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Analysis Of The Black Friday Consumer

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An Analysis of the Black Friday Consumer

(TITLE)

BY

Lori A. Logan

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in Family and Consumer Sciences

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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RUNNING HEAD: The Black Friday Consumer

An Analysis of the Black Friday Consumer

Lori A. Logan

August 26, 2013

Abstract

Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, is a retail term in the United States that signifies the start of the Christmas holiday shopping season. While the media has documented aggressive behaviors of consumers on Black Friday, empirical research based on observations of consumer behavior is minimal. Black Friday has been tied to consumer frustration and aggression as it is traditionally known for waiting outdoors in cold weather, chaos, large crowds, long lines, and sold out “hot items.” The purpose of this study was to provide a unique empirical perspective on the causes of Black Friday consumers’ frustration, the types of shopping strategies that were used by consumers, and how technology was incorporated into consumers’ experience on one of the busiest shopping days of the year. While the current research suggests that a few select shoppers demonstrated aggressiveness, this small number poses a safety concern to store personnel and other consumers. Furthermore, the findings provide implications for safety and well being for consumers and employees and creating a customer service oriented philosophy and approach. Retailers need to address the issue of frustration that occurs with consumers on Black Friday if they are serious about reducing consumer frustration and improving consumer satisfaction.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who encouraged my dream to return to graduate school, my sister for her constant encouragement and my nieces and nephews who have always stood by me and dealt with all of my absences from many family occasions with a smile. Thank you so much for all the support, I could not have achieved this goal without all of you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide an empirical perspective on the Black Friday consumers' causes of frustration, shopping strategies, and the use of technology on one of the busiest shopping days of the year. The term "Black Friday" has two meanings. In the 1960's, "Black Friday" was used by police in Philadelphia in reference to the heavy traffic on that day. Prior to that, "Black Friday" was set to mark the first day that a retailer had sold enough inventory and turned a profit for the year. The term was used as the sales from the day after Thanksgiving put retailers "in the black" referencing the old by-hand accounting system of using black ink to indicate a profit and red ink to indicate a loss (Black Friday, n.d.).

In recent years, Black Friday has become one of the busiest shopping days of the year. Retailers use deep discounts to draw consumers into their establishment and will aggressively campaign by offering consumers incentives like gift cards and other small gifts. In order to make sure they get the best deals, consumers sometimes resort to aggressive behaviors (Buyn & Mann, 2011; Simpson, Taylor, O'Rourke, & Shaw, 2011). This aggressiveness can be problematic at best, dangerous at worst.

For consumers, Black Friday signifies big sales, whether consumers are searching in malls, department stores, specialty stores or online, the sales on Black Friday are very effective at encouraging consumers to shop. Many retailers offer "loss leaders" and limited quantity sales to entice consumers into their stores. Some consumers spend hours preparing for Black Friday. Groups and families strategically plan the best routes to their favorite stores, collect stacks of Black Friday ads and coupons, and coordinate strategies

for purchasing products once inside the store (Black Friday, n.d). To date, few, if any, empirical research has examined how individuals and groups coordinate their purchasing strategies for Black Friday. With the integration of the Internet, consumers have been able to use smart phones and Blackberries as valuable shopping tools on Black Friday. The purpose of this study is to discover what kinds of strategies consumers use when buying products on Black Friday, how consumers incorporate technology into their spending and planning, and where consumer frustration originates on one of the busiest shopping days of the year.

Research Design

The data that was analyzed to answer the research questions in the current study came from a long-term, multi-wave study that started in 2006. The original study was conducted by Simpson, Taylor, O'Rourke, Shaw, Bowers, and Reifsteck (see Simpson et al., 2011 for more information). Observations of consumers on Black Friday were documented by Simpson et al. using an observation instrument developed by the researchers. Data was collected in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010. The multi-wave study incorporated a quantitative and qualitative research design. Observers watched consumers on Black Friday and completed a checklist of behaviors and emotions that may have been witnessed. In addition, six open-ended items were included on the observation instrument so that observers could record any comments or actions that exemplified "extreme behavior" (as defined by the observers) on Black Friday. The comments were recorded at the discretion of the observer and not all of the observers made comments on all of the open-ended items. The data from the open-ended items was the focus of this study. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of frustration among Black Friday consumers?
2. What kinds of strategies are used by consumers on Black Friday?
3. How is technology incorporated into the strategies used by consumers on Black Friday?

Definition of Terms (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2006)

Anxious – Mentally upset over possible misfortune or danger etc; worried; Causing or fraught with or showing anxiety. Examples of behavior might include:

- Pale skin
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Pupil dilation

Calm – Not agitated; characterized by absence of emotional agitation. Examples of behavior might include:

- Remaining calm throughout the uproar
- Speaking in a calm voice
- Entered the store/mall in an orderly way

Courteous – Exhibiting courtesy and politeness; “a nice gesture”. Examples of behavior might include:

- Opening doors for others
- Apologizing

Excited – In an aroused state; of persons; excessively affected by emotion; Marked by uncontrolled excitement or emotion. Examples of behavior might include:

- High energy level
- Running
- Talking louder than normal

Happiness – State of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Examples of behavior might include:

- Laughing
- Smiling
- Noticeably having fun

Irritated – Feeling inflammation or other discomfort; Aroused to impatience or anger.

