998; McEwan, 2005; Yim, Tse, & Chan, 2008). Perhaps one route to achieving this goal is to facilitate customers forming bonds with each other.

Second, for a retail experience to be sufficiently "memorable" it must be capable of eliciting a range of powerful emotions. Episodic memory, or the memory of autobiographical events, includes times, places, contextual knowledge and emotions. Generally, emotion tends to increase the likelihood that an event will be remembered later and that it will be remembered vividly, compared to events that are emotionally neutral (Burke, Heuer, & Reisberg, 1992). It is widely held that these affective experiences can be classified by two main dimensions: arousal and valence. Arousal ranges from calm to excited, and the valence of arousals range from highly positive to highly negative (Russell, 1980). The present findings demonstrate the emotional ranges associated with the competitive shopping experience, and begin to suggest the valences people hold with respect to some of these emotional arousals. In short, this study is of importance to retailers who wish to replicate and encourage shoppers to create memories in the retail context. In such cases, retailers must be able to arouse emotions associated with a retail experience that result in positive memories.

For the experience to hold longevity in consumer memory, and become a sacred event that is integrated into one's life-story, it should be both purposeful and symbolic. This study illuminates a holistically symbolic product, the wedding gown, but the symbolic nature of experiences need not be contextualized around a product itself. The bonding that took place and the interaction between teams appears to also be symbolic in the eyes of the informants.

Therefore, retailers should make a concerted effort to manage relationships between shoppers who share retail space.

Further, this "sacred event" in many cultures is presumed to be a singular occurrence. The *ROTB* experience itself may only be a singular occurrence as well. If drawn to the store only one time for a special event, how can retailers encourage favorable memories and experiences to carry over into increased store patronage and loyalty? The *ROTB* informants did not allude to any plans to consider Filene's for future shopping needs. Therefore it cannot be presumed or substantiated that a resonating impact of the *ROTB* experience will forge future store patronage. It did appear, however, that the favorable experience of the event left the participants with warm feelings towards the brand that could increase patronage, loyalty and positive word of mouth. For example, Allie explained how she recommended the ROTB to one of her friends and pledged her help:

> I was actually just speaking to another friend on the phone, she wants to get engaged and I said will you please get engaged so I can go next year and help you because it was, you know, you could not do it alone and having somebody who has been before was like, I felt like I had such an advantage because you know she kind of had a plan of action once we got in the store.

Other comments alluded to whether or not the participants would themselves take part in a ROTB event again, to help someone else. While some expressed the desire to go again, others felt that once was enough. Some of the data not integrated into the phenomenon or core category imply that Filene's will not be capable of leveraging the *ROTB* experience for a large number of participants due to limited store locations and geographical shopper differences. Rachel was able to participate in a Chicago *ROTB*, but lives in San Francisco:

> I would not have gone to Filene's basement if it wasn't for this; it's definitely not a West Coast thing, so I probably stood out in the crowd. [Rachel]

The *ROTB* was also a purposeful experience, one that required thoughtful and considerate action and strategy which made it engaging for the people involved. When customers are engaged in purposeful action in a retail setting, they inherently become co-producers. The *ROTB* became purposeful and team-oriented because of a high degree of uncertainty regarding the both the dresses and the experience itself. These unknowns led people to feel that they were free to make decisions and alter strategies as they saw fit. People should be permitted to make their own rules, or at least be under the impression that they are able to do so. Thus, retailers who can successfully integrate degrees of uncertainty into sales events may be able to evoke feelings of control, purpose, and an element of "fun" that these informants experienced. Throughout the data analysis from a competitive shopping event, it was surprising that the outcome of winning or losing (find a dress or leave empty handed) did not emerge as an important concept in the creating memories process. However, people need to at least believe that there is a good probability that they will be able to acquire the item they are searching for, or it is unlikely that they will embark on the mobilizing stage. This is why supply scarcity tactics are not likely to work in the same way.

Therefore, it seems plausible that consumers can create meaningful memories in retail settings in lieu of making a purchase. Albeit contrary to retail management thought, catering retail experiences to companion shoppers, like members of the ROTB teams, could lead to longstanding effects on brand awareness and satisfaction even in situations when no purchases were made.

Finally, for the experience to be memorable and engaging, it should be unique and compelling; something that cannot be done anywhere or everywhere. As such, it would lose its draw as "something special." This does not mean that every retailer can't create a competition,

only that the competitions must provide some kind of unique experience different from the experiences available through other sources. It is the retailer's task to think creatively about providing a unique experience. It need not be a one-day experience. Consider the Build-A-Bear stores who revolutionized teddy bears into a retail "experience." From our data, and some of these examples, we suggest that getting people to work together, bond, and create warm happy feelings contributes to the creation of memories in the retail sector. The experience should also be one that contributes to the symbolic nature of people's lives. Weddings are a highly symbolic shopping context. So are having babies, graduating from high school and college, etc… The experience should be one that allows groups of consumers to feel connected to each other and engaged in cooperative social action because working together and bonding is what appears to provide meaning to the memory.

Since creating memories involves the preservation of these memories, the retailer should offer its customers ways to preserve them. A variety of tactics come to mind: a) offer a free photos of the team, b) provide trinkets to all members of the team as a token to remember the experience (Filene's gives T-shirts away to all gown purchasers only), c) have a photo or story contest afterwards… sponsor a gift card giveaway to the winner, d) create a "family reunion" day, and e) make sure the experience is enjoyable for everyone involved. The problem with Black Friday shopping is that it is not uniformly enjoyable for all shoppers, especially those who live in areas where they are forced to wait in cold, dark parking lots during inclement weather waiting for the store to open (Burke R. , 2006). Customers need to be entertained, comforted, and made to feel that they are valued, as is their time and effort. This issue of wait time is itself an opportunity for retailers to capitalize on a captive audience. Like Black Friday shopping, theme parks like Disney World, and other circumstances like new product launches

where consumers commit their time to wait in long lines, retailers should integrate experiential elements for consumers that contribute to a favorable experience, improve brand awareness and store offerings, and influence repeat patronage.

Contribution

In line with arguments made by Arnould and Thompson (2005) and many others, this research contributes to the presence of multiple conversations within the field of consumer research, speaking to a distinct set of theoretical questions. It specifically reports on the behaviors, social processes, symbolisms, and problem solving capability of a set of consumers within a well-defined boundary of consumer experience. Albeit a potentially extreme case of consumer competition, the present study brings to light the many facets of consumer competition that exist in one specific retail context, and suggest some facets that likely exists elsewhere. With these accomplishments, these findings should be interesting beyond just the eyes of consumer researchers, but also to other branches of social science, management, and public policy, as was the recent hope expressed by consumer culture theorists of late (Arnould & Thompson, 2005)

Considering the paradigm of the strategic marketing logic of experiences (Lanier & Hampton, 2009), this study contributes to the understanding of memorable customer experiences. First, it revolves around symbolic resources; those that represent perspectives and meaning. Second, the transaction was engaging to the participants; it held their interest and attention. In this case, the experience itself is regarded as the transaction. Third, the experience offered internalized value to the participants; it facilitated a subjective, hedonic response characterized by personal connectivity, extraordinary characteristics, and social connectivity with the

experience. Presently, "experiential offerings" are widely considered those that lack tangibility (i.e. sporting events, art museums, theme parks). This study highlights the need to more rigorously study the experiential aspects of retail settings and events.

Aspects of this study contribute to understanding interpersonal and social relationships that develop and cultivate within retail shopping contexts. These relationships between family members, friends, and "opposing" teams are meaningful beyond the shopping experience itself. No longer should consumer researchers concentrate on retail and other types of shopping simply as a time for consumers to be social and socialize, but also as instances deserving attention as meaningful and memorable moments in peoples' lives where interpersonal bonding can cultivate.

This research also adds to the understanding of competitive, coopetive, and cooperative structures in the consumer domain and begins to answers calls that address this exact issue (Walley, 2007). This paper has highlighted how a dynamic consumer environment, issues revolving around crowding and social presence, and intensities in emotions contribute to this understanding in one particular context regarding one particular product.

Returning to the notion of variety and experience-seeking, this study suggests that some competitive shopping is characterized by aspects of recreational and task-oriented shopping; which together contribute to bonding and memory creation. From the onset, the participants classified this experience in terms of the anticipated outcome: have fun. Therefore, the recreational elements of the experience were inherently goal-directed and produced enactments of purposive actions related to "having fun." (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999).

Recreational shopping has been described as one which consumers enjoy as a leisurely activity (Bellenger, Robertson, & Greenberg, 1977). Such research often emphasizes the emotional contribution of shopping and the pleasures experienced from the shopping activity

(Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Williams, Slama, & Rogers, 1985). As Backstrom (2006) points out, research in recreational shopping has not made strong efforts to understand the phenomenon as one which is recognized as a cultural phenomenon, nor have wide gains been made to investigate various ways in which recreational shopping is performed in retail settings, among others. This study helps fill this gap by offering some important insight to the task-recreational shopping dichotomy. The bridal shoppers regard the experience as "fun" and a "good time," while at the same time describing it as "exhausting," and "draining." Thus, this study supports recreational shopping as a multifaceted activity (Boedeker, 1995; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994), but shows how task-oriented motives can be accomplished via recreational-oriented behavior. It also highlights that the shopping could be not only task and recreational-oriented, but highly symbolic at the same time.

From a broad paradigmatic perspective, this study and its findings contribute to the service-dominant logic in marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), highlighting a value-creation processes that occurs when customers are engaged in an experiential aspect of product or service consumption. Calling upon Woodruff and Flint's (2006) contention that little is known about how customers engage in co-creation of value, this study suggests several ways in which this occurs. The output of valuable and meaningful memories, centered around interpersonal bonding, developed within a framework that was designed by a retailer. Whether or not consumers credit or recognize the retailer's role for providing this opportunity for bonding and making memories is a question that deserves deeper exploration. Still, this study provides insights to how psycho-social and social-cultural circumstances are an impetus for customers' participant in co-creation of value. The main concern for the retailer, Filene's, is how well this value is recognized by the consumer.

Finally, this paper has provided a substantive theory of the creation of memories in the context of consumer competition. The findings set forth in this paper should aide future research endeavors by offering a comparison of theory and processes.

Implications for Future Research

This study has shed light on many potential future research endeavors involving competitive retail shopping situations. A cross-cultural investigation has the potential to extend the present findings into a mid-range theory by reinforcing and adding dimensionality to the core category and sub-categories described in this study. Culture has been identified as a strong influencer in environmental psychology studies (Evans, Rhee, Forbes, Allen, & Lepore, 2000), but its influence in crowded commercial settings has been neglected by researchers, despite growing cross-cultural interactions due to the globalization of services (Jamal, 2003). These studies should involve a diverse set of both symbolic and mundane product classifications.

Additionally, empirical studies that follow this inquiry should help to identify areas of generalizability. The relationships of mobilizing, performing, competing, bonding and preserving as a set of interrelated social structures can be explored in terms of presently identified. The properties and their relationships to the categories can be tested empirically. For example, relationship-connectedness could be used as an indicator of bonding. A measure of affective responsibility could be developed and evaluated in light of performance of duties and competitive actions. Facets of the competition-cooperation trajectory could also be inspected more deeply. A series of controlled experiments could assess the exact environmental conditions that are most conducive for cooperative social structures to emerge from competitive and coopetive ones in retail or other consumer settings.

Finally, the creation of memories in competitive shopping contexts, including the activities described in the process, should be empirically investigated with respect to its influence on other important marketing concepts such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, customer satisfaction, service delivery and recovery, and customer value. Studies of this nature would have further-reaching implications for both researchers and practitioners alike.

QUANTITATIVE MANUSCRIPT

Examining a Psychological Scarcity Effect: Consumer Interpretations of Competitive Purchase Situations and Moderating Personality Traits

ABSTRACT

Despite the proclivity of scarcity-based messages in marketing and advertising efforts, marketers have made only limited efforts to investigate the "human effect" of these tactics. Primarily, the scarcity effect is presumed to increase desirability of scarce goods through mechanisms of needs for uniqueness. Lacking is the inspection of how scarcity messages create varying perceptions in the minds of consumers with respect to the purchase situation of the scarce goods. Specifically, we seek to understand if scarcity messages create competitive arousals in consumers. This study tests two frequently employed scarcity tactics, product and time scarcity, and examines this relationship. It also examines the relationship between perceptions of product and time availability.

Introduction

With the explosion of internet auction activity in the last decade, consumer competition has become highly visible and to some degree, perhaps, an increasingly normative aspect of consumer behavior. In reality, the "fixed price" marketplace of many Western societies is a relatively new phenomenon (Fiore, 2002), one that has minimized much of the competitive consumer activity. However, research suggests that some consumers *prefer* to compete for product ownership through bidding, rather than using fixed price options (e.g. Angst, Agarwal, & Kuruzovich, 2008).

The shift in Westernized marketplace norms from flexible to fix-price formats has indubitably caused researchers to lose sight of the theoretical and social importance of the active engagement in competition between consumers. With this in mind, Nichols and Flint (2010b) have argued for increased attention to the phenomenon and the many facets that current research questions in terms of antecedents, outcomes, moderating and mediating variables. The research set forth in this paper embarks on the subject.

This paper reports on an empirical investigation into how consumers develop beliefs or attitudes regarding a competitive purchase situation. Employing scarcity tactics and the scarcity effect (Cialdini, 1993), this research explains a portion of the variance within the relationship between communicated availability information, competitive perceptions and arousals, and purchase interests of scarce and non-scarce goods. It also examines the interaction effects of two theoretically relevant personality traits.

According to Inman, Peter, and Raghubir (1997), while the general role of scarcity has been examined in some depth in psychology, "most of the empirical work in this area has either been undertaken with little consideration for how a scarcity tactic would affect choice behavior

or has been tested under extreme conditions…(p. 69)." Calls for a more in-depth inspection of the effects of scarcity tactics in terms of individual differences and psychological traits are still being made (Gierl, Plantsch, & Schweidler, 2008). Although the widespread use of scarcity tactics is acknowledged (Cialdini, 1988; 1993; Eisend, 2008; Stock & Balachander, 2005), there is little research in the consumer literature about their effects, such as why some individuals might be more prone to respond, react, or thoughtfully consider these tactics. Therefore, bridging the gap between scarcity messages and individual differences related to perceptions of scarcity and choice behavior are timely.

Thus, the overarching research objective is to examine the conditions (contextual and individual) that lead consumers to perceive purchase situations as competitive, and to explore how this may influence purchase interests. This objective is supported by three research questions:

1. Does scarcity information lead consumers to perceive purchase situations as competitive?
    a. If so, for which scarcity type (product or time) is this effect most observable?
2. How do individual differences affect this perception, if at all?
3. What effect, if any, does the perception of a competitive purchase situation have on purchase interest of a scarce good?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: first, the concepts of competition and competitiveness are reviewed and the concept of *consumer competition* is more clearly defined. This is accomplished in light of the distinct difference from the construct of competitive consumption. Next, a literature synthesis reviews the concepts of competition and competitiveness, and the current state of research dealing with scarcity and competition within the consumer behavior domain. This section is abbreviated as the expansive literature review can be found in chapter two. Formal hypotheses are presented within the literature review. Next, the

model under investigation is presented along with the study design and procedures. The results are presented followed by interpretation of the findings, study limitations and suggestions for future research.

Research on Competition and Competitiveness

Competition

The verb "to compete" comes from the Latin root *competere*, meaning "to seek or strive together." Most would agree that this is not the generally accepted interpretation of the term. Cooperativists and some sociologists (e.g. Kohn, 1992) define competition as *amoral competition* or *the survival instinct* where competition is biologically motivated and results in behaviors that are neither good nor bad, but are directed towards the survival of species, or for acts of self-defense. The opposing perspective, from social Darwinists, is that not only is competition always moral, but it is necessary for survival. The end result of competition amongst species is survival, extinction, or adaptation.

Other social theorists define competition as a situation which stimulates the individual to strive against others for a goal object of which he hopes to be the sole principle possessor (Maller, 1929). Mead's (1937) definition of competition is less restricting: the act of seeking or endeavoring to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time. Mead's definition avoids the concept of being the "sole" possessor, widening the concept.

Economic theory stipulates that companies compete as a natural force of the free market system. Within the same theory, assumptions about how consumers respond to supply and demand fluctuations are made without due consideration for many tenets of consumer behavior like preferences or attitudes. Only recently have researchers begun to explore the "human" effect of supply and demand (e.g. Lynn, 1989, 1991, 1992).

In sports, *competition* is meant to describe a formalized instance of rivalry against an opponent or opposing team, also called *intergroup* competition (Kohn, 1992). In most cases, competition results in a clear distinction between winners and losers. Sport competition may also surface internally within a team; i.e. athletes competing for a starting position. This situation begets the term *intragroup* competition (Kohn, 1992). The free market system and sports are good examples of competitive contexts that are generally socially accepted.

The overarching commonality to the definitions of competition and competitive situations is the reference to scarce resources: i.e. food, shelter, territory, possessions, notoriety, customers, winning etc... The subject of scarcity will be reviewed in subsequent sections.

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is often viewed from an individual perspective as *trying to be better than others*. It has been defined as the desire to win in interpersonal situations (Griffin-Pierson, 1990; Helmreich & Spence, 1978; Smither & Houston, 1992), a need or disposition for superiority or competence relative to others (Hibbard, 2000; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999), and is often associated with aggressiveness and achievement motivation (Murray H. A., 1938; McClelland, 1976; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Smither & Houston (1992) contend that competitiveness requires a perceived presence of a rival, or group of competitors, who serve as performance standards, or to whom one can compare himself.

