

Countersignaling and Counterdominance – How Consumer Signals can Successfully Ward Off Status Attacks

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Cite as:

Kreuzbauer Robert, Nguyen Huy (2019), Countersignaling and Counterdominance – How Consumer Signals can Successfully Ward Off Status Attacks. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 48th, (9599)

Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.



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Abstract

This research introduces consumer countersignaling, which is a strategy of consumers to use certain objects and symbols to challenge domineering and condescending behaviors from high status groups. We propose that countersignals have the following properties: they reference the domineering act or symbol, and they are displayed in an exaggerated manner to signal the intention to challenge the domineering act rather than literal agreement with it. In five studies we show that first countersignaler are perceived as more prestigious, prosocial and socially competent. Furthermore, we show that consumer countersignals are more effective to challenge domineering high status groups in comparison to other consumer signaling strategies (e.g., uniqueness/deviance, autonomy). Therefore, they are a unique category of consumer signals, which are central to consumer cultural movements (e.g., counter- and sub-cultures) and which describe some of the most counterintuitive consumer behavior phenomena.

Keywords: *Consumer Signaling; Strategic Interaction; Status Competition*

Track: Consumer Behaviour