Examples of behavior might include:

- Aggression, both physical and verbal
- Facial expressions

Tension – Feelings of hostility that are not manifest; A state of mental or emotional strain or suspense. Examples of behavior might include:

- Clenched fists

Tired – Depleted of strength or energy. Examples of behavior might include:

- Drooping shoulders
- Slow walk
- Tired facial expression

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide an empirical perspective on Black Friday consumers' emotions, behavior, and strategies on one of the busiest shopping days of the year. Retailers use deep discounts to draw consumers into their establishment and will aggressively campaign by offering consumers incentives like gift cards and other small gifts. In order to make sure they get the best deals, consumers sometimes resort to aggressive behaviors. The research seeks to discover what kinds of strategies consumers use when buying products on Black Friday, how consumers incorporate technology into their spending and planning, and where consumer frustration originates on Black Friday.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Black Friday is traditionally known for long lines, packed stores, aggressive consumers and a limited amount of products available at a reduced price. Recent studies of consumer behavior on Black Friday have been published in the academic literature and have revealed consumption rituals associated with Black Friday consumers. Black Friday shoppers prepare for this day by scouring newspaper, Internet and television ads for the best Black Friday deals and planned their days extensively with their co-shoppers ahead of time (Byun & Mann, 2011; Thomas & Peters, 2011). They then strategically mapped out their routes to hit the best deals first. The Black Friday experience appears to be a chance for females to bond together (Thomas & Peters, 2011) but sometimes the limited availability of goods in stores can excite consumers who might see this as a form of competition (Byun & Mann, 2011).

This current study focuses on the causes of frustration, shopping strategies, and the use of technology by consumers on Black Friday by using observational methodology. The use of an analytical methodology to study consumer behaviors provided a unique empirical contribution to the literature.

Media

The media has documented aggressive behaviors of consumers on Black Friday. For example, in 2008, a 34-year-old security guard was trampled to death after frenzied shoppers smashed through the store's front doors. According to police, officers who arrived to perform CPR on the dying man were also stepped on and injured, as was a pregnant woman. The crowd of shoppers did not seem to care about the injured

employee, they were complaining that they had been waiting in the cold weather and were not going to wait any longer (Crowley, 2008). During Black Friday 2010, a Madison, WI woman was arrested outside of a Toys 'R' Us store after cutting in line and she threatened to shoot other shoppers who tried to object and a Toy for Tots volunteer in Georgia was stabbed by a shoplifter. Another act of violence occurred in 2011 when a woman became angry when other consumers started to crowd around her in an attempt to buy cheap Xbox games at a local Wal-Mart, she pepper sprayed a crowd of shoppers injuring 20 people (Jablon, 2011).

Crowd Management

In order to prevent further tragedies from occurring during Black Friday, the National Retail Federation (NRF) issued guidelines to retailers on crowd management; primarily how to keep consumers, employees and the store safe. For example, the NRF suggested that consumers plan ahead, park in a well lit area, and to make a list of items that are wanted (NRF, n.d.). The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational and Health Administration recently encouraged major retail chains to take precautions, such as having trained security personnel on site explaining entrance procedures to consumers, and setting up barricades for pedestrians so lines do not start directly in front of store doors (Black Friday, n.d.). Strategies implemented by retailers to curtail consumer frustration prompted by standing in long lines have included distributing tickets for purchases of specific sale items, passing out a bracelet which entitles consumers to come back at a specified time to purchase an item, providing holiday music, and providing hot chocolate and donuts. Another suggestion was to display sale items throughout the store

instead of concentrating them in a few areas, holding staggered sales, and providing a detailed map of store layouts (Abelson, 2011).

Consumers' Emotions

According to Byun and Mann (2011), consumers are turned off by crowds, but when crowds create a sense of competition, such as when hundreds of consumers are rushing to collect marked-down goods, they generate a different feeling entirely.

Competition creates what is called hedonic shopping value or a sense of enjoyment from the mere process of buying goods. Consumers love to share stories and show off their purchases at the end of the day, boasting about the great deals they found and how they purchased the last popular item (Byun, 2011). Paying a low price for a particular item may lead a consumer to feel proud, smart, or competent (Holbrook, 1984). There might be a sense of accomplishment or a thrill of feeling in a small way victorious over other consumers'.