Competitive attitudes

There are three primary types of competitive attitudes. Personal development competitive attitudes are characterized by one's interest in challenging tasks for the sake of personal enjoyment of mastery tasks, achievement, and personal improvement (Ryckman et al, 1996). The second type, interpersonal competitive attitudes, reflects one's interest in superiority and winning

over others (Helmreich & Spence, 1978), and is characterized by a need to feel superior over others in order to affirm one's self worth (Kayhan, 2003). Last, hypercompetitive attitudes describe an extreme form of interpersonal competitiveness characterized by aggressiveness and a "win at all costs" mentality (Horney, 1937). Although personal development and extreme (hyper) competitiveness traits are identified, and strongly supported in psychological literature (e.g. Horney, 1937, Ryckman et al, 1996) this study focuses on the general interpersonal characteristic of competitiveness.

Interpersonal competitive attitude

An *interpersonal competitive* attitude reflects the generally accepted definition of competitiveness; one that focuses on winning over others. It has also been described as a disposition for superiority, or a way to gain superiority over rivals for limited resources (Hibbard, 2000), and characterized by a need to feel superior to others in order to feel good about one's self and affirm one's self worth (Kayhan, 2003). This attitude focuses on being better than others, winning in interpersonal situations, and enjoyment of interpersonal competition (Griffin-Pierson, 1990; Helmreich & Spence, 1978, 1983). The focus in interpersonal competitiveness can be on reaching performance goals, or those that demonstrate competence relative to the performance of others (Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999).

Psychometric scales measuring interpersonal competitive attitudes are multiple, however, they are generally found to have high internal consistency, e.g. the competitive subscale of the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire (WOFO; Helmreich & Spence, 1978), the Competitive Index (CI; Smither & Houston, 1992), and the Interpersonal Competitiveness subscale of the Competitiveness Questionnaire (CQ; Griffin-Pierson, 1990).

Houston et al (2002) conducted a factor analysis of ten scales measuring competitiveness, finding them to be highly inter-correlated, and resulting in a two-factor solution. The results suggest that competitiveness is a multi-dimensional construct comprised of superiority and success. Therefore, superiority competitive attitudes may be placed on validating one's self worth in comparison to others (negative attitude towards losing and being a loser) and emphasizing the benefits one may gain from a successful competitive experience, i.e. enjoyment of competing with others and learning about one's own abilities (Houston et al, 2002).

Competitiveness as an individual difference characteristic

The preceding discussion of *what is competitiveness* ultimately describes competitiveness as an individual difference, or disposition that can be used to explain variations in behavior. Behaviors are viewed, in part, as a result of personality characteristics that drive people to interpret and act in one way or another in given situations. They are "consistent patterns of thought, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another (Johnson, 1997, p. 74)," where behaviors are believed to be a function of both traits and situational contexts (McAdams, 1997). Under the trait theory framework, one's competitiveness would be relatively stable across homogenous situations and influence their behavior in various situations.

Competitive Consumption vs. Consumer Competition

Competitive consumption

To date, the general received view of competition in the consumer domain is consistent with of status driven consumption behavior; behavior motivated by social needs to be, or appear to be, in a particular place within one's social hierarchy (Veblen, 1899). Because products and brands have the ability to communicate messages to others and can determine how consumers

are perceived by others (Angst, Agarwal, & Kuruzovich, 2008; Belk, 1988; Holman, 1981; Solomon, 1983), status-driven consumption and *competitive consumption* are often used interchangeably. Competitive consumption has been defined as spending that is "driven by a comparative or competitive process in which individuals try to keep up with the norms of the social group with which they identify - a reference group (Schor, 1999)." These ideas are extensions of James Duesenberry's (1949) "demonstration effect," which describes the power of imitation among consumers.

The term *competitive consumption* is popularly iterated in sociological, economic, and consumer-politic literature regarding unequal distribution of wealth and individuals' needs to climb the social ladder (Carver, 1915; Duesenberry, 1949; Frank, 1985; 1999; Hirsch, 1977; Schor, 1999; Walther, 2004; Veblen, 1899). It is similarly referenced in consumer and marketing literature streams (e.g. Mowen, 2004; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Richins, 1994; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

Based on the preceding discussion, and the points made by Nichols and Flint (2010b) in their conceptual model of consumer competition*, competitive consumption*, therefore, appears to be better explained as a social movement, or psychological consumption pattern.

Consumer competition

Consumer competition refers to the active process of striving against others for the acquisition of a consumption object of mutual interest (Nichols & Flint, 2010b). It is characterized by a situation when individuals vie for a common consumer goal for which they (1) believe others also desire, and (2) have the ability to contribute to the outcome. The term *goal* is appropriate because not all consumer outcomes result in an exchange for goods or services. The goal is believed to be desired by others. Therefore, consumer competition

requires that individuals consider the presence of others within their decision frame, and consumers may or may not knowingly be competing against one another. In this respect, consumer competition is idiosyncratic in nature.

Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest that some consumer competitions emerge from supply-demand market conditions, while others are characteristic of certain acquisition situations. Both indicate a transition into a social environment, and are functions of true or perceived levels of supply. For example, competitive themes can be found in both traditional and online auction behaviors where competing with other consumers is fundamental. In a survey of auction participants Ariely and Simonson (2003) reported 76.8 percent of respondents indicated that they perceive other bidders as competitors and refer to bid outcomes as either winning or losing. Special sales events like Black Friday and bridal gown sales are characterized as competitive retail environments, and have been shown to elicit competitive responses (Nichols, 2010; Harrison & Wooten, 2010).

Unexpected and threatening market conditions may also spawn competitive situations for consumers. People living in coastal regions, like Florida and Louisiana, often find commodities like water, milk and gasoline in short supply when hurricanes threaten. These shortages, however, have been blamed on the media inducing fear into consumers (Harris & Keim, 2008), which leads to "panic buying" situations resulting in stock outs and increased scarcity (Stiff, Johnson, & Tourk, 1975). Nonetheless, these shortages reflect both the scarcity of commodities themselves, increasing anxieties, and increased time pressures that result in the quickening of purchase behavior.

Competing and competitiveness in consumer behavior

Research regarding competition and competitiveness in consumer behavior is lacking (Angst et al, 2008; Mowen, 2004). A small body of extant literature addresses competition and competitiveness in consumer contexts. This research is present with respect to three major categories: (1) the competitiveness trait as an antecedent to consumer behaviors, preferences, and attitudes, (2) competing as a response to consumer situations, (3) and competitiveness as a dimension of other consumer constructs. This third category refers to conspicuous consumption and other constructs like materialism that have competitive undertones (see chapter 2). The first two are reviewed due to relevance to the present study.

Competitiveness trait as an antecedent

Trait competitiveness may influence a variety of consumer behaviors, preferences and attitudes. In Mowen's (2000) 3M model, he finds trait competitiveness as an indicator of sports interest, impulsive buying, proneness to bargaining, and attention to social comparison information. In a subsequent set of studies, Mowen (2004) further examined the trait of competitiveness, concluding that consumers are motivated to win and beat others. He finds the trait to be positively associated with three broad contexts of "besting others": sports/contests, vicarious experiences (i.e. watching sports), and conspicuous consumption. Although positive support was found within some of these contexts, others were unsupported (e.g. gambling as a contest). The relationship between competitiveness and gambling behavior is iterated by other research (Parke, Griffiths, & Irwing, 2004). These studies shed light on competitiveness, but do not address the trait in light of competing to acquire a good. A review of the auction literature offers further insights.

Auctions. In the context of internet auctions, bidders with high trait competitiveness choose to participate in bidding for items rather than using a strategic exit (e.g. *Buy in Now*) with a fixed price (Angst et al, 2008). The findings are similar to conclusions drawn by Nichols and Flint (2010a) in their interpretive study of eBay bidders where competing emerged as a major theme of bidding behavior. They suggest that the competitive nature of bidding activity leads some participants (those who are less competitive or uncomfortable with the competition environment) to retreat from the auction either by using a strategic exit purchase, or by resigning from purchasing at item altogether.

Angst et al (2008) also find that items sold in the traditional auction format have lower final prices than those offered as *buy it now*, suggesting that price – or anticipated price – may act as a motivator for individuals to act on competitiveness.

Auction studies have reported participants as being competitive, or competing with one another (Angst el at, 2008; Ku et al, 2004). However, few of these studies focus specifically on individual competitiveness influencing measurable auction-related behaviors.

Bargaining. Similar to auctions, competiveness may influence behaviors involving price-haggling and bargaining. Qualitative research on the motivations for price-haggling and bargaining identify non-economic drivers (Jones, Trocchia, & Mothersbaugh, 1997). These authors propose that the motivation for price-haggling can be explained by the "trio of needs" theory. This theory posits that all human motivation is based on either the (1) need to achieve, (2) affiliation, or (3) dominance. The need to achieve and dominance appear in the literature as components of competitiveness. These findings support those of Sherry (1990) and Belk et al (1988), positing that consumers do gain a sense of achievement, success and dominance when

"beating dealers at their own game" when negotiating and bargaining to a low price. Bargaining tends to occur with sellers rather than other consumers.

Competitiveness as a response

What causes competitive responses? The second body of literature considers competition and competitiveness as a situational response mechanism, such as the real or implied presence of other people. Much of this work also revolves around traditional and online auction contexts. In a study of live auctions Ku, Malhotra and Murninghan (2004) identified four main drivers influencing competitive responses: rivalry, time-pressure, presence of an audience, and a combination of the three. The result of these drivers is what they call *competitive arousal*, an adrenaline-fueled emotional state. Interestingly, it was found that bidders became more competitive and placed higher bids when the number of rivals was few, rather than many. Qualitative research finds that found bidders of online auctions describe bidding against other people as an intense experience, emotionally draining, and resulting in many physiological responses such as sweating, heart-racing, and adrenaline rush (Nichols & Flint, 2010).

Ku et al's (2004) competitive arousal model of decision-making suggests that induced arousal results in impaired decision-making processes and outcomes. It follows extant evidence of the *winner's curse*, a situation where a bidder pays more for an item than it's worth, often times due to heightened competitive emotions and escalation of commitment to the item (Foreman & Murninghan, 1996; Kagel, 1995; Thaler, 1992).

To what else can the winner's curse be attributed besides commitment to the item? Experiments investigating the winners curse identify competitive differences with respect to consumers competing and bidding against a computer versus those competing and bidding against other bidders (van den Bos, et al., 2008). The findings indicate that people are able to

use rational decision making processes and rarely overbid when bidding against a computer. However, when bidding against other humans, people are more likely to overbid and experience the winner's curse. The authors suggest this effect is a result of assigning significant future value to victories over humans, where an equivalent value is not assigned to victories over computers.

Bidders can also experience an escalation of commitment to the item, especially when the competition becomes intense (Heyman, Orhun, & Ariely, 2004). After initial entry, bidders may experience a sense of ownership to the item (endowment effects), or value in the time already dedicated to it (Ku et al, 2004), resulting in a higher sense of commitment to winning or acquiring the product and outcompeting others.

These responses reflect both cognitive and somatic anxiety when competing with other bidders. These refer to people's concerns or worries and their conditioned physiological responses to competitive situations. Anxiety, a major component of competitive arousal, is an emotional reaction to a variety of stressful stimuli (Nordell & Sime, 1993). Trait anxiety is a relatively stable individual difference in anxiety proneness, state anxiety is a transitory emotional state that varies in intensity, fluctuates over time, and can be situation specific (Spielberger, 1971).

Commodity Theory and the Implications of Scarcity

This section (1) reviews commodity theory as the theoretical foundation for the present study and other studies employing scarcity information, (2) further defines scarcity and scarcity effects, and (3) identifies scarcity tactics employed by marketers, including literature regarding cognitive processing of scarcity information.

Commodity theory

Commodity theory presumes that any "thing" will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable (Brock, 1968). Things can be messages, information, experiences, or objects that meet the requirements of being potentially possessable, useful to their possessors, and conveyable from person to person. The theory states that commodities meeting these criteria "will be valued to the extent that it is unavailable [scarce][6] (Brock, 1968, p. 246)," where value refers to the object's potency for affecting attitudes and behaviors (Lynn, 1989). The present study evaluates the potency of the scarcity-value relationship to influence particular attitudes and behaviors, namely competitive attitudes towards a specific acquisition situation.

Commodity theory is of particular relevance to consumer competition because it provides an "organizing framework for ubiquitous phenomena of increasing interest (Brock & Brannon, 1992, p. 135)," and is seemingly complimentary to the general concept and proposed definitions of consumer competition. When an object is perceived to be scarce, *commodification* of the object occurs. For commodification to be effective the commodity must meet three criteria: it must be useful, transferable, and possessable.

The major focus of commodity theory rests on communication and persuasability of availability messages about goods (objects, messages, or experiences), rather than on goods themselves. The theory is summarized in two major postulates. First, for the scarcity effect to be present a person must have an interest in or see usefulness in the commodity at hand. For example, a family who vacations at the shore each summer would have an interest and see

[6] Caption added to clarify the synonymous meaning of *unavailability* and *scarcity*.

usefulness in a beach house available for rent. "Usefulness implies that a commodity is seen by the possessor as having potential relevance to his needs and interests; he is an interested possessor" of objects, experiences, or information (Brock, 1968, p. 246). Second, threats increase commodity-seeking behavior and the tendency to withhold commodities from others. These threats may refer to anticipated loss of personal control over one's physical and/or social environment. The same family who vacations at the shore each summer may feel threatened and increasingly motivated to secure their summer rental home if a recent hurricane had damaged a large percentage of normally available rental homes, now incapable of being rented. This situation may lead the family to speed up their rental home search and the decision on which home to rent so that they may secure their summer vacation spot before all rental homes are rented by other families, and thus become unavailable and completely scarce.

Although commodity theory has gained attention pertaining to some psychological effects of scarcity (Verhallen, 1982; Lynn M. , 1989; 1991), it has not yet been applied to the psychological effect of competitive arousal.

Scarcity effects and scarcity tactics

"The real price of every thing, what every thing really costs to the man who wants to acquire it, is the toil and trouble of acquiring it" as influenced by its scarcity. (Adam Smith, 1776, The Wealth of Nations)

Scarcity is both fundamental to classical economic theory and a pervasive aspect of human life (Lynn, 1991). The scarcity effect identifies the tendency for individuals to attempt acquisition of opportunities and resources that are either scarce or becoming increasingly scarcer (Cialdini, 1995). It also posits that consumers exhibit specific behaviors related to the perceived or true scarcity of goods (e.g. Folkes, Martin, & Gupta, 1993) because situations of scarcity can be persuasive to people – making the opportunity to own scarce goods more attractive.

Researchers promote the notion of using scarcity tactics as an aggressive strategy of persuasion because scarcity implies competition, and to obtain something scarce implies that one has won the competition (Knowles & Linn, 2004).

Scarcity tactics and types

Marketers employ scarcity messages to signal quality or increase desirability of goods hoping that promoting "toil and trouble of acquiring it" will add to its value. Claiming that a product is scarce has increased the perceived value of a diverse set of products including pantyhose (Fromkin, Olson, Dipboye, & Barnaby, 1971), wine (Lynn, 1989), recipe books (Verhallen, 1984), women's suits (Szybillo, 1973), art prints (Atlas & Snyder, 1978), pastries (Brannon & McCabe, 2001), automobiles, real estate (Cialdini, 1993), car batteries and paper clips (Pratkanis & Farquhar, 1992). Intentionally communicating information about an object's real or implied unavailability is considered a *scarcity tactic*.

Within commodity theory, the scarcity of product and the scarcity of time provide boundaries with which to investigate the likelihood of consumer competition to manifest, as marketers are well known for using product scarcity and time scarcity tactics (see Gierl et al, 2008). Product and time scarcity tactics may be employed via marketing communications, or via signaling an intentional supply restriction.

Product scarcity exists when a real or implied limitation exists for the supply of product. This can lead to *structural competition*; a situation in which two or more individuals vie for tangible or intangible rewards that are too scarce to be equally enjoyed by all (Kohn, 1992). Product scarcity may be either marketer-driven (through marketing communications or signaling) or market-driven (a function of true supply and demand). Advertising research has found that advertisements with scarcity appeals lead to enhanced value perception and purchase

intention of the scarce good (Eisend, 2008; Wu & Hsing, 2006). Retail experiments employing product scarcity echo these findings, noting that subjects in scarcity conditions are more motivated to think about the scarcity message (Inman et al, 1997). See chapter two for a lengthy review of market versus marketer-driven scarcity. These outcomes may be driven by bandwagon effects: "the extent to which demand for a commodity is increased due to the fact that others are also consuming the same commodity (Leibenstein, 1950, p. 189)," or perceptions of exclusivity or increased uniqueness that can come from scarcity appeals (van Herpen, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2005).

In general, research supports the hypothesis that consumers' valuation of tangible goods is higher when scarcity is due to increased demand and restricted supply, rather than by accidental supply circumstances (Verhallen, 1982; Verhallen & Robben, 1994; Worchel, 1992).

Lynn (1992) proposed in his model of scarcity effects that assumed expensiveness, due to people's naïve economic theories when price is unknown, mediates the relationship between scarcity and desirability. He finds that this effect is enhanced when people are primed to think about the price of a good in general, prior to being exposed the product. Therefore, to control for naïve theories of assumed expensiveness, price should be held constant when scarcity is manipulated (Lynn, 1992).

Time Scarcity is defined as people's perceptions or feelings of not having enough time to do the things they want or need to do (Godbey, Lifset, & Robinson, 1998). Social theorists believe that time is socially constructed in order to regulate social behavior (Jabs & Devine, 2006). Like product scarcity, time scarcity can also evoke fear or threat to consumer choice when consumers fear "missing out" on an offering and consider anticipated regret (Cialdini, 1993). Reactions to time scarcity and product scarcity situations may be supported by reactance

theory (Brehm, 1966), which stipulates that people have an innate desire, under conditions of restriction, to restore their freedom of choice. These restrictions have been shown to pose perceptions of consumption restraints and cause psychological reactions that lead to increased desirability of scarce goods and behavioral manifestations aimed to acquire scarce goods (Miyazaki, Rodriguez, & Langenderfer, 2009).

