

“Thank You for Your Service:” Consumer Attitudes toward Military and Veterans

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Abstract

Americans have a long-standing history of endearing support for those who served in any branch of the U.S. military. You may see individuals thanking these brave heroes for their service and sacrifice, or business establishments extending that gratitude by introducing special promotions for veterans, sponsoring veteran activities, or even providing discounts on products or services for these heroes.

As a target market for receiving such discounts or special promotions, veterans are an appealing group of shoppers. Veterans make up a significant percentage of the American population. In 2015, the Department of Veterans Affairs reports projected a population of veterans to be to exceed 21.6 million individuals. Of those, 7.1 million are associated with the Vietnam Era, 7.3 million from the Gulf War, 5.4 from peacetime only involvement, 1.7 million from the Korean Conflict, and .8 million from World War II (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics 2016).

Typically marketers actively promote that fact that they provide discounts to (or, otherwise support) veterans. Many automotive companies such as General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler; retailers such as Kohls, Best Buy, Home Depot, Lowes, Sears, and Bass Pro Shops; entertainment companies such as Fandango and most movie theaters; insurance companies such as Geiko and USAA; restaurants such as Chick-fil-A, Hard Rock Café, and Outback; and travel and hotel companies such as Amtrak, Greyhound, and Hyatt offer some sort of discount to veterans (Military Benefits 2016).

So, what do we know about the effects of offering discounts or special promotions to veterans on the attitudes and purchase intentions of both veterans and non-

veterans? Unfortunately, we know very little. We have no research to date that specifically addresses the following questions: Do consumers desire to support veterans? Do consumers have more positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward businesses and marketers that actively support and/or give discounts to veterans? Do attitudes toward business and marketers that support veterans vary by whether or not a consumer is a veteran themselves? The purpose of this paper is to examine the issues and provide answers to these questions.

A nationwide survey was conducted using an online panel of consumers. Six hundred and fifteen respondents successfully completed the entire survey. There were 205 respondents that were classified as being active military/veterans, 205 were family members of active military/veterans, and 205 were non-military. The ANOVA results and follow-up Tukey analyses showed significant differences between these three classification groups.

These results show that active military/veterans had higher levels of patriotism and stronger purchase intentions than both family members of active military/veterans and non-military. For purchase intentions, this study found that active military/veterans are more likely to purchase from businesses that honor them. Similarly, family members are more likely to purchase from businesses that honor veterans than consumers that have no affiliation with the military. Yet, family members have lower purchase intentions than those that directly receive these special promotions. Finally, non-military consumers have favorable purchase intentions from businesses that support veterans; however, these purchase intentions are significantly lower than both military and family members. Therefore non-military consumers are less likely to seek out businesses that support veterans when making purchase decisions as compared to active military/veterans and family members. This does not mean that businesses should not offer these promotions as this research found that active military/veterans are more likely to purchase from these businesses. This supports prior research which found that active military typically spend more than the general public at these types of stores (Nielsen 2016).

Active military/veterans and family members of active military/veterans also had higher attitudes toward veterans and businesses honoring veterans than non-military. Although it is important to note that all groups displayed highly favorable attitudes towards both Veterans and towards Businesses Honoring Veterans. This is important because it clearly shows that consumers, regardless of military status, have a greater perception towards businesses that honor active military/veterans. Businesses offering support to active military/veterans need to make sure that these programs are well known to all consumers. This research supports the idea that non-military consumers do not perceive themselves as being “disadvantaged”

nor did they feel unhappy, angered, or unfairly treated because they did not qualify for these special promotions.

References

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: This study examines consumers' attitudes towards businesses honoring and/or offering discounts to active military and veterans. Results indicate a difference in attitudes between active military/veterans, family members of active military/veterans, and non-military.

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