Unlike product scarcity situations, where a real or implied product limitation is inferred, time scarcity refers to a real or implied limitation on the duration for which an offering can be acquired, or that a person has time to purchase. Time scarcity might reflect a period of time for which a sale lasts, or the amount of time one has to purchase a product before it becomes completely unavailable. The latter are usually communicated by way of "limited time offers," or "seasonal special editions," respectively. These are considered time *scarcity tactics*.

Recent research inspected the relationship of time scarcity to variables such as deal evaluation; e.g. promoting time restrictions leads consumers to evaluate the offer as either a good one or a bad one. While some research shows a negative effect of time restrictions on deal evaluation (Sinha, Chandran, & Srinivasan, 1999), other research suggests a positive effect (Inman et al, 1997). Swain et al (2006) inspected this discrepancy further and find purchase intentions diminish under time scarcity promotions when deal evaluations decrease due to perceived inconvenience, but that higher time scarcity can increase purchase intent when it creates a sense of urgency, which they define as "a felt need to initiate and complete an act in the immediate or near future (p. 1)."

As described, time scarcity can only be a result of limited supply restrictions imposed by a seller (Gierl et al, 2008). Time scarcity tactics do not directly give consumers information about how desirable the product is by other consumers and may provide less strength for

desiring goods or services for reasons of social status or exclusivity, since it does not definitively communicate or imply supply-related information. But, despite the apparent disconnect between time scarcity and product scarcity, advertisements with a time scarcity stimulus have shown to increase consumers' perceived value and purchase intention of the advertised product (Eisend, 2008). Therefore, one may presume that the psychological effects of product scarcity and time scarcity are similar, and the following hypotheses are made:

H_{1a}: When product supply is perceived to be scarce, due to exposure of product scarcity tactics, time to acquire the product will also be perceived as scarce. Therefore, product scarcity and time scarcity should be positively correlated.

H_{1b}: When time to acquire a product is perceived to be scarce, due to exposure of time scarcity tactics, product supply will also be perceived as scarce. Therefore, product scarcity and time scarcity should be positively correlated.

Although the effects of scarcity on perceptions of value, expensiveness, and desirability have revealed broad empirical support, the effects of scarcity on consumers' perceptions of the respective purchase situation have not. In particular, social marketplace phenomena resulting from scarcity are left unexamined at both the societal and individual level of analysis. Competition is one of these social phenomena. Collectively, extant literature in the auction domain suggests that the implied or real presence of other people influences competitive thoughts and behaviors, as may be exacerbated by the competitiveness trait. Integrating the scarcity literature with that of competitiveness and competitive arousals, there is theoretical support that scarcity conditions have the potential to lead to competitive thoughts and behaviors, especially for people who are characterized by high levels of trait competitiveness. This effect should be heightened when the tenets of commodity theory are met (e.g. objects are useful, transferable, and possessable). Therefore, the following hypotheses are offered:

H_{2a}: Individuals exposed to product scarcity messages will be more likely to perceive a competitive purchase situation for that scarce good, compared to those who are not exposed to scarcity messages about that same good.

H_{2b}: Individuals exposed to time scarcity messages will be more likely to perceive a competitive purchase situation for the related good, compared to those who are not exposed to time scarcity messages about that same good.

H_{3a}: When exposed to product scarcity messages, high trait competitiveness should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce product condition.

H_{3b}: When exposed to time scarcity messages, high trait competiveness should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce time condition.

Most frequently, the need for uniqueness has been identified as a motivation to acquire scarce goods, since it enables differentiation and individuality (e.g. Lynn, 1992a; 1992b; Snyder & Fromkin, 1971; van Herpen et al, 2005). Consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU) is defined as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image (Tian et al, 2001)." The trait manifests in three behavioral dimensions: creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice conformity, and avoidance of similarity. In essence, individuals high in CNFU turn away from consumption objects that are perceived as being mainstream, popular with the masses, or incapable of allowing creative differential expression. CNFU is believed to be consistent over time and capable of predicting consumer behaviors within a two year period over a broad range of consumer contexts (Tian & McKenzie, 2001).

Although desirability of scarce goods may be recognized in those who are motivated by uniqueness, these manifestations suggest that individuals characterized by the trait also interpret

scarcity situations as those that are increasingly attractive to many people. Therefore, these individuals may not only consider commodified objects as desirable for themselves, but also recognize that others will also find commodified objects desirable (an element of the competitive context). Thus, individuals characterized by a high need for uniqueness should infer a greater propensity for a competitive purchase situation for the scarce good than people with low need for uniqueness. Therefore,

> H_{4a}: When exposed to product scarcity messages, high CNFU should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce product condition.

Following the prediction that inferences of availability of product and time are positively correlated, a similar effect is hypothesized regarding the need for uniqueness on competitive perceptions under time scarcity conditions.

> H_{4b}: When exposed to time scarcity messages, high CNFU should strengthen perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. This effect will not be observed in the non-scarce time condition.

Model, Variables, and Study Design

To test the predicted hypotheses, a controlled experiment was conducted. The experiment relied on advertising materials to communicate the scarcity and non-scarcity messages. The experiment was comprised of two manipulated variables (product and time scarcity), two measured independent variables (CNFU and trait competitiveness), and two dependent variables (perceived competitive purchase situation and purchase interest). The model for this study will be presented in two stages. The hypothesized relationships are represented in the model shown in Figure 11 (p. 233). An extended model that incorporates the second dependent variable is shown in Figure 12 (p. 236).

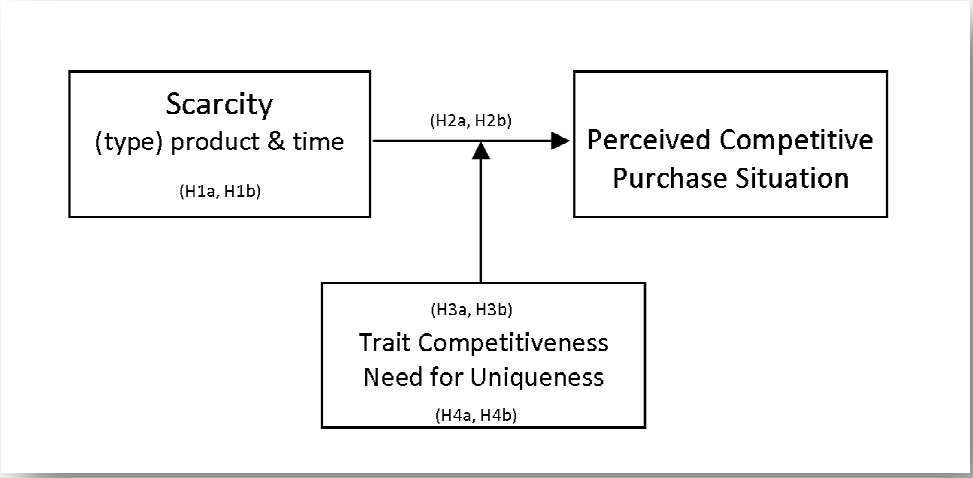


Figure 11. Moderated model of scarcity effects on perceived competitive purchase situations

Variables

Independent (Manipulated) variables

Scarcity condition. Scarcity condition refers to the degree of availability or unavailability of a commodified object. An object that is highly unavailable is scarce. An object that is widely available is not scarce. Therefore, scarcity exists when objects are in limited supply, or are believed to be in limited supply.

Scarcity type. Scarcity type pertains to *what* is believed to be (un)available. *Product scarcity* refers to the relative unavailability of a specific market offering. In this study, product scarcity refers to a limitation of a tangible market offering that is due to supply restrictions imposed by the retailer. *Time scarcity* refers to the limited time frame within which an offering can be acquired or purchased. In this study, time scarcity refers to imposed time restriction set

forth by a retailer, rather than that imposed by individuals' unique situations. This allows for possible comparisons between the effects of two scarcity tactics.

Dependent variables

One dependent variable is pertinent to the predictions previously stated: perceived competitive purchase situation. A second dependent variable is of interest for exploratory purposes: purchase interest.

Perceived Competitive Purchase Situation (PCPS). The employed definition of perceived competitive purchase situation integrates Maller's (1929) and Mead's (1937) definitions of competition: it is the perception that, in a purchase situation, one would have to strive against others to gain what another is endeavoring to gain at the same time. Given the awareness and consideration of a "competitor," PCPS can be viewed as a form of pre-competitive arousal.

In short, PCPS is a belief regarding the competitive nature of a consumer situation. Beliefs "refer to a person's subjective probability judgments concerning some discriminable aspect of his world (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 131)." In classical belief-attitude network models, beliefs are the building blocks of attitudes, providing the basis for attitude formation, and frequently the route through which an attitude is measured or inferred (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Although attitudes towards objects have garnered significant attention in behavioral research, attitudes towards situations have shown to have significantly more predictability to behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Rokeach & Kliejunas, 1972). Therefore, establishing beliefs about a particular situation in lieu of measuring attitudes towards a commodified object is particularly relevant as a precursor to examining purchase intentions.

Purchase interest. Purchase interest is an attitude directed towards the purchase of a market offering, or acquiring a product for sale. Without establishing the relationship of scarcity to perceptions of competitive purchase situation, it is premature to make formal hypotheses about PCPS relationship to purchase interest. Therefore, this variable is included for exploratory purposes and the following proposition is offered:

P_1: PCPS will influence purchase interest.

Moderating variables

Interpersonal trait competitiveness (IPC). The definition of interpersonal competitiveness is adopted from that of Griffin-Pierson (1990), Hibbard (2000), and Smither & Houston (1992). Interpersonal competitiveness refers to a disposition and desire to win in interpersonal situations. Based on the previous literature review, the pervasiveness of traits to influence behaviors across situations, the following propositions are also offered:

P_2: In general, high IPC should strengthen the relationship of PCPS to purchase interest.

Consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU). Research indicates that people with high needs for uniqueness demonstrate this need behaviorally (Ruvio, Shoham, & Brencic, 2008; Tian et al, 2001) though unique consumption behaviors. Since consumers' need for uniqueness is viewed through the lens of counter-conformity, a scarcity effect should be observed for those high in this need such that an increase in PCPS should be followed by a diminished purchase interest. Therefore, the follow proposition is offered with respect to purchase interest:

P_3: In general, high CNFU should attenuate the relationship of PCPS to purchase interest.

Figure 12 depicts the proposed relationships.

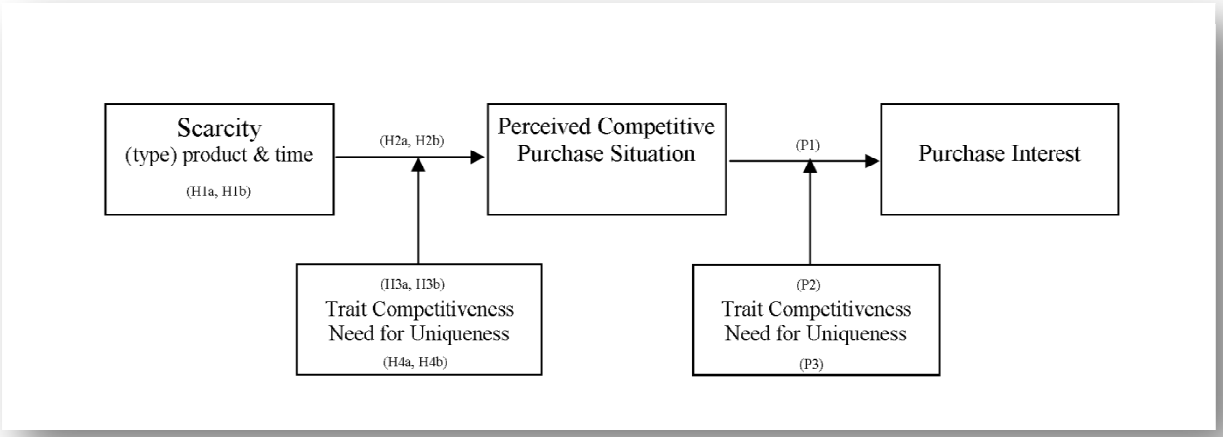


Figure 12. Extended exploratory model

Measures

Two one-item measures were employed to test the correlation relationships stated in H1a and H1b. Participants were asked to indicate how quickly they would have to act in order to purchase the advertised product. They were also asked to indicate how much of the advertised product they believe is available. Responses ranged from (1) there is limited product/I have very limited time (7) there is plenty of product/I have plenty of time.

A measure was developed to reflect the PCPS construct. Items were drawn from definitions of competitive situations, existing scales measuring competitiveness and competitive anxiety, and from examining qualitative data with consumers who described a competitive purchase situation. A detailed account of the measure's development, refinement and testing can be found in the Appendix H. After preliminary testing and scale purification, ten items were maintained to measure the PCPS construct. These ten items comprised a two-factor solution, explaining 66 percent of the total variance. The first factor loads with items that refer to the "win-lose" framework of competition and the classification of rivals or competitors. The second

factor loads with items that are indicative of situational expectations including an anticipation of needing to compete, anticipations that the product will be of interest to other shoppers, and an expectation that the purchase environment will be challenging in some way.

Since the factors were highly correlated, the measure was collapsed into an index. Pretests in scale development indicate the measure has high internal reliability ($\alpha > .70$), and high correlation to measures of interpersonal competitiveness. An eleventh item was added for the final study to address the concept of anxiety, which is typically experienced in competitive situations. This item contributed appropriately to the measure's overall alpha and fell in line with the first factor. In total, the final measure accounts for 69 percent of the variance. The final list of items in the scale can be found in Appendix G.

Desirability was assessed in two ways, using continuous response scales: (1) how interested are you in owning *object x [the advertised product]*, where 1 = not at all interested, 7 = very interested, and (2) if given *object x* as a gift, how willing are you to trade *object x* for *object y [a non-scarce substitute],* where 1 = not at all willing, and 7 = very willing. (This will be described further in the procedures.) Lynn (1989) employed similar measures in his study examining the scarcity-desirability relationship. An unwillingness to trade a scarce good for a non-scarce good further reflects the interest one holds in owning it (e.g. its desirability).

Purchase interest was measured by asking participants to rate their degree of interest in purchasing the advertised product. Responses range from (1) not at all interested to (7) very interested.

Ruvio et al's (2008) consumers' need for uniqueness short-form was employed to evaluate CNFU. Measures of CNFU are shown to be reliable ($\alpha > .90$) and unrelated to education or gender (Tian et al, 2001; Ruvio et al, 2008). The CNFU-S has been shown to hold

cross-cultural validity, indicating that its psychometric properties do not have cultural-dependent meanings and the scale can be used for generalizability (Ruvio et al, 2008).

Two measures of trait competitiveness were included due to the lack of implementation of the scales in consumer behavior contexts to date. Griffin-Pierson's (1990) interpersonal competitiveness subscale of the Competitiveness Questionnaire (CQ), and Smither and Houston's (1992) Competitiveness Index (CI) were included. CQ is comprised of eight items with a reported internal consistency of .76. CI consists of twenty true-false items with a reported internal consistency of .90. This measure is believed to be a more global measure of competitiveness, assessing both positive and negative attitudes towards competition. The use of two measures of interpersonal competitiveness is supported because the "appropriate" measure of competitiveness within consumer domains has not yet been established. While one measure may indicate high reliability and predictability to dependent variables, others may be deficient. Houston et al (2002) warn that using an "inappropriate measure of competitiveness could lead to erroneous conclusions that may stifle further research (p. 296)."

Study context

The present study concentrates on the psychological effects of scarcity for video game systems. Situating the study in a particular context provides a degree of homogeneity of participants, as well as the propensity for streamlined implications of results. Although the context is somewhat narrow, the implications should be generalizable across similar product types. The gaming context was selected for two distinct reasons. First, the context provides distinct boundaries for the sampling pool and likelihood of meeting the tenets of commodity theory. Second, the game system market has a long history of actual scarcity situations that allow for realistic scarcity tactics to be employed. Findings are likely to add significant

contribution to marketers targeting gaming consumers, and potentially to other technology-based consumer goods.

Procedures

Participant sample and recruitment

Participants were comprised of video game consumers who were characterized by high involvement in video game systems, games and accessories. The sample was drawn from a large consumer panel of video game consumers hosted by a third party market research company. A generally homogenous sample allows for a higher propensity for the participants to consider the experimental materials to be considered "useful" and "potentially possessable," a necessity under the commodity theory framework. Homogeneity of the sample also served as a control mechanism for the experiment. The list was randomly generated from a larger master list. Participants who logged into the study were randomized for exposure to one of the four treatments. These consumers met qualifications including product involvement, purchase frequency, and not having taken a gaming or computer product-related survey in the past one month. The host market research company sent an email to potential participants who met the criteria for participation. This email contained a link that directed participants to the study materials.

Materials

The study was carried out via a web-interface. Once directed to the website, participants were told that the link included three separate short studies. The purpose of this was to disguise the relationship of the personality measures to responses to the scarcity-related advertising materials. Study one included exposure to scarcity messages through video game advertising

(manipulations), measures of perceived product and time availability, the PCPS scale, measures of purchase interest, exposure to advertising for a non-scarce game system, and measures of desirability. Study two asked the participants to respond to three open-ended questions regarding a short scenario about a dual-career family. Study three included the personality measures of interest, as well as other personality items that were randomly interspersed.

In study 1, participants were presented with one of the four manipulated treatments, randomized for each unique log-in. Randomization by log-in was used to adequately fill each treatment cell. A short introductory paragraph communicated product information (i.e. technical features) and led into exposure to the treatment advertising materials (see Appendix D).

To control for potential style preferences, a counter-balance procedure was used, employing two color/style variations of the game systems. To successfully counter-balance the study materials, a total of eight advertisements were created (two for each treatment). Within each of the four main conditions, an advertisement that featured a white game system was rotated with an advertisement that featured a black game system. These systems also differed in aesthetics, e.g. the size orientation differed, as did placements of buttons and the style of the controller. Within each of the four treatment conditions, half of the participants were exposed to an ad featuring the white game system, half of the participants were exposed to the black game system (called System AAA). Save the image of the product and main copy text (scarcity information), all advertisements were identical.

Following exposure to the treatments, participants completed measures PCPS, purchase interest, and perceived product/time availability. Next, participants were presented with information and a second advertisement for a different game system. This system (called System XXX) was described as having the same features as System AAA, and was advertised at the

same price point. For all conditions, System XXX is not advertised with any scarcity information (see Appendix E). Therefore, it serves as a substitute product with which to compare to System AAA.

The use of two advertised products was employed to measure desirability of the scarce system, and to reassess availability perceptions and purchase interest of System AAA; it should not, however, influence the main hypotheses of the study. Perceived availability of System AAA, for those exposed to the scarcity treatments, should be rated as less available than the non-scarce System XXX. We are also able to observe any changes in availability perceptions that occur for System AAA after participants are exposed to System XXX. Because they are not essential to the model under investigation, the relationships are not predicted and will be discussed in the post hoc tests.

To address desirability, participants were told to imagine that they were given System AAA as a gift, and a friend of theirs has a brand new System XXX. Participants were then asked to indicate how willing they would be to trade their game system for their friend's (1= not at all willing, 7 = very willing). Next, participants were told to imagine the opposite: they have been given a System XXX as a gift and their friend would like to trade for System AAA. The same measure was employed. If the scarce game system is desirable, participants should be less willing to trade it for system XXX, and more willing to trade the XXX to acquire the AAA. Differences are not likely to be observed for participants who were not exposed to scarcity treatments.

Participants were told that the first study was complete and were asked to continue to study two. The responses in study two were irrelevant to our interests and were employed to clear short term memory before responding to the personality measures.

In study 3 participants completed the two measures for interpersonal competitiveness, and the CNFU short form. The measures of interest were separated procedurally by items from other inconsequential personality measures. General demographic data including income, age, marital status, and gender was also collected. Following the demographic questions, participants were thanked and presented with a debriefing statement that clarified the true purpose of the study and the manipulations.

Manipulation check and pretest

Several pretests were conducted in order to assess the capability of the study materials to create the desired manipulation and account for any external variations. They also served to assess reliability of the measures, confirm the realism of the manipulations, and to detect any color or style bias in the manipulation materials.

Study participants were 272 undergraduates. The game system featured in the product scarcity condition was perceived to be less available than the system featured in the non-scarcity product condition ($p <$. 000), and the game system featured in the time scarcity condition was perceived to be available for a shorter period of time than the system featured in the non-scarcity time condition ($p <$ .000). No difference in availability was detected based on game system color or aesthetics (all $p >$.20).

The potential for primacy effect was also evaluated. A second pretest was conducted that rotated the exposure of the manipulation materials (system AAA) and the non-manipulated materials (system XXX). The sample consisted of 124 undergraduates. Forty-five were traditional students recruited from a large Southeastern university and 79 were non-traditional undergraduate students recruited from a large Northwestern university. The average age was 27. Perceived availability of the manipulated game system did not vary based on whether

participants were first exposed to the scarce or the non-scarce game system (p >.30). Additionally, this pretest reconfirmed the manipulations. The game systems advertised with product scarcity messages were perceived as less available than those advertised without scarcity messages; $t(59,1) = -3.63$; $p = .001$. Similarly, participants believed they had less time to purchase the game system advertised with time scarcity messages compared to the system advertised without time scarcity messages; $t(61,1) = -3.05$; $p = .003$. Based on the two pretests, the materials were deemed to reliably manipulate product and time scarcity.

The second pretest also addressed the realism of the materials and reliability of the measurement scales. Constructs used in this research were assumed to be reflective and cause the observed variations in measures. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Alpha values above a 0.7 cutoff were sought for all variables as that level suggests good correlation between the item and true scores, while lower alpha values indicate the item set does a poor job of capturing the construct of interest (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

To assess realism, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a seven-point Likert type scale (see Table 9; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Means indicated the materials and information in the advertisements were interpreted by participants as more realistic than unrealistic (all averages were above the midpoint of 4.0). Reliability analysis confirmed that that all scales were internally consistent: CI (α= .82), CQ (α = .88), PCPS (α = .92), CNFU-S (α = .90).

Table 9 *Realism Check*

Item	*M*	*S.D.*
The Best Buy ads were realistic	4.38	1.66
Best Buy would probably sell these types of products	5.46	1.56
I think Best Buy runs ads similar to the ones I have just seen	5.02	1.41
$349 is about the price I would expect to pay for the products I have just seen	4.65	1.66
Grand Mean	19.50 (4.88)	4.75

Results

Manipulations

Participants in the product scarcity condition perceived the gaming products to be less available than those in the non-scarcity condition (M_{ps} = 2.35, M_{pns} = 4.50; p = .000), and participants in the time scarcity conditions perceive the game system to also be less available than when exposed to the control treatment (M_{ts} = 3.55; M_{tns} = 4.32; p = .006).

Descriptive statistics

The final study consisted of 297 video game consumers; 56.5 percent were male, 43.5 percent were female. Ages ranged from 18-66, with a median age of 36. Of the 297 participants, 56 percent indicated that they were married, and 51 percent reported having children. Average income was reported to be between $45,000 and $65,000.

All measures were again confirmed to have high internal reliability (see Appendix G). Responses on the CI ranged from 0-20 with a mean score of 11.42 (SD = 5.12). Cumulative scores on the CQ ranged between 8 and 56 with a mean of 30.62 (SD = 9.99). Cumulative scores

on the CNFU-S ranged between 12 and 77 with a mean of 36.61 (*SD* = 14.05). Responses on the PCPS dependent measure ranged from 11 to 77 with a mean of 46.81 (*SD* = 17.65), across all treatments.

All independent continuous variable responses were subjected to outlier tests. For each variable, the trimmed means were not significantly different from the actual means. Outliers identified in the SPSS output were evaluated and deemed reliable, thus they were kept in the data set.

Normality tests for the dependent variable were conducted because regression analysis assumes normal distribution. For the PCPS dependent variable, all trimmed means for each condition were less than .40 difference from the true mean. To support this conclusion, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic of PCPS for each condition is above .05, thereby rejecting the null hypotheses that the data are normally distributed (i.e. the data are from a normally distributed sample of the population). Correlations of the measures and treatments are shown in Appendix F. Since all significant correlations are under .90, multiple regression techniques can be conducted without concern for multicollinearity. Categorically, the manipulated treatments were not significantly correlated with any of the independent moderating variables (all $p > .25$).

Hypotheses testing

Across all participants, perceived product availability and perceived time availability were positively correlated in the predicted direction such that participants believed that when products were less available there was also less time to acquire these products *(r* =.507, *p* = .000). Thus, H1a and H1b are supported. These findings were consistent within both product and time scarcity groups (*r* =.417, *p* = .000; *r* = .458, *p* = .000, respectively), and both non-scarcity groups (*r* =.397, *p* =.001; *r* =.481, *p* =.000). Therefore, it appears that people make

assumptions regarding the availability of time/product scarcity based on the advertising message regarding product/time scarcity.

With respect to the second set of hypotheses, H2a is supported and H2b is rejected. Two independent samples t-tests compared PCPS scores between the product scarcity and product non-scarcity groups, and between the time scarcity and time non-scarcity groups. Significant differences in PCPS scores were found only between the product scarcity and product non-scarcity groups, $M_{ps} = 52.39$, $M_{pns} = 44.52$; $t(144) = -2.66$, $p = .009$. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 7.86, 95% CI: 2.03 to 13.69) was relatively small ($\eta^2 = .047$). Eta squared represents the proportion of total variance attributed to the treatment. According to Cohen (1988), eta squared of .01 represents a small effect, .06 a moderate effect, and .14 a large effect. PCPS scores between the time scarcity and time non-scarcity groups did not differ, $M_{ts} = 46.0$, $M_{tns} = 44.17$; $p = .515$. Therefore, the data suggest that when exposed to messages about product scarcity, people have a somewhat greater propensity to perceive that the purchase environment for the scarce good will be competitive in nature. This is not the case under messages relaying time scarcity.

The remaining hypotheses predicted that individual differences would moderate the relationship between the scarcity messages and levels of PCPS. Several problems have become evident in recent years with the application of the traditional ANOVA with a cut-point approach. A reduction of power of statistical tests can occur when dichotomizing continuous variables (Cohen J., 1983), and in designs with two or more correlated individual difference variables, significant yet spurious effects of the individual difference variable may be detected even when the two variables have no relation to the outcome (Maxwell & Delaney, 1993). Using dichotomous cutoff points also limit the ability to detect curvilinear relationships. Therefore,

rather than utilizing a two-way ANOVA, the data were analyzed using a moderated multiple regression technique (Aiken & West, 1991; Jaccard & Turrisi, 1990; Judd & McClelland, 1989; Saunders, 1956) which requires the regression of the dependent variable on the continuous independent variable, the manipulated independent variable, and their interaction (Fitzsimons, 2008). Each of the continuous independent variables was centered from their means, and dummy codes (0, 1) were assigned to the dichotomous independent treatment variables in order to perform the analyses.

With respect to H3a and H3b, moderated multiple regression was conducted first employing the CQ measure, and then employing the CI measure. Considering both measures of interpersonal competitiveness, H3a and H3b are rejected, as neither measure of competiveness were found to significantly interact with exposure to the treatments on the PCPS scores. Therefore, one's trait competitiveness does not seem to influence their perceptions of a competitively natured purchase situation, regardless of the presence of scarcity messages.

However, both overall models employing CQ as a measure of competitiveness are significant ($p < .01$) and main effects are observed. Using standard linear multiple regression to assess the ability of CQ and the product scarcity/non scarcity treatments to predict levels of PCPS, the total variance explained by the model as a whole is 8.9 percent, $F(2, 143) = 6.97$, $p = .001$. Both the treatment and the CQ measure are statistically significant, with the treatment reporting a slightly higher beta value ($\beta = .230$, $p = .005$) than the CQ measure ($\beta = .205$, $p = .011$). To interpret the beta weight of the treatment, one can say that the product scarcity treatment (coded as 1) has a positive relationship with the PCPS scores, compared with the non-scarcity treatment (coded as 0). Looking to the time scarcity/ non-scarcity regression model, the model as a whole is significant and accounts for 10.9 percent of the variance, $F(2,148) = 9.02$, p

= .000. However, only CQ is statistically significant (β = .325, p = .000). To interpret these findings, it appears that although trait competitiveness, as measured by the competitiveness questionnaire (Griffin-Pierson, 1990), does not strengthen or weaken the influence of scarcity messages on PCPS, it does consistently contribute to overall PCPS scores regardless of the presence of scarcity information or scarcity type.

Next, the ability of CI along with the treatments was assessed to predict levels of PCPS. For the product scarcity/non scarcity groups, the model as a whole explains 5.1 percent of the variance in PCPS, $F(2,143) = 3.86$, p = .023, but only the treatment is significant (β = .217, p = .009), explaining 5.1 percent of the variance. For the time scarcity/non scarcity groups, the model as a whole explains only 3.9 percent of the variance, $F(2, 148) = 3.00$, p = .05. Interestingly, here only the CI trait is found to contribute to the predictability (β = .190, p = .02). Given the low F-statistics for the main effects, and the relatively low R-squared, one can conclude that there is likely to be many other influences on PCPS that are unaccounted for in these models. It also appears, comparing the findings from the CQ and CI measures, that CQ may be a better indicator of competitiveness, at least in the context of perceived retail competition.

With respect to H4a and H4b, both hypotheses are rejected. Looking to the product scarcity/ non-scarcity groups (H4a), the interaction with CNFU is not significant in the regression model (p = .265). However, the overall model is significant, explaining 8.9 percent of the variance in PCPS, $F(3,142) = 4.10$, p = .008, and indicates main effects for both CNFU and the treatment. CNFU records a higher beta value (β=.248, p = .032) than does the treatment (β = .214, p = .009). From these data, it appears that a consumers' need for uniqueness, as a consistent personality trait, does not strengthen or weaken their perceptions of a competitive

purchase situation based on exposure to product scarcity information. It does, however, contribute to the PCPS score, which would suggest that one's need for uniqueness may have innate competitive qualities that influence one's beliefs about purchase situations in general. The data also suggest that CNFU contributes to perceived competitiveness of a purchase situation over and above that of the presence of product scarcity messages.

The time scarcity/non scarcity regression model is not significant ($p = .324$) and no main effects are present.

Proposition testing

The full model shown in Figure 12 was tested for mediation. It was of interest to inspect PCPS as a mediating variable between exposure to scarcity messages and purchase interest. First, no significant direct relationship between exposure to the scarcity treatments and purchase interest are found (both models $p > .50$). Therefore, the proposition that product or time scarcity of video game systems directly affects purchase interest is rejected. However, exposure to scarcity messages could have an indirect or resonating effect on purchase interest through other variables, such as PCPS.

As anticipated, tests indicate that PCPS can predict purchase interest to some degree (proposition 1). In the product scarcity/non scarcity model, PCPS explains 8.5 percent of the variance in purchase interest, $F(1,44) = 13.39$, $p < .001$ ($\beta = .292$). In the time scarcity/non scarcity model, PCPS explains 14.9 percent of the variance in purchase interest, $F(1,149) = 25.99$, $p < .001$ ($\beta = .385$). Overall, mean comparison t-tests (using median split) indicate that participants with higher PCPS scores show greater interest in purchasing the game system AAA, compared to those with low PCPS scores. This difference is replicated for both the product and time scarcity types (see Table 10, p. 250).

Although a traditional mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) is rejected, two direct causal relationships are observed for product scarcity/non scarcity groups (scarcity to PCPS, and PCPS to purchase interest). Thus, investigating the extent to which scarcity is carried though PCPS to purchase interest is of interest. The Sobel test (1982) determines whether a mediator carries the influence of an independent variable to a dependent variable. The Sobel test is superior to Baron and Kenny's (1986) method in terms of being able to achieve greater power, avoid Type I error, account for suppression effects, and its ability to address the significance of the indirect effect. To conduct the Sobel's tests, regression analysis must first be conducted and the unstandardized beta weights and standard error terms of the variables are noted. For the product scarcity/non scarcity model, the Sobel statistic is significant; statistic = 2.12, $p = .03$ (two-tailed). Therefore, there is a direct sequential effect of product scarcity on purchase interest that is carried only through PCPS (see Figure 13 on p. 251).

Table 10 *T-tests Showing Mean Difference in Purchase Interest between Low and High PCPS*

	Full Sample	Product Scarcity/ Non Scarcity	Time Scarcity/ Non Scarcity
	M	*M*	*M*
Low PCPS	3.30	3.50	3.11
High PCPS	4.34	4.28	4.39
t-value	-5.272**	-2.729**	-4.772**
Mean difference	-1.032	-.779	-1.28
CI	-1.41 to -.646	-1.34 to -.21	-1.81 to -.75
η^2	.10	.05	.13

***p<.01*

The second proposition stated that interpersonal competitiveness would moderate the relationships of PCPS to purchase interest. Inspecting both the CQ and CI measure, this relationship was not observed for any of the treatment groups. Main effects were observed across both measures of competitiveness and for PCPS (Tables 11 and 12). In both models, it is observed that the influence of the situational measure (PCPS) carries the most weight suggesting that situational interpretations are more influential than the trait of competitiveness.

The third proposition stated that CNFU would attenuate the relationship of PCPS to purchase interest for both product and time scarcity conditions. This prediction was based on the non-conformity characteristic of the CNFU trait that suggests that persons with high needs for uniqueness avoid products that are becoming main-stream or in high demand by the greater population. Moderated multiple regression was employed to evaluate the interaction. CNFU was not found to interact with PCPS in either the time or product regression models. However, there are main effects for both CNFU and PCPS to predict purchase interest (see Table 13).

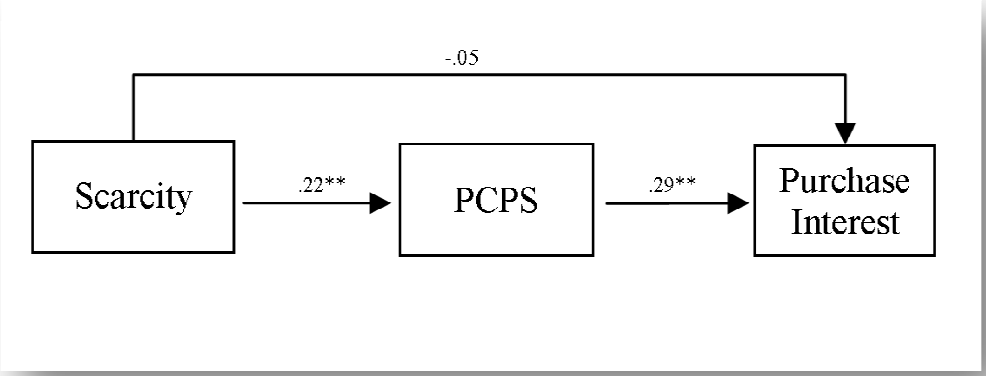


Figure 13. Direct sequential effect of scarcity to PCPS, and PCPS to purchase interest for product scarcity/non scarcity groups

Table 11 *Moderated Multiple Regression of PCPS, CI, and PCPS x CI on Purchase Interest*

	Product Scarcity/ Product Non Scarcity	Time Scarcity/ Time Non Scarcity
Variable	β	β
PCPS	.306**	.356**
CI	.134	.179*
PCPS x CI	-.119	.025
R^2	.11	.18
F -statistic	5.92**	10.73**
N	146	151

**p < .05; **p<.01*

Table 12 *Moderated Multiple Regression of PCPS, CQ, and PCPS x CQ on Purchase Interest*

	Product Scarcity/ Product Non Scarcity	Time Scarcity/ Time Non Scarcity
Variable	β	β
PCPS	.251**	.295**
CQ	.224**	.282**
PCPS x CQ	.036	.012
R^2	.135	.22
F -statistic	7.38**	13.80**
N	146	151

**p < .05; **p<.01*

Table 13 *Moderated Multiple Regression of PCPS, CNFU, and PCPS x CNFU on Purchase Interest*

	Product Scarcity/ Product Non Scarcity	Time Scarcity/ Time Non Scarcity
Variable	β	β
PCPS	.262**	.380**
CNFU	.169*	.155*
PCPS x CNFU	.065	.074
R^2	.114	.181
F -statistic	6.106**	10.79**
N	146	151

**p < .05; **p<.01*

Discussion

Based on the theoretically driven hypotheses, the conclusion is that product and time scarcity inferences are positively related. When people are presented with time scarcity information, their presumptions related to product supply or availability follows in a similar direction. When people are presented with product scarcity information, they also presume a degree of 'urgency' or time pressure for purchasing the good. Therefore, retailers employing time scarcity tactics should consider that consumers may be inaccurately estimating the actual number of products available for sale. In turn, this interpretation of product supply may influence a variety of other shopping-related decisions or outcomes like store choice. It may also affect consumer attitudes toward the store, or towards the brand.

Retailers promoting product scarcity consider that people may estimate the duration for which the scarce goods are available for sale, which may also influence feelings of inconvenience related to purchasing the product which can affect attitudes towards purchase, as previous research has found that beliefs of time scarcity may create feelings of inconvenience in the minds of consumers (Swain, Hannah, & Abendroth, 2006).

For H2a and H2b, the finding suggests that scarcity messages can influence perceptions of a competitive purchase situation only with respect to messages about product scarcity, albeit the effect is small. With this in mind, managers wishing to use product scarcity tactics should be aware that these beliefs could have the ability to influence a variety of other factors. Our analysis of the mediation model showed that exposure to scarcity messages has a positive influence on PCPS, and this positive effect was carried through to purchase interest such that as PCPS rose so did purchase interest. Therefore, in the case of video game systems, scarcity tactics, through thoughts about the purchase environment, can increase interest in purchasing the

item. Contrary, the lack of support for the time scarcity group suggests that competitive arousals in purchase situations may be driven more forcefully via knowledge of supply limitations rather than time restrictions where the actual supply could be sufficient. This finding is interesting in light of the correlations found in H1 which indicated a strong relationship between perceived product and time availability for all treatment groups.

Further, since it was found that perceptions regarding the competitive nature of the purchase situation under exposure to product scarcity messages is stronger than when no scarcity message is used, retailers should consider what others effects scarcity tactics may have, compared to the absence of scarcity messages. This study has tested only two outcomes of interest, but retailers should thoughtfully consider others. For example, research on couponing and other marketing promotions consistently show that promotional tactics can influence consumers' price sensitivity, especially when these tactics are used frequently and over long periods of time (Kaul & Wittink, 1995; Mela, Gupta, & Lehmann, 1997). Retailers and brand managers alike should consider what long-term effects the use of scarcity tactics may have consumer attitudes like price sensitivity and product valuations.

Considering this, there are likely many other extraneous factors influencing the perception of a competitive purchase situation other than exposure to scarcity messages and beliefs about the availability of both product and time. For example, consumer level of involvement in the product or recent purchase behavior may impact situational perceptions. Those who are highly involved in a product may be able to better imagine themselves in the context described. Similarly, recent purchase history with related gaming products may increase or decrease sensitivity to scarcity messages and the related competitive arousal. In fact, our data show that PCPS does seem to be affected by recent purchase behavior. Recent purchase

behavior was measured as a qualification of study participation. Comparing product scarcity and non-scarcity groups, only main effects are found for both the treatment, $F(1,5) = 6.51$, $p = .04$, and recent purchase history, $F(2,5) = 3.09$, $p = .04$. Effect sizes for both main effects are small ($\eta^2 < .05$). Comparing time scarcity and non-scarcity groups, no main effects are observed, but a marginal interaction surfaces, $F(2,5) = 2.70$, $p = .07$. Under time scarcity, participants who have made the most recent purchase of gaming-related products or accessories are most affected by the time scarcity message, as it appears to create a significant difference in competitive arousal more so than for the other two groups. In essence, these individuals may be more sensitive to advertising messages regarding a product similar to one they have just purchased. But again, the effect size is small. The profile plots can be found in Appendix I.

Exposure to product or time scarcity messages did not directly influence purchase interest for the gaming products. However, through the mechanism of situational perceptions, the effect of product scarcity does carry through to purchase interest. Therefore, retailers should consider that the scarcity message itself may not be capable of increasing purchase interest or intentions for this classification of products, but that other considerations like the purchase environment influence the desire to purchase scarce goods. Perhaps, the situational expectations related to shopping for scarce goods enhances feelings of excitement or being able to "get in the swim of things," that Leibenstein (1950) refers to in his definition of *bandwagon effects*.

Last, since no moderating relationships are found for the need for uniqueness, the conclusion is that the beliefs about the purchase situation of scarce video game systems are not affected by one's need for uniqueness. Brock (1968) hypothesized that people prefer scarce objects over similar available ones because owning scarce objects could enhance one's feelings of uniqueness. Lynn (1991) found a positive relationship between people's need for uniqueness

and their valuation of scarce goods. However, his studies also showed that this effect varied and thus concluded that not all scarce products enhance this effect.

The lack of support for both competitiveness traits measured lead us to question the measures' ability to relate one's innate competitiveness to competitive arousal in consumption domains, and to suggest that perhaps more specific measures that account for shopping competitiveness be developed. Looking to the totality of the relationships of the competitiveness measures to PCPS, it appears that the CQ scale (Griffin-Pierson, 1990) provides a better measure with which to relate the trait due to its higher correlations and accountability in regression models, as well as its ability to capture a greater variance due to its measurement structure (e.g. continuous rather than dichotomous).

These observations should be considered in light of the contribution to the variance from all independent variables of interest, as well as other potential predictors. Some of these relationships are explored in post hoc tests.

Post hoc tests

The first research question stated was: does scarcity information induce consumers to perceive purchase situations as competitive? This study has shown that exposure to scarcity messages has, itself, weak effects on this belief. However, looking to perceived availability ratings of scarce and non scarce goods, which served as the manipulation check for all treatments, we do find the effect to widen. The following t-test and regression results are observed.

T-tests show that product scarcity induces higher levels of PCPS than does time scarcity, $M_{ps} = 52.39$, $M_{ts} = 46.0$, $t(156,1) = 2.35$, $p = .02$. The magnitude in the difference (mean difference = 6.39, 95% CI: 1.03 to 11.75) was small ($\eta^2 = .036$). Not surprisingly, results

indicate that the perceived product availability is higher under time scarcity conditions than under product scarcity conditions (M_{ps} = 2.33, M_{ts} = 3.55, p <.001). The magnitude in the difference (mean difference = -1.22, 95% CI: -1.75 to -.724) was large (η^2 = .14). There is no difference in perceived time availability between the product and time scarcity groups (M_{ps} = 2.37, M_{ts} = 2.84). This should be of interest to retailers who wish to create a sense of urgency for product purchase. It seems that both scarcity tactics will work in the same manner in terms of creating urgency. Future studies should investigate the multiplicative effect of product + time scarcity messages on competitive arousals and feelings of urgency.

Next, multiple regression was used to explore the influence of the perceived product and time availability, CNFU, CQ, and CI on PCPS. Table 20 in the appendix shows the regression results for the total sample and each treatment group independently.

Integrating the results of the hypotheses tests, it may be surmised that exposure to scarcity information alone does not strongly lead to perceptions of competitive situations, but that priming and processing of scarcity information may make the effect stronger. This seems to be especially true when considering perceived time pressures associated with acquiring goods. Further, it is observed that the individual difference characteristics pertaining to needs for uniqueness and competitiveness show very little in the way of influencing PCPS. Only in the product scarcity treatment does this trait (CQ only) appear to strongly contribute to perceptions of competitive purchase situations.

Evaluation of scarcity-desirability relationship

The predicted relationships imply the effect of scarcity on increased desirability. Two measures of desirability were employed. The first asked respondents to indicate their interest in owning the advertised product (System AAA). No differences between treatment groups were

found with respect to desired ownership. The second assessment of desirability followed a technique employed by Lynn (1992). Participants were asked to indicate how willing they would be to (1) trade product AAA that they had been given as a gift, to a friend for the XXX, and (2) to trade product XXX that they had been given as a gift, to a friend for the AAA. In the product and time scarcity conditions, it would follow that desirability would be reflected in a low willingness to trade away a scarce good, and a higher willingness to trade to acquire the scarce good.

First, comparing the product scarcity and non-scarcity treatment groups, desirability of the products does not differ when asked if they would be willing to trade product AAA for XXX ($M_{ps} = 3.32$, $M_{pns} = 3.39$; $p = .794$). Similarly, when asked to trade XXX for AAA, willingness to trade does not differ ($M_{ps} = 3.41$, $M_{pns} = 3.26$; $p = .564$). These findings are replicated for the time scarcity versus non-scarcity groups ($M_{ts} = 2.90$; $M_{tns} = 3.14$; $p = .357$; $M_{ts} = 3.24$, $M_{tns} = 3.07$; $p = .523$).

Multiple regression was used to explore the influence of the perceived product and time availability, CNFU, CQ, CI, and PCPS on the first measure of purchase interest (prior to exposure to the second product advertisement). Results can be found in the appendix (Table 21).

After exposure to the second product (the XXX), perceived availability and purchase interest were again measured. Since those in the scarcity treatments were able to compare and consider a scarce good in light of an available alternative, we suspect that their interpretations of availability and purchase interest may change, as might the sensitivity of the information to evoke the moderating effects. Representative statistics are shown in Table 14 and Table 15. Looking to those in the product scarcity group, perceived product availability of game system AAA actually increases between the first and second assessment, and purchase interest in the

AAA decreases significantly after exposure to the XXX. This effect of purchase interest is replicated in the time scarcity condition.

These results suggest that when products are advertised as scarce in either limited supply or under a time pressure, people's availability perceptions change, as does their interest in purchasing the scarce good. It suggests that people will be less interested in purchasing the scarce good if a similar or substitute product is known to be available. To corroborate this interpretation, purchase interest in product XXX is significantly greater than that of the AAA for both of the scarcity groups, but not significantly different for those in the two non-scarcity groups (see Table 15, p. 260).

We are also able to the re-evaluate the moderation of the personality traits between PCPS and the second measure of purchase interest. Again, no significant interactions are found between exposure to product or time scarcity treatments and the non-scarcity treatments for CNFU, CI, or CQ. We do find, however, that PCPS and other variables have main effects contributing to the variance in the second assessment of purchase interest (see Table 22 in the appendix).

Table 14 *T-tests Comparing Perceived Product and Time Availability of AAA Prior to and After Exposure to Comparison Product XXX*

Treatment Group	Perceived Product Avail T-1	Perceived Product Avail T-2	*t*	*df*	Perceived Time Avail T-1	Perceived Time Avail T-2	*t*
Product Scarce	2.33	2.63	-1.97*	75	2.37	2.32	.344
Product NS	4.50	4.54	-2.84	69	3.91	3.99	-.407
Time Scarce	3.55	3.34	1.15	81	2.84	2.98	-.882
Time NS	4.32	4.30	.088	68	3.97	3.97	.000

*p < .05

Table 15 *T-tests Comparing Purchase Interest at Time1, Time 2, and to Product XXX*

Treatment Group	Purchase interest in AAA T-1	Purchase interest in AAA T-2	*t*	*df*	Purchase interest in XXX	*t*
Product Scarce	3.79	3.25	3.08**†	75	4.09	3.34**†
Product NS	3.99	3.77	1.38	69	3.83	.386
Time Scarce	3.79	3.37	2.63**	81	4.10	4.11**†
Time NS	3.72	3.49	1.49	68	3.71	1.62

*p < .05 **p<.01
† $\eta^2 > .10$

Discussion of post hoc tests

The indifference of desirability of the game system AAA between the scarce and non-scarce treatment groups poses problems to the ubiquity of scarcity's relationship to desirability. It also poses questions related to peoples' desires to restore their freedom of choice. Reactance theory contends that people will attempt to restore their ability of free choice when they perceive it to be restricted. Under this assumption, participants in the scarcity treatments, both time and product, should have been willing to trade their non-scarce good for the scarce one when given the opportunity to do so. Looking to pair-wise comparisons, there is no indication that the desirability (as indicated by willingness to trade) of the scarce good is different than that of the non-scarce good for any of the treatment groups. This suggests that although participants do interpret the products to have different levels of availability, it did not significantly affect their overall desirability for either gaming system. Thus, there is lack of support that scarcity leads to increased desirability for gaming systems. However, due to naïve economic theories that people hold with respect to scarce goods, this could be due to the knowledge equivalency of prices of the products, since people tend to think that scarce goods are more valuable, and increased

valuation enhances desirability. An experiment that varies and eliminates pricing information could shed more light on the ability of these products to induce desirability when scarcity is present.

Since tests do not support CNFU as a moderating variable between product scarcity and desirability, PCPS or purchase interest, one may begin to presume that video game systems do not possess the necessary intrinsic features for consumers to achieve a sense of uniqueness by owning or possessing these products, even if it is recognized as being limited in supply.

Contribution and Managerial Implications

This study makes several contributions. First, it contributes to the commodity theory literature by testing a psychological effect of scarcity. Rather than concentrating on value and ownership of scarce goods, this study sought to inspect how scarcity messages could influence perceptions of the retail environment, namely competitive perceptions. It also appears, based on the measures of desirability, which it may serve to refute the ubiquity of commodity theory. On the other hand, it is possible that game systems do not meet the third requirement of the theory: i.e. they may not be sufficiently conveyable. Within the same scope, the findings question the applicability of reactance theory within the framework of scarce video game systems and products of a similar nature. Even when participants acknowledges that levels of availability were low and they were given the opportunity to trade a non-scarce good for a scarce good, they did not elect to do so. Perhaps the applicability of reactance and commodity theory are limited for certain product categories where scarcity tactics have become rather main-stream. From this interpretation, retailers and marketers employing (or wishing to employ) these tactics should thoughtfully consider their effects, which may conflict with the desired outcome.

The findings also contribute to our understanding of employing scarcity tactics in advertising. Scarcity tactics are often employed as a means to increase demand for products, or to encourage customers to purchase an item within a specified time period. Considering the wide-spread use of this tactic, and the lack of support this study finds with respect to purchase interest, it is possible that consumers have either become desensitized to these promotional efforts, or consider them to be an indication of inconvenience. The observed changes in perceived availability for the advertised product, and the increase in purchase interest for an available alternative also contribute to the study of scarcity effects. Most studies in this domain have not considered such effects, and the findings suggest that future research should explore these relationships with more precision.

From a retail perspective, scarcity can be attributed to an array of circumstances. This study investigated only scarcity based on retailer imposed time restrictions and product availability (supply). As such, the circumstances of scarcity may not be readily controlled by the retailer, but the communication of the circumstance to the consumer can be controlled. The findings suggest that mostly under product scarcity conditions will perceptions of having to compete for a product surface. The retailer must ask themselves whether or not this is a desirable outcome from scarcity-based promotions. If so, what are the ramifications? The findings presented here suggest that as these perceptions rise, so does purchase interest. But, considering the implications from an alternative product, retailers should consider how the effect may be counteracted when an available alternative can be considered by consumers.

Finally, this study contributes to the trait literature for the measures of need for uniqueness and interpersonal competitiveness, neither of which has been employed in a similar study. Ruvio et al (2008) note that additional manifestations of the extended self beyond that of

owning unique material products are desirable. This study achieves this extension by testing it as a moderator to situational perceptions. Similarly, examining the trait of competitiveness with respect to situational competitive arousal suggests that the trait may only be of consequence in behavioral situations, and may not manifest to alter one's perceptions of a specific situation. But this conclusion cannot be made from the present study alone.

Importantly, this study should be considered in light of historical ecological, biological and economic theory of competition, all of which are founded on competition stemming from scarce resources. In these domains, species or firms compete for scarce resources. In the consumer domain this paper has discussed examples that suggest scarce resources influence consumers to compete with one another, however, it appears that scarcity itself may not be a very strong driver of this phenomenon. If scarcity does not drive competition, or the perceived presence of competition, then we must ask, *what does*?

Limitations and Future Research

A long stream of research may follow this study to further study situational perceptions following scarcity tactics. Since perceptions of a competitive purchase situation has shown to influence purchase interest, competing in the domain of consumer behavior would benefit from furthering our understanding of how people act competitively, employ individual competitiveness, and experience competitive arousal.

Pricing and discounting

The present study showed weak findings between scarcity and PCPS. This could be due to eliminating people's use of naïve economic theories (Lynn, 1991), since price was held constant in order to isolate and manipulate scarcity. Future studies should manipulate both the

presence of price and levels of price to assess its impact on PCPS. Further, price discounting can be added to scarcity messages and evaluated in a similar manner.

Product type

A limitation in the present study was the manipulation of only one product type. Although some of the findings were weak, and some not significant, conducting a similar study within a different product context may result in more significant findings for both direct and moderating relationships. Visibility of the product may also influence the findings and suggest a future research endeavor. The focal product in this study would probably be considered a private good rather than a public good since it would be used almost exclusively in the home. Comparing scarcity effects and the influence on competitive arousals for private versus public type goods should contribute to our understanding of when and why scarcity tactics are most influential on competitiveness.

Similarly, inspecting how people perceive situations dealing with scarcity of services or experiences are of interest. If commodified, would these market offerings create a response similar or different than the response to scarce product offerings?

Cultural research

Another limitation could have been the sample and population itself. The sample was drawn from American consumers. Therefore, a cross-national study would be able to detect if competitive arousals in the form of PCPS are more strongly affected by scarcity tactics by consumers in other countries, and from different socio-economic environments. Indeed, research has found that culture differences of scarcity effects are present (Jung & Kellaris, 2004).

Branding

Since the study employed a controlled experiment, and extraneous variables were accounted for in order to avoid obvious confounds, no real-world branding information for the products were used in the advertising materials. It is possible that the absence of a known brand in connection with the video game system advertised had a strong impact on the results. If strong brands do have the intrinsic features to increase desirability of their products, then branding information could contribute to higher levels of PCPS under scarcity conditions, as well as higher levels of purchase interest. Future studies could test if the presence of a strong brand, weak brand, or no brand affects PCPS and purchase interest any differently that reported in the present study.

Research has found that when shoppers find their preferred brand to be out-of-stock, they refuse to switch to an alternative brand (Verbeke, Farris, & Thurik, 1998). A similar study could be conducted with limited supply levels rather than stock outs to investigate if people would demonstrate competitive-type behaviors. Surprisingly, there is very little empirical work within the scope of branding and manipulated scarcity effects.

Field experiments, social impact, and scarcity classification

The literature on scarcity effects and consumer competition would also benefit from field experiments that allow researchers to observe actual consumer behaviors and purchase behaviors when placed in conditions of product and time scarcity, and under conditions that vary the presence of other people. Studying consumer competition with the presence of perceived "competitors" may be especially necessary. Worchel (1992) argued that scarcity does not invariably lead to increased liking of objects. He contends that the desire for scarce goods increases as the number of other people who want the commodity also increases, and thus it is

the *distribution of supply* rather than supply that can determine scarcity effects. As such, a future study should account for the distribution of supply in addition to scarcity messages with respect to actual competitive purchase behavior. Indeed, scarcity in a retail environment can lead to competition between shoppers and ultimately to behaviors like in-store hoarding and making quick and irrational purchases (Byun & Sternquist, 2008)

In this study, supply limitations were employed to indicate scarcity. Future research should consider investigating demand-driven scarcity, which more directly considers Worchel's contention.

Purchase patterns

Post hoc tests showed that recent purchase history of gaming related products may affect competitive arousals related to the scarcity of video game systems. Future studies should explore this further in relation to consumer purchase patterns and product category involvement. It seems that recent purchase behaviors within the same product category may sensitize or desensitize consumers' interpretations of scarcity messages. If this is the case, retailers and managers should consider the implications of this on marketing communications strategies.

CHAPTER 5 – CONVERGENCE OF FINDINGS

Summary of Grounded Theory Findings

The interpretive study of participants involved in a competitive shopping experience concluded that although the competitive nature of the event contributed to the fun and excitement of attending the event, the experience as a whole was one in which the participants were engaged in the processes of bonding and the phenomenon of creating memories.

Ingrained within these processes another set of processes had emerged. These processes (referred to as trajectories) coincided with the shifting social environment in which the participants were seated. Here, relationships with other teams and strong emotional intensities were found to change dramatically over the course of the experience and to be closely tied with the progression of competitive to cooperative social interactions.

Interestingly, although the wedding dresses were believed by many of the participants to be scarce (in style, size, color, etc…), it did not appear that scarcity of the dresses were a main driver for participating in the event. Instead, the opportunity to spend time with friends and family, itself a scarce commodity in modern times, appeared to be the primary motivation for attending and acting out competitive behaviors. In essence, the competitive experience was usurped by a social opportunity. Woven into the fabric of spending quality time with loved ones was the excitement of engaging in something new and different; something that was expected to be easily remembered for its own sake.

Similarly, the findings do appear to offer support for the notion that the competitive opportunity itself was able to generate interest and participation, recalling that Parke et al (2004) cite Goffman's (1982) *deprivation-compensation* theory as an explanation for the willingness to partake in competitive consumer behaviors. The theory infers that individuals will exercise

competitive instincts in opportune situations because the stability of modern society no longer creates situations to test competitive instincts. The competitive situation in which the ROTB participants were engaged was of little risk to the "competitors," perhaps contributing to their willingness to engage in competition and consider it a lighthearted experience.

Summary of Experimental Findings

The experiment tested a psychological effect of scarcity: perceptions of a competitive purchase situation. The findings support the hypotheses that messages communicating product quantity limitations can contribute to this psychological effect. But, the effect is rather small. However, messages communicating time limitations for purchasing the product do not produce this same effect. Further, those who perceive a competitive purchase situation appear to show greater interest in purchasing the advertised product, whether it was communicated as scarce or not.

The results of this study lead to many questions surrounding the effects of scarcity messages for video game and related products. First, one may question if the intrinsic features of the products themselves are strong enough to create competitive arousals. The possibility of desensitization to scarcity messages based on historical sales and advertising trends is also possible.

Although the study did not directly measure engaging in competitive behavior, the positive relationship between perceived competitive purchase situation and purchase interest suggests that competitive arousal with respect to retail circumstances may increase the likelihood that consumers are willing to engage in competition with one another. Since no support was found for the moderation of the competitiveness trait, it appears that one's level of competitiveness is not an important factor affecting this potential behavior.

Convergence of Findings

Scarcity effects

Conversations about competing and competitiveness are wide-spread in many fields of study. Within and across these fields there is much contradiction regarding the appropriateness of competition, the benefits and/or consequences, and the normality or abnormality of competitive behaviors and attitudes. These contradictions are not likely to be solved since it is probable that acts of competition and competitive attitudes seem to have their right place within the Western society and others, and values within cultures dictate the degree to which competing is appropriate, beneficial, or normal.

Together, these two studies help further our understanding of the how people may utilize competitive situations in a retail context, how they progress through competitive social interactions to cooperative ones, and the competitive perceptions implied by scarcity messages and its effects on purchase interests of scarce goods. Taking a broad view, the two studies together suggest that scarcity alone has little implication on consumer competition in the two contexts studied. This raises many questions regarding the many extraneous variables that may cause and encourage people to compete for products or other market offerings. Some of these have been discussed in the literature synthesis and are in need of further inquiry.

Although scarcity is presumed to create competition in a wide array of circumstances, we find little support that scarcity of products themselves, due to supply or time restrictions, or scarcity messages alone are capable of creating this phenomenon within the consumption domain. This is perhaps a reflection of the modern Western society in which the studies were conducted, especially since Western cultures overwhelming benefit from a general surplus of commodities. Scarcity was manipulated in one study, and perceived in the other – with a great

deal of uncertainty. However, in both circumstances, although scarcity was present within the specified context in which the participants were involved, many other sources for the scarce good were likely to still be under consideration. In circumstances when the scarcity context is a person's *only* opportunity to acquire a certain product, the results may be different. One might suggest that, following the presumptions of commodity theory, circumstances involving personal threat and fear may lead to stronger scarcity effects for competitive perceptions and arousals.

On the other hand, the GT study of competitive bridal gown shopping alludes to aspects of scarcity of experience that was discussed in chapter two. This experience is one that seems to be considered by the participants to be socially scarce (Hirsch, 1976), as opposed to materially scarce (as some perceived the dresses to be). It is unclear if the socially scarce aspect of the experience drove elements of competitiveness, but it did appear to drive participation and turnout, which in turn, led some people to engage in competitive behaviors. Interestingly, the scarcity element of the experience was not that the opportunity was limited to only a select number of people or due to membership or social status, but was based on the participants' own feeling that the experience was characterized as a "once in a lifetime opportunity."

Thus, both studies suggest how powerful the availability (rather than unavailability) of commodities can be, rather than the unavailability. In both studies participants were realistically able to consider a similar substitute product. In the experiment, the substitute product was shown to be widely available. Participants showed a greater interest in purchasing the available game system than they did the scarce one. In the ROTB study, the brides and teammates had access to almost 2,000 gowns from which to choose. Although they were uncertain about the availability of the dress type and style which the bride desired, they recognized the possibility that many of the gowns could meet the bride's needs, as could gowns from traditional bridal

stores. Based on these findings, it appears that for the scarcity effect to induce competition or competitive arousals, the scarcity must be "true" scarcity based on product capabilities, i.e. alternative products cannot serve the same purpose. This is perhaps why the scarcity effect was found to increase desirability for things like rare art prints (Lynn, 1991).

Social influences

Neither study purposefully studied the effect of social presence on competitive arousal, however the grounded theory study suggested that competitive arousal was indeed a function of the number of people present. Many participants spoke of the crowded environment and how their perception of the crowd influenced emotions, likelihood of success, and competitive plans. In the experiment, the PCPS measure indicated that social size is a component of competitive arousal in a retail domain. Again, since the scarcity effect itself had limited effects on competitive arousal in the experiment, integrating different levels of social presence could enhance the effect of competitive arousal in scarcity situations. This follows the traditional view of ecological competition whereby competitive arousal linked to a specific resource/good is likely to be related to the number or density of people perceived to be present such that the population density per unit of the resource becomes critical (Hassell 1978), i.e. the individual must assess how much of the resource is available. In auction studies, the perceived number of others is shown to be related to competitive arousal (Hauble & Leszczyc, 2004).

Pricing

The price of scarce goods is also likely to influence competitive arousals. As Lynn (1991) demonstrated in his SED model, people hold naïve economic theories which lead them to presume scarce goods are more expensive. In the experimental study, price was held constant are therefore may have limited competitive arousals that may vary with levels of scarcity. Price

reduction may also enhance competitive arousals for scarce goods. We see evidence of this in the ROTB study where the price reduction of the bridal gowns was a main condition leading to mobilizing to participate in the event. However, the price did not seem to influence the competitive behaviors or arousals after the teams had mobilized and began to participate. Therefore, the role of price or discounting in competitive situations in retail scenarios is likely to be rather complex.

Outcomes of competitive arousals

The two studies also add to our understanding of how people perceive competitive situations in the retail domain. Employing scarcity messages, the experiment finds that perceptions about competing are influenced such that the scarcer the product, the more likely one would have to compete to acquire the product. Interestingly, these participants did not seem to desire the scarce game system more, nor were they more willing or interested in purchasing the scarce product on the day it was advertised for sale. On the other hand, the ROTB participants were drawn to the retail space, and viewed it as "fun" and a chance to have a good time. Comparing the findings from both studies, it does appear that the experiential aspect of the ROTB sale and "fun" competition is more intriguing to consumers that competing only for the sale of acquisition.

Product classification and symbolism

Considering the focal products in each study, one could suspect that people may be more inclined to *want* to compete depending on the nature of the product itself and the meaningful role or symbolism the product or shopping experience may have in their life. Comparing the two studies, it could be said that one focal product is symbolic in nature (wedding dress) and the other is not (game system). Wanting to compete and competitive arousals that lead to purchase

interests may be a function of the intrinsic nature of the product itself, and its intrinsic symbolic value. On the other hand, considering gift buying and Christmas shopping, the nature of the product may be less material than the desire one may have to create joy and happiness for someone they love. It could be that creating this joy and happiness is what motivates people to compete for products.

Integrating the Findings with Current Literature

Researchers have been interested in the constructive or destructive nature of competition. As discussed in chapter two, opinions regarding the positive/negative effects of completion and related research findings on the topic are not ubiquitous. In the ROTB study, it appears that competing is constructive. The participants enjoyed the competitive nature of the event as it related to their own job and team members, but also enjoyed the "light hearted" and "fun" competition that the context provided. Many of the competitive relationships cultivated into cooperative and charitable ones, which gave the participants self-gratification and warm memories. Referring to the four influences of constructive outcomes detailed in chapter two, the present study cannot corroborate with all four. The first referred to clearly defined rules that are fairly enforced. We saw no evidence of clear rules or fair rule enforcement. Instead we observed a context with loose rules that were culturally developed and only infrequently enforced. The last three (importance of winning is low, equal probability of winning, task is easy) can be somewhat supported.

Whereas many sociologists contend that competition is destructive for people and societies, we also lend some support for this position. Despite our participants overwhelmingly having enjoyable experiences, there is evidence that some engaged in deviant competitive behaviors that were harmful to others (e.g. stealing dresses, yelling). Many of our participants

spoke of this as "not normal" or abnormal shopping behavior. As such, this research contributes to O'Guinn and Faber's (1989) suggestion to better understand what constitutes as *abnormal* consumption behavior.

In the discussion of "who competes?" it is briefly mentioned the manner in which women compete: through appearances (Boskind-White & White, 1983; Brownmiller, 1984; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Rodin, 1992). The ROTB study may serve as a surrogate for competing through appearances, as the brides and their teams were searching for the dress that would make the bride look most beautiful. After all, it is the wedding day which many women believe they should be the center of attention.

With respect to the trait of competitiveness, both studies suggest that the trait itself may have little influence on participation in competitive purchase situations. For the ROTB participants, some admittedly classified themselves as very competitive individuals who "live for this kind of stuff." While others referred to themselves as shy and those who would "not normally do something like this." The lack of support for the trait in the experiment coincides with the grounded theory study to suggest that this trait may not adequately predict competitive behaviors in the consumption domain. A measure of *competitive shopping tendencies,* specifically, should be developed.

While Mowen's studies (2000, 2004) were aimed at the underlying motivations of different consumption preferences (gambling, sports consumption, conspicuous consumption), they did not address the active engagement in consumer competition, as we have defined it. Therefore, the present set of studies contributes to our understanding of how one's competitiveness may manifest in purchase situations. Considering this present study in light of Mowen's work, and those within the auction domain (e.g. Angst et al, 2008; Ariely & Simonson,

2003), one may question the cultural norms of competing in the retail and purchase domain. The retail environment is typically very public and behaviors are observable by others, whereas auctions tend to be more private and anonymous, especially internet auctions. Consumer competition, as indicated by one's trait competitiveness, may only be predicted in situations that ensure anonymity. This is perhaps because of cultural norms that perceive consumer competition as abnormal behavior. Based on the findings and the literature, one might conclude that the question of "who competes" is less important than "*when and why* do people compete?"

The grounded theory study contributes to Martin's (1996) contention that "relationships between a business and its consumer customers are enhanced when the business' customers interact with one another in a satisfying (or at least tolerable) manner." The ROTB study demonstrated that the participants, though competing with one another, generally felt a sense of satisfaction in dealing with one another, and this interaction is the key element of the enhanced experience. However, this situation was one which seemed to cultivate and nurture interpersonal relationships because the interaction between consumers was necessary for goal achievement. A similar conclusion from the experimental study cannot be drawn.

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has provided a foundation for an introductory and holistic view of the consumer competition phenomenon. It has shown that consumer competition can be a vehicle through which consumers build important bonds and lasting memories with loved ones, and that scarcity messages do not necessarily have the most desirable effects on purchase interests when competitive arousals are considered. After examining elements of consumer competition more closely in this dissertation, there is much work to be done regarding the phenomenon. An important question still looms: Why do consumers compete? This will be a multifaceted set of

answers, for which current theories should be useful. When do consumers compete? This dissertation has shown that consumers will compete when they are in the process of bonding and making memories, and when given the opportunity to do so in a controlled retail environment. An interesting comparison would be to compare and contrast how people go about competing under various market circumstances. Who competes has been partially answered with the ROTB study. But what consistency would the participants behaviors have across contexts and time? Perhaps none, perhaps a great deal.

Finally, the definition of consumer competition has been offered, and a measure regarding perceived competitive purchase situation has been delivered. Exploring the influence this perception may have on other consumer outcomes besides purchase interest is a valid stream of study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Preliminary Interview Guide

Welcome/Introduction

- Thanks for willingness to participate; help them feel at ease
- Obtain consent to take notes and record audio of interview

"I'm interested in understanding what it's like to attend a Bridal Sales Event" (Filenes' *Running of the Brides*).

Opening: "Grand Tour"

To get us started, can you describe why you decided to attend, what you did before you arrived, and what it was like? Feel free to talk about any feelings or thoughts you have/had.

- Note interactions with people and issues, particularly any conflicts/prioritizations going on among them
- Note specific cues regarding preparations for 'competing', and competitive feelings and emotions.

Pre-Event Questions-Probes from Grand Tour

- What do you expect will happen today?
- Are there any feelings or emotions that you are experiencing?

Positive/Negative Experiences

- You described [use their words] about _____. Tell me about that.
- You described [use their words] about _____. Tell me about that.

Other Experiences

I'd like to learn more about some of the experiences you have mentioned so far.

If mentioned:

- Tell me about:
- ….the dress you saw but couldn't get …
- …finding "the one"…
- …the strategies that help you get the dress…
- …knowing that someone else wanted your dress….
- … being frustrated, happy, etc…

For each item:

- Were other people involved in the process? Who? How?
- Is/will anyone be impacted by this action? How?

Conclusion

- _____, thank you for your time and valuable information. You've helped me understand a lot more about the experience of attending a bridal sales event.

Appendix B

Detailed Contextual Observation

The following description of the sale will explain the circumstances and environment leading up to 8:00 a.m. It is based on the primary researcher's observations and field notes over the course of attending four bridal sale events in three different cities.

Teams arriving the earliest frequently brought chairs, blankets, pillows, games, music, food and drinks. Many teams came wearing costumes or uniforms of T-shirts, hats and other accessories like face paint, whistles and signage. Some teams spent their time in line making these uniforms. Often, it was observed that several members of a team would join the queue after initial members had established a place in line.

As teams continued to arrive, a long queue formed. The queue formation behavior was inherently normative, meaning that the teams assumed their place in line behind the last party who had arrived. Despite similarities to other queuing behavior, these queues tolerated a degree of spreading out, rather than a linear fashion. Teams made circles with chairs, coolers, small tents, etc… Teams who arrived Thursday were prepared to "camp out," and were observed in the midnight hours attempting to sleep. The mood was quiet and subdued. By the early hours of Friday morning, the queues had grown to one full city block or longer. At approximately 5:00 am, as teams began to arrive in the masses, those who spent the night became more alert to the environment. They began packing up the "camp," folding chairs, packing up pillows and blankets, discarding garbage and generally became more vocal and lively. This mimicked the tone set by those who were just arriving who appeared to be excited and energized, often

cheering as a group as they took their place in line. Prior to the 8:00 a.m. hour, most queues circled more than two full city blocks with an estimated 1,500 people.

People were generally friendly and talkative with each other, and were frequently overheard discussing the style and size of dress the bride was searching for. Many teams came equipped with signs that advertised the type of dress the bride was hoping to find; e.g. "Lace Trumpet. Size 4-6." Within the queue, people were seen leaving and joining the line without others behind them reacting unfavorably as long as they were joining members of a team already present. On a few occasions, the researcher noted comments made by members of teams that were competitively-oriented and potentially intended to intimidate other teams. For example, one woman near the middle of the line was overheard yelling to a team who arrived at about 7:30 am, "don't think you are going to get any dresses showing up this late!" The late arrivers did not respond.

The researcher also overheard teams conversing within their own group about how they planned to execute their strategy once they were inside the store (i.e. designating team members to certain areas of the store). Some women were observed flexing their muscles, performing stretches as one would before a running race or sporting contest, and running in place. Interestingly, as the morning grew later, the researcher observed several men in the queue who were not present the evening before.

In two Washington, D.C. and Atlanta local radio stations were set up at the front entrance of the stores to conduct a remote broadcast. Broadcasting began at approximately 5:00 a.m., which energized the crowd as they played music and interacted with many of the teams, especially those in the front of the line. On one occasion, the radio station sponsored a cheering contest for the teams.

At each locations, wedding-related vendors including photographers, makeup artists, hair salons, and wedding cake bakeries marketed promotions to the crowd. Bagels and coffee were sold by representatives of non-profit organizations including "Race for the Cure." The Atlanta event took place in early March, and participants seemed to appreciate the hot coffee. News crews began to arrive around 6:00 am in order to interview attendees and film the event.

At approximately 7:00 the mood and energy of the crowd escalated. By this time the sun had risen and teams could easily see the line that had formed in front and behind them. The noise level increased as the excitement seemed to build. Many people continued to join their team already in line. Many brides-to-be were specifically identifiable because they wore veils on the heads, or shirts labeled "bride." Other team members also wore identifiable paraphernalia, i.e. "mother of the bride," "aunt of the bride," "maid of honor," etc… Some teams wore uniforms that identified their role in the sales event specifically. For example, one team wore black jerseys with pink numbers and lettering on the back (similar to football uniforms) that read "Negotiator," "Runner," and "Protector." Another team was observed wearing T-shirts that read "Survival of the Fittest. Colleen's Crew," Others were observed wearing tennis-type headbands, boxing gloves, and track gear. One group was observed wearing military-themed clothing (BTU's) with camouflage face paint and helmets.

By 7:30 am, there appeared to be a great deal of anticipation building. Teams were slowly moving forward even though the doors had not yet opened. This seemed to be a function of both the removal of chairs and tents that took up sidewalk space, and the parties getting within closer proximity of the group in front of them. On three separate occasions, the line seemed to move drastically before 8:00 am and many people in the line were overheard yelling "run!", "it's time!", or "Oh my God!" The attendees then realized they were not yet beginning the sale.

When only a few seconds remained before the store opened, store management and/or radio emcees conducted a final count-down that began at 20 seconds. The teams in the front of the line pushed further towards the door and counted down out loud until they reached "one," when store management opened the doors. People screamed, cheered, laughed and ran into the store towards the dresses. On each occasion, all dresses were cleared from the racks in less than 45 seconds.

People were observed carrying armfuls of dresses, looking for their bride for whom the dresses were intended. People yelled for specific dress styles and sizes, and held up their signage that indicated the same thing. Many women were observed lying on top of a large pile of dresses with arms and legs stretched out over the pile. There appeared to be no distinct organization and a general sense of chaos and confusion. In general, most of the attendees appeared happy and excited. However, on three distinct occasions two people were observed tugging and pulling on the same dress, as both seemed to believe they had grabbed the dress first. On all three occasions, the people involved appeared irritated and were not laughing or smiling. On four occasions, the researcher observed an angry exchange of words between two women from different bridal teams. Management did not interfere with any of these altercations. In lieu of these incidents, most people appeared to be in good spirits as the store buzzed with noise and activity.

As time drew on, people were finding their way. Most had established a designated meeting place where the bride remained, methodically trying on gowns. For at least two hours (8-10 am), the stores buzzed with excitement, yelling, and laughing while dresses were strewn everywhere, including on the floor and on top of clothing racks. By noon in most cases, several

hundred gowns were returned to the racks where people could casually scour the racks, and still barter for dresses with other teams.

Appendix C

Representative Quotes

War Metaphor	Representative Quote
War	I mean, it's crazy - these women would sit in the corner and wouldn't let anyone touch them. So I wasn't surprised. I know Bridezilla's, how they get, and I definitely expected that there would ***be a war out there***, so it was definitely crazy. [Grace]
Keep the Peace	JC: Because you didn't want to end up **bombing on someone** who you're gonna end up needing to talk to so, you know. Researcher: Okay so you were trying to keep the lines pretty soft? JC: **Trying to keep the peace**, yeah. [Felice]
Hold down the Fort/Our station	So she [her teammate] just went to the dressing room and **held it down** for me. [Allie]
	I thought it would be best to just **secure a good** dressing place. [Isabel]
	Once we were in the store she pretty much stood in what we **established as our camp** and just was constantly trying on dresses [Brenda]
	everyone pretty much knew **where our group was stationed** so we had a lot of people
Survival: Do or Die	I'd love to be able to get my dress for this but if I don't its okay. Whereas for some people it was **do or die,** they were doing it you know. [Quinn]
	Then when they opened the door everyone just like ran and it didn't matter if you were back of the line because everyone was just coming straight forward and as soon as we went through the door it was like **everyman for themselves** pushing and shoving and trying to find a dress. [Tamara]
	The group in front of us, the bride's sister had done the event two years before so she kind of gave us a little hope that **everybody did come out alive..**. [Tamara]
Make Allies/Alliances *Don't make enemies*	It's actually good yeah the group that was here was playing scat. **We made alliances**. [Cassidy]
	We **formed an alliance** with this other big group and this girl she was I think my same age and size. She tried on a dress and then it didn't fit her and she'd let me try it on and that was the dress I actually got. [Olivia]
	That was the goal, because we were like *we **can't make any enemies** right now.* [Delaney]
	… I know there were other people that were trying to pick dresses and pull dresses out of piles but we definitely did not take the approach like we want **to make enemies** for that. [Erin]
Tactics, Make a Strategy, Accomplish the Mission	I cannot see myself doing that again, but I'll tell you what you need to do **to accomplish your mission.[Delaney]**
	I was thinking that I wished I would have had some kind **of ulterior tactic** to try and get it but I didn't really come up with anything that I could then implement the next time around [Tamara]
	Our strategy all along that we had talked about was to rush in and get as many dresses as we could and then we knew that there was gonna have to be **a fall back plan** [Hollie]
	Because it is kind of **like strategic**, you have to kind of have people doing all sorts of things [Jen]
	we decided okay one of us is going left, one is going straight and one is going to the right and then we're going to find each other at this place and that worked, so

	that was great so we definitely **had a plan of action.** [Allie]

Participant	Comment on Co-opetition
Isabel	You know, people are competing against each other but then also you know like when we were in line we were talking to people and there was some camaraderie as well, so it's a little bit of both.
Brenda	…pay attention to what the other groups want and make friends; for two reasons: One - that it just makes it a lot of fun when you're friends with the group and then they find a dress, you're just as excited for that person as you are for your own group at the end of the day. And also it helps you get the dresses you want when you're working; it just grows your team. When teams are remembering what I'm looking for and I'm remembering what they're looking for you grab for each other, I mean you still do trades but it's just broadens your horizons of which dresses you have available for you.
Brenda	I just kind of stopped back in to make sure she kind of remembered us and I think it was sort of established that she was holding that dress for us, I guess it was never officially said but because we were stopping back so much and we were clearly looking for a dress for her -she knew her team just doubled because she now had more people helping to find a dress for her, so she wouldn't give [the dress we wanted] away to anyone else.
Paige	The bartering and forming alliances just kind of evolved throughout the morning as we met people and people started being more nice because they knew they wouldn't get anything from us if they didn't help us out.
Quinn	So fortunately the girl next to me, we're about kind of the same size and we started talking and I said do you mind handing me dresses that you don't really want anymore and she said no, no problem and that's how we started getting some dresses to go barter with.

Participant	Comments on the role of attitudes in developing good relationships with other teams
Sondra	You want to be friendly so that you can trade.
Felice	There were two other girls who were around the same size [as me] and one of them **she was very snotty** but like she was nice about it a little bit, because we had dresses that she wanted and she had dresses that we wanted so **like her attitude was a little bit snotty** but it worked out well because we were just trading.
Felice	You didn't want to end up bombing on someone who you're gonna end up needing to talk to… [we were] Trying to keep the peace.
Felice	Whereas one of my friends, she is quick to have an attitude so she tried to go for a time but then she got really mad so she came back and stayed there. She was one of the people who we originally thought would barter but she was too quick to get angry so we were like no, you stay here because you're gonna end up making everybody mad and then we're screwed, you know.
Rachel	There were a couple of people that stood out because they were kind of aggressive to the point where nothing can really get accomplished.
Delaney	because I feel like even in a competition that's not required, you don't need to be nasty or vicious to anybody.

Participant	Comments on Cooperation
Olivia	We formed an alliance with this other big group and this girl she was I think my same age and size. She tried on a dress and then it didn't fit her and she'd let me try it on and that was the dress I actually got.
Hollie	Anytime you were able to help a different bride it seemed like they were usually willing to reciprocate. If I was able to find one that was beaded I would take it over to them and say you know "here you go, I know you were looking for this," kind of a deal in which case then most [of them] were running over to us if they were able to find one that was fit-to-flare style, which was what we were looking for.
Cassidy	And they had like the exact opposite size of what my friend was looking for so we actually were swapping dresses between the two of them. So I know we both had the biggest piles of gowns.
Tamara	Like we made good friends with the group in front of us and actually during the event we were really helping each other out, if I had her size I would always send it her way and if she had my size she would always send it my way, so that was helpful.

Appendix D

Treatment Materials

Product Scarcity Ad Treatments (A)





Time Scarcity Ad Treatments (C)





Product and Time Non-Scarcity Ad Treatments (B & D)





Common text:

In a few months a new video game system, SYSTEM AAA (we cannot release the actual name), will be released for sale.

The system has been under development for over three years and will feature the newest and most advanced technology of any game system to date.

It will tout the following features as well as many other advanced play technologies that are being held confidential until the product's release.

* Twin Intel Dual Core Processors
* Super Capacity Hard Drive
* Blu-Ray
* Wireless BlueTooth controllers with motion sensing capabilities
* Integrated WiFi (b/g/n)
* Revolutionary HD-TV graphics card (compatible with next generation HDTV)

The Retail price is $349.

A. **Product Scarcity Treatment:** In anticipation of the product release, retailers are currently creating advertising materials featuring SYSTEM AAA. The retailers anticipate that they will have very few to sell. Please click "next" to see a Best Buy advertisement for the new game system

B. **Product Non-scarcity Treatment:** In anticipation of the product release, retailers are currently creating advertising materials featuring SYSTEM AAA. It should be widely available at many retail stores. Please click "next" to see a Best Buy advertisement for the new game system.

C. **Time Scarcity Treatment:** In anticipation of the product release, retailers are currently creating advertising materials featuring SYSTEM AAA. This particular version of the product you will see is exclusive to Best Buy and will be sold for ONE DAY only. Please click "next" to see a Best Buy advertisement for the new game system.

D. **Time Non-scarcity Treatment:** In anticipation of the product release, retailers are currently creating advertising materials featuring SYSTEM AAA. This particular version of the product you will see is exclusive to Best Buy. Please click "next" to see a Best Buy advertisement for the new game system.

Appendix E

System XXX Ad Materials

Substitute Product Ad Materials





Appendix F

Correlation Tables

Correlations of independent, dependent and manipulated variables for **product** scarcity & non-scarcity treatments

	CI	*CQ*	*CNFU*	*PCPS*	*Treatment*
CI	1.000	.500**	.074	-.065	-.004
CQ	.500**	1.000	.276**	.190*	.065
CNFU	.074	.276**	1.000	.170*	-.060
PCPS	-.065	.190*	.170*	1.000	-.217**
Treatment	-.004	.065	-.060	-.217**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Treatment: 1 = Product Scare; 2 = Product Not Scarce
N=146

Correlations of independent, dependent and manipulated variables for **time** scarcity & non-scarcity treatments

	CI	*CQ*	*CNFU*	*PCPS*	*Treatment*
CI	1.000	.523**	.166*	.191*	-.014
CQ	.523**	1.000	.399**	.325**	.014
CNFU	.166*	.399**	1.000	.107	.070
PCPS	.191*	.325**	.107	1.000	-.053
Treatment	-.014	.014	.070	-.053	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Treatment: 3 = Time Scare; 4 = Time Not Scarce
N=151

Appendix G

Measurement Scales

Competitive Index (Smither & Houston, 1992)
Cronbach's Alpha = .872

1. I get satisfaction from competing with others.
2. It's usually not important to me to be the best. (R)
3. Competition destroys friendships.
4. Games with no clear cut winners are boring.
5. I am a competitive individual.
6. I will do almost anything to avoid an argument.
7. I try to avoid competing with others.
8. I would like to be on a debating team.
9. I often remain quiet rather than risk hurting another person.
10. I find competitive situations unpleasant.
11. I try to avoid arguments.
12. In general, I will go along with the group rather than create conflict.
13. I don't like competing against other people.
14. I don't like games that are winner-take-all.
15. I dread competing against other people.
16. I enjoy competing against an opponent.
17. When I play a game I like to keep scores.
18. I often try to out-perform others.
19. I like competition.
20. I don't enjoy challenging others even when I think they are wrong.

Scoring Key*:
Items 1,4,5,8,16,17,18,19 = T
Items 2,3,6,7,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,20 = F

Interpersonal Competitiveness subscale of the Competitiveness Questionnaire
(Griffin-Pierson, 1990)
Cronbach's Alpha = .861

1. I perform better when I am competing against someone rather than when I am the only one striving for a goal.
2. I do not feel that winning is important in both work and games.
3. When I win an award or game it means that I am the best compare to everyone else that was playing. It is only fair that the best person win the game.
4. In school, I always liked to be the first one finished with a test.
5. I have always wanted to be better than others.
6. When nominated for an award, I focus on how much better or worse the other candidates' qualifications are compared to mine.
7. I would want an A because that means that I did better than other people.
8. Because it is important that a winner is decided, I do not like to leave a game unfinished.

Consumers' Need for Uniqueness - Short Form (Ruvio et al, 2008)
Cronbach's Alpha = .915

1. I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image for myself that can't be duplicated.
2. I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original.
3. I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands.
4. Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image.
5. When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules
6. I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own.
7. I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used.
8. I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they wouldn't seem to accept.
9. When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin using it less.
10. I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population.
11. As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily purchased by everyone.
12. The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it.

	Perceived Competitive Purchase Situation* Cronbach's Alpha = .941
1.	I will probably be competing with others to buy the new product.
2.	I will probably be seeking out something that others are also seeking out.
3.	It will probably feel like some kind of contest or challenge
4.	Other potential buyers are opponents or rivals of mine.
5.	I will probably feel like a winner or that I have "won" if I am able to purchase this product.
6.	If others (who want to buy it also) are NOT able to buy this product, it means that they have "lost".
7.	It will probably feel like a battle with other interested shoppers when trying to buy this product.
8.	I will probably need some kind of strategy or "game plan" to be able to buy this product.
9.	I will probably feel anxious or nervous when I go to purchase this product.
10.	Trying to buy this product is going to be a competition.
11.	I will probably feel successful if I am able to buy this product.

*All items based on lead in: "Consider what it might be like to go out and purchase the item you have just seen advertised and respond to the following statements:"

Appendix H

PCPS Scale Development

Item development

With no existing scale that captures the dependent variable of interest in this model, it was necessary to construct a new measure. An initial pool of twenty two items was generated to reflect aspects of competitive shopping situations. Item generation relied heavily on published, popular and theoretical conceptions of competitiveness and competitions (e.g. Kohn, 1986; Houston et al, 1999; Mead, 1937). Items were also constructed from examining qualitative data gathered in an exploratory investigation with consumers who described what a competitive shopping situation would be like. As Judd et al. (1991, pp. 56–57) state "validity is demonstrated when the empirical relationship observed with a measure match the theoretically postulated nomological net of the construct." The content validity of the items was assessed using a panel of judges (Bearden et al, 1989). A panel of four judges was given the definition of a competitive shopping situation. They were given a list of 22 items and asked to rate the statements that would be describe the definition. They ranked the statements as either "clearly representative," "somewhat representative," or "not representative." Items evaluated as clearly or somewhat representative by all judges were retained. This process eliminated eight items, leaving a total of fourteen items.

Samples for scale development and assessment of latent structure

The set of 14 items that remained after testing for inter-judge content validity were testing for internal reliability and dimensionality. To test the items for reliability and dimensionality, a pretest was conducted with 190 undergraduate students recruited from upper

level business courses. Of the respondents, 75 were male, 115 were female. The average age was approximately 22. The pretest provided respondents with a fictional scenario about a new electronic product being released for sale. The scenario was designed to suggest that many people would be seeking out the new product on its release date. They were asked to think about what the situation might be like if they decided to go out and buy this product on the day it was released for sale. This was needed in order for the participants to have a situation for which to respond. Reponses were in the form of a seven point Likert-type scale with end points, (1) *strongly disagree* and (7) *strongly agree*. Eight erroneous items were included in order to avoid response bias to the items of interest.

Factor analysis on the 14 items produced a 4 factor solution, however, the factoring resulted in several items that cross loaded. Four items were eliminated due to cross-loading and low item-total correlation. A two factor solution resulted with the remaining ten items. Results of the pretest indicated a two-factor solution (using PCA extraction, egienvalues > 1 with Varimax rotation) with ten items. Table 16 shows the factor loadings. None of the erroneous items loaded on either of the two factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistics was run on these ten items to ensure the appropriate use of the factor analysis. The KMO assesses which variables to drop from a model due to multicollinearity, and indicates if a factor analysis is appropriate for a given set of data. The KMO statistic should be over .60. For this pretest, the KMO statistic equals .886; Bartlett's test for sphericity is significant ($p < .000$). These tests indicate that the items are appropriate for a factor analysis and the samples have homoscedasticity, or equal variances.

Varimax rotation. In the rotated sum of squares loading, factor one consisted of seven items, accounting for 41 percent of the variance ($M = 26.87$; $SD = 8.96$). Factor two consisted of

three items, accounting for an additional 25 percent of the variance (M = 13.95; SD = 4.19). In total, the two factors account for 66.26 percent of the variance. All factor loadings exceeded .40. Item-Total correlations to the 10-item scale exceeded .35 for all items (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Items loading to factor one suggest a dimension that indicates the "win-lose" competition framework possible in a shopping situation. Items loading to factor two suggest a dimension that indicates the "in the moment" aspect of the competitive situation that reflects a response to the presented situation. Due to the imbalance of male to females who participated in the study, a mean difference test was conducted to ensure that no gender bias was present on either factor. Results indicate that males and female did not respond differently to either factor of the measure ($p > .10$).

The intercorrelation among the sum of the two factors (.503; $p < .000$) suggests that individuals who indicated that the fictional scenario would be one that consists of the win-lose competition framework, also tend to believe that their behavior in the situation will competitive in nature. Therefore, all ten items are summed to form a composite index. The mean of the composite index was 40.82 (SD = 11.65). Summing across all factors of a latent construct is appropriate since the construct of a perceived competitive shopping situation appears to be multifaceted, and thus can relate better to a diverse set of outcome measures better than does a one component dimension. Although each dimension of the perception or belief of a competitive shopping situation may be of interest in other specialized studies, the present study seeks to validate and test the higher-level construct of the general belief structure that is of interest in broad attitude theory and consumer theories. The chi square statistic of the index is 273.35 ($p <$ .000).

Table 16 *PCPS Item Factor Loadings*

Item	Win-lose Framework	Situation Expectations	Item to Total correlation	Squared multiple correlation
1. I will have to compete with others to buy the new product.		.89	.54	.60
2. I will be seeking out something that others are also seeking out.		.88	.49	.54
3. I will be in some kind of contest to be able to buy the product.		.67	.58	.41
4. Other potential buyers are "rivals" of mine.	.67		.74	.60
5. If I am able to buy this product that I have "won".	.81		.60	.50
6. If others (who want to buy it also) are NOT able to buy this product, that they have "lost".	.75		.62	.47
7. Trying to buy this product will be some kind of "battle".	.84		.72	.67
8. I might need some kind of strategy or "game plan" in order to be able to buy this product on this day.	.71		.61	.45
9. Trying to buy this product is going to be a competition.	.75		.79	.67
10. I will feel successful if I am able to buy this product.	.73		.63	.47
M	**.74**	**.81**		
$\chi 2$	**87.47****	**98.17****		
α	**.89**	**.80**		

** Friedman's chi square statistic is significant at $p < .000$
Cronbach's $\alpha = .889$
$n = 190$

Scale reliability and scale norms

The scale indicated sufficient internal reliability ($\alpha = .892$). Alpha values exceeding the recommended value of 0.70 suggest the items sufficiently capture the construct of interest (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally & Bernstein 1994). The grand scale mean was 40.83; *SD* = 11.65. Mean scores on individual items ranged from 3.38 to 5.19; standard deviations ranged from 1.48 to 1.74 (see Table 17). The index mean did not differ based on either gender or age, albeit a homogenous college aged sample was used.

Scale face validity

After the initial test of scale items, a second pretest was conducted in order to establish variance in the measure and to clarify language. For validity sake, the scale should demonstrate that under varying degrees of competitiveness in a given consumer situation, beliefs about the competitive nature of the situation should also vary. The second pretest was conducted in a scenario-based fashion, with random assignment to two scenario treatments that were intended to manipulate the PCPS scores, and further purify the scale if needed.

Method and materials

The follow up test for scale purification used a new cell phone as the product of interest. Since most college students own cell phones it was felt that this product meets the requirements of commodity theory. Additionally, cell phones are products that historically draw attention from their consumer base, especially when new technologies are involved.

Two scenarios were developed involving the release of a new cell phone: the first scenario described the situation as one where there is a great deal of "hype" surrounding the new phone and many people would be interested in buying this product on the day it becomes available. It also suggests that there is a possibility of stock outs. The second scenario

described the same situation as one where even though the phone technology is novel, does not express the interest that other people will have in buying the product the day it becomes available.

The materials were distributed and data collected via a web interface. The study included 82 participants (47 male, 22 female) from a variety of undergraduate courses at a large Southeastern University. The mean age was 22. Using the same original scale items from the first study (adjusted for language clarification), as well as erroneous items mixed in, participants indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement using a seven-point Likert-type scale.

Scale statistics and realism check

Due to the scenario based nature of this study, a realism check was performed to determine if the scenario approximated a real world situation and engaged the participants. A five-point Likert-type scale assessed realism (1= very unrealistic, 5 = very realistic). The item mean was 3.96 (*SD* = 1.0), indicating that across all participants in both treatments, the scenarios were thought to be more realistic than unrealistic. To further clarify and inspect the measure for bias from one of the treatments, means were calculated for each treatment. Respondents in both treatments indicated that the situation described to them was more realistic than unrealistic (*M* = 3.85; *M* = 4.07).

Results

Across all participants in both scenarios, the PCPS scale mean was 40.0 (*SD* = 12), and ranged between 11 and 67. Cronbach's alpha on the ten final items indicates internal consistency (α = .888). The rotated factor solution was identical to that found in the first study. PCPS scores in the competitively-oriented treatment are higher (*M* = 42.30, *SD* = 11.08) than those in the non-

competitively oriented condition (M = 37.11, SD = 12.45; p =.05). These results serve two functions. First, the scale demonstrates that under differing situational consumption expectations, participants differ in their perception that the purchase situation is competitive in nature. Therefore, the composite index has demonstrated an aspect of variance that can be observed with exposure to an immediate context. Second, the measure indicated sufficient internal reliability across two differing consumer contexts ($\alpha > .80$) as well as for each context independent of the other (α = .877; .889). Chi square test across both scenarios are significant ($\chi^2 = 107.56$; $p < .000$).

Final study scale results

For the final study, one item was added to the PCPS measure to account for competitive anxiety. Therefore, the scale was again subject to scale reliability and factor analysis to ensure robustness of the measure. The eleven-item scale produced a similar factor structure as previous tests, again with high internal consistency (α = .941). Factor one accounts for 46 percent of the variance, factor two accounts for an additional 23 percent. For all eleven items, the Friedman's chi square test was significant ($\chi^2 = 552.02$, $p <.001$). The rotated solution is shown in Table 18 (p. 346).

Finally, to reinforce construct validity, the 11-items comprising the PCPS measure were subjected to discriminant analysis tests using other measures within the study. In discriminant analysis the indicators for different constructs should not be highly correlated, demonstrating that the items are measuring different things (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Similarly, we would expect some correlation to occur between items of the PCPS and those that have some definitional overlap, like CQ and CI scale, for example. Using correlation methods, an indicator should be rejected if it correlates more highly with a different construct that with the one with which it was

intended to measure. Correlations cut offs above .85 with other constructs are used as a rule of thumb. Table 19 (p. 347) shows the correlations between each PCPS item and the measures of introversion, CNFU, CI, CQ, and materialism. All significant correlations to the other measures are below $r = .30$, suggesting discriminant validity.

Table 17 *PCPS Item Statistics (pretest)*

Item	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
1. I will have to compete with others to buy the new product.	1	7	4.82	1.65
2. I will be seeking out something that others are also seeking out.	1	7	5.19	1.65
3. I will be in some kind of contest to be able to buy the product.	1	7	3.95	1.64
4. Other potential buyers are "rivals" of mine.	1	7	3.90	1.74
5. If I am able to buy this product that I have "won".	1	7	3.76	1.50
6. If others (who want to buy it also) are NOT able to buy this product, that they have "lost".	1	7	3.38	1.61
7. Trying to buy this product will be some kind of "battle".	1	7	3.81	1.66
8. I might need some kind of strategy or "game plan" in order to be able to buy this product on this day.	1	7	3.99	1.71
9. Trying to buy this product is going to be a competition.	1	7	4.03	1.66
10. I will feel successful if I am able to buy this product.	1	7	4.00	1.48
Items Mean			4.0	

Table 18 *PCPS Factor Loading (final study sample with Varimax Rotation)*

Item	Win-lose Framework	Situation Expectations	Item to Total correlation	Squared multiple correlation
1. I will probably be competing with others to buy the new product.		.93	.65	.80
2. I will probably be seeking out something that others are also seeking out.		.91	.64	.79
3. Going to buy this product will probably feel like some kind of contest or challenge.		.79	.75	.71
4. Other potential buyers are "rivals" of mine.	.80		.80	.72
5. I will probably feel like a winner or that I have won if I am able to buy this product.	.83		.80	.75
6. If others (who want to buy it also) are NOT able to buy this product, that they have "lost".	.80		.62	.51
7. It will probably feel like a battle with other interested shoppers when trying to buy this product.	.74		.84	.76
8. I will probably need some kind of strategy or "game plan" in order to be able to buy this product on this day.	.71		.76	.61
9. Trying to buy this product will feel like a competition.	.78		.85	.80
10. I will probably feel successful if I am able to buy this product on this day.	.81		.77	.93
11. I will probably feel anxious or nervous when I go to purchase this product.	.75		.64	.50
M	**.77**	**.87**		
χ^2	**227.24****	**39.89****		
α	**.94**	**.92**		

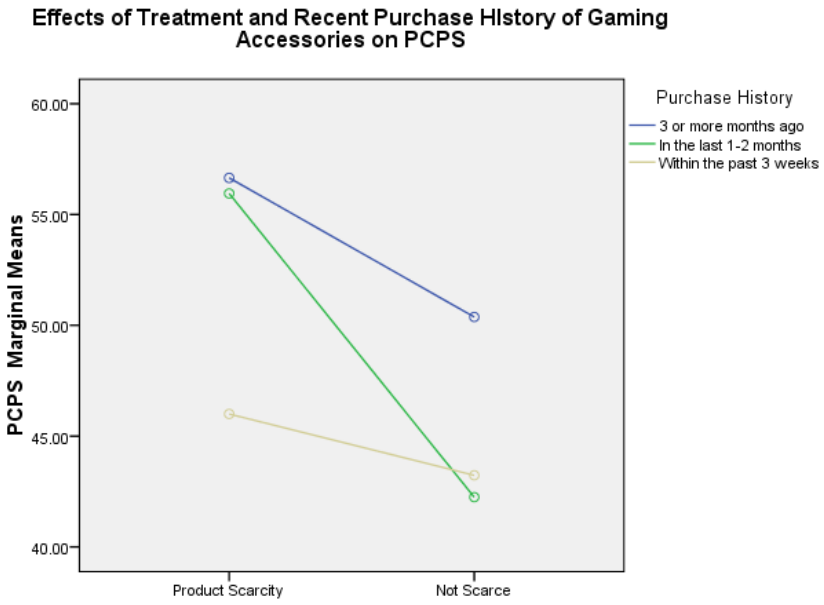
** Friedman's chi square statistic is significant at $p < .000$
Cronbach's $\alpha = .941$
$n = 297$

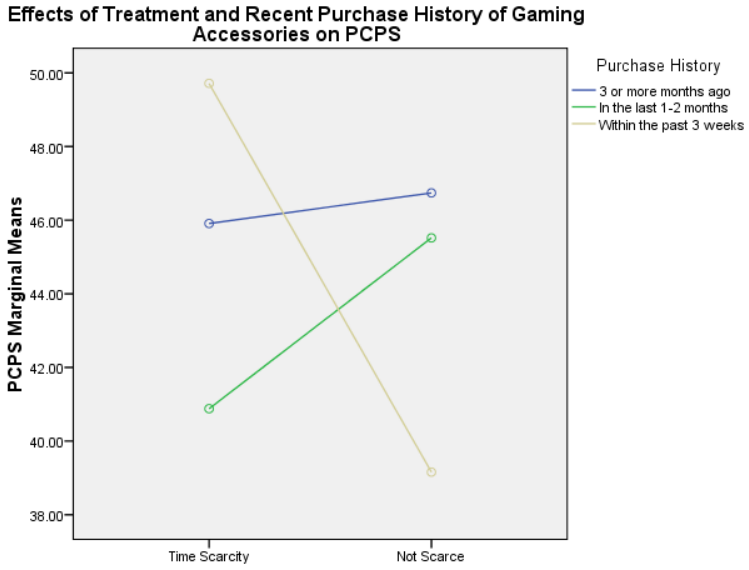
Table 19 Correlations Demonstrating Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Variable	INTROV	CNFU	MAT	CI	CQ	PCPS
Introversion	1.000	.134*	.153**	.267**	.214**	.015
CNFU	.134*	1.000	.294**	.115*	.330**	.147*
Materialism	.153**	.294**	1.000	.194**	.542**	.190**
CI	.267**	.115*	.194**	1.000	.510**	.057
CQ	.214**	.330**	.542**	.510**	1.000	.251**
PCPS	.015	.147*	.190**	.057	.251**	1.000
I will probably be competing with others to buy the new product.	.032	.033	-.001	.078	.060	**.709****
I will probably be seeking out something that others are also seeking out.	.005	.034	.013	.091	.078	**.700****
It will probably feel like some kind of contest or challenge	.013	.077	.098	-.039	.075	**.798****
Other potential buyers are opponents or rivals of mine	.051	.101	.172**	.044	.256**	**.845****
I will probably feel like a winner or that I have “won”	.006	.129*	.156**	.060	.242**	**.842****
If others (who want to buy it also) are NOT able to buy this product, it means that they have "lost".'	.060	.212**	.155**	.086	.296**	**.690****
It will probably feel like a battle with other interested shoppers when trying to buy this product.	.025	.169**	.168**	.024	.198**	**.874****
I will probably need some kind of strategy or "game plan"	.059	.168**	.181**	.010	.214**	**.806****
I will probably feel anxious or nervous when I go to purchase this product.	-.117*	.088	.229**	.028	.256**	**.710****
Trying to buy this product is going to be a competition.	-.001	.139*	.217**	.061	.248**	**.881****
I will probably feel successful if I am able to buy this product.	.005	.129*	.247**	.064	.244**	**.862****

Appendix I

Profile Plots





Appendix J

Regression Tables

Table 20 *Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting PCPS after exposure to treatment*

	Model 1 – Full Sample	Product Scarcity	Product NS	Time Scarcity	Time NS
	β	β	β	β	β
Variable					
Perceived Product	-.119*	-.079	.027	-.215*	-.216*
Perceived Time	-4.70**	-.456**	-.453**	-.442**	-.448**
CNFU	.103*	.046	.183	.714	.108
CQ	.265	.411**	.232	.153	.231*
CI	-.045	-.237*	-.128	.221*	.010
R^2	.363	.367	.274	.416	.462
F -statistic	33.108**	8.101**	4.83**	10.84**	10.80**
N	297	76	70	82	69

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Table 21 *Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Purchase Interest after Exposure to Treatment*

	Model 1 Full Sample	Product Scarcity	Product NS	Time Scarcity	Time NS
Variable	β	β	β	β	β
Perceived Product	.155**	.259*	.327	.710	-.150
Perceived Time	-.028	.030	-.074	-.085	.154
PCPS	.316**	.260*	.272*	.186	.468**
CNFU	.101	.060	.263*	-.059	.160
CQ	.180**	.235	.010	.416**	.087
CI	.041	-.002	.043	.057	.034
R^2	.202	.224	.246	.261	.294
F -statistic	12.22**	3.33**	3.43**	4.42**	4.31**
N	297	76	70	82	69

*p < .05 **p<.01

Table 22 *Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Purchase Interest after Exposure to Comparison Product*

	Model 1 – Full Sample	Product Scarcity	Product NS	Time Scarcity	Time NS
Variable	β	β	β	β	β
Perceived Product	.257**	.206	.313*	.283*	-.025
Perceived Time	-.033	.118	-.151	-1.99	.167
PCPS	.338**	.240	.325**	.243*	.538**
CNFU	.108*	.130	.219	.034	.085
CQ	.137*	.097	.058	.178	.256*
CI	.000	-.090	-.044	.193	-.048
R^2	.218	.170	.280	.286	.359
F -statistic	13.50**	2.35*	4.08**	5.01	5.77**
N	297	76	70	82	69

*p < .05 **p<.01

VITA

Bridget Satinover Nichols holds a Bachelor of Science in Marketing and a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Tampa, in Tampa, Florida. Prior to returning to graduate school to complete the PhD degree, Bridget held several professional positions. She was employed as a Marketing Specialist and Media Buyer with Environmental Lighting Concepts, Sales and Marketing Intern with RJ Reynolds Tobacco, and a Business Development Specialist with Creative Loafing Publishing.

Bridget's research interests focus on socio-psychological aspects of consumer behavior in both virtual and traditional retail domains. Her work has been presented and published in proceedings in both domestic and international marketing conferences including the Society for Consumer Psychology, Academy of Marketing Science, and the Society for Marketing Advances. She has published research in the International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing, and co-authored a chapter in the Handbook of Brand Relationships.

Bridget was the recipient of the College of Business ESPN Scholarship Award (2009-2010), and recipient of the College of Business Administration Graduate Teaching Award (2010). She is an active member of several marketing associations including the American Marketing Association, Society for Marketing Advances, and the Academy of Marketing Science.

In June 2010, Bridget completed the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in Business Administration with a major in Marketing and a minor in Psychology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN. She is presently employed as an Assistant Professor of Marketing and Sports Business at Northern Kentucky University in Highland Heights, KY.