On the other hand, paying a higher price for a particular item could lead a consumer to feel angry and resentful. The emotional consequence of not being able to obtain what they want is evidenced in consumers' extreme behavior on Black Friday. An example of this extreme is provided by the Wall Street Journal's description of the effects of K-Mart's "blue-light specials" when it was reported that when the light starts to flash, mothers sometimes abandon their babies. Consumers have pushed clerks up onto counter tops and ripped merchandise to shreds. When they miss a special, some consumers berate the store's employees while others steal tagged merchandise from the carts of their more successful rivals (Guiles, 1987).

Frustration-Aggression Theory

The Frustration-Aggression Theory was formulated to link frustrating scenarios to acts of aggression towards people. Frustration is defined as an interference blocking someone from obtaining a goal; aggression is a behavior in response to frustration intended to harm the person blocking the goal (Berkowitz 1989; Anderson & Dill, 1995). Frustration develops when an aggressor is unable to attain a goal. Aggression is usually directed towards the cause of the frustration, but if this is not possible, the aggression may be displaced onto another person or object. It has been suggested that competitive sport is inherently aggressive because participants who are losing become frustrated.

Averill (1982) noted that frustration was the single most frequently mentioned anger-precipitating event and often involved the “violation of important personal expectations or wishes.” Maslow (1941) maintained that people prevented from reaching a desired goal become aggressively inclined only when the interference was thought to be a violation of socially accepted rules. The amount of frustration and subsequent aggression depends on how near the individual is to the goal when they are blocked. Harris (1974) examined the consumers’ reactions by purposely cutting in front of people standing in line at movies, grocery stores, etc. If he cut ahead of a person second in line, they were much more likely to elicit verbal aggression than if he cut ahead of someone twelfth in line.

According to Dollard (1939) the frustration-aggression theory stated that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. Frustrations can create hostility and aggression even when they are not viewed as intentional. Dollard (1939) noted that frustration is an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response at its

proper time in the behavior sequence. They believe that frustration is an obstacle blocking the attainment of an expected gratification. It is also believed that keeping people from some attractive goal was a frustration only to the extent that these persons had been anticipating the satisfactions they would have attained at reaching this objective.

The Black Friday consumer is looking to save money on their purchases and to obtain the most popular and sometimes hard to find items, when other consumers interfere with this goal frustration will occur. It has been found that stress and societal pressure can be a cause of frustration and therefore lead to aggression. Berkowitz (1989) stated that social frustration is a type of aggression that is an expressive way of venting frustration, indicating that stress is a major factor in the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989). Frustration does not inevitably result in aggression, it is important to identify the circumstances under which frustration will end in aggression. Berkowitz (1989) contends that aggression is the result of an interaction between an internal emotional state and cues that are available in the environment. Frustration alone is not sufficient to produce aggression. A frustrating experience creates a readiness to aggress; however, whether aggression will occur depends on stimulus cues. Depending upon the personality of the individual consumer, the greater the satisfaction anticipated on attaining their objective, the more aggressively inclined they will become when kept from reaching that goal.

Social Learning Theory

According to Bandura's (1973) Social Learning Theory, rewards are the most common reason that aggression continues. These may be money, praise, a higher status,

or the pleasure found in the suffering of another person. There can be little doubt that persons prevented from reaching a desired objective are often more angry and aggressive than are those exposed to socially approved barriers to their goal attainment.

Consumers' Frustrations

Consumers have reported feeling frustrated on Black Friday when having to interact with hordes of disgruntled consumers, especially when there was congestion at the cash registers (Jones, 1995). The main complaint from consumers is time spent in the check-out lane due to the clerks moving slowly, appearing to be bored, unenthusiastic, or talking to other workers. Consumers have also complained that the clerks are not aware of sale prices, they do not have a sales flyer in front of them and they do not know how to enter a coupon (Duff, 1992).

An additional complaint from consumers on Black Friday is once a consumer has reached the register, the sales clerk asks them to apply for a store credit card, which can save the consumer another 10% off of their total purchase. However, this application can take an additional 15 or 20 minutes to complete which causes the other consumers to continue waiting in line. In an age where consumers value speed in almost all of their shopping pursuits, timeliness in providing services is essential. Most aggressive acts will occur while consumers are waiting in line; many frustrated consumers will try and cut in line in order to complete their shopping experience quicker (Dawson, Bloch, & Ridgeway, 1995).

A further frustration for the consumer is the lack of availability of the more popular items, many of which are sold out (Jones, 1995). This means that some consumers have to purchase products they really did not want or like. Veteran Black

Friday consumers are aware that many of the most prominently advertised items are “loss-leaders,” or items steeply discounted or even sold at a loss in order to get consumers in the door. These deals will often have the caveat “while supplies last” somewhere in the fine print. Some stores print the number of items available, such as “minimum 5 per store” (Black Friday, 2010). Limited inventory combined with overwhelming demand can create confusion and anger for the Black Friday consumer. Price is important, but a great price on something the consumer does not want means nothing. The key is giving the consumer permission to buy by satisfying his or her value equation. Within the value equation there has been a shift in importance from affordability to sales and deals. Retailers need to remember that to be out of stock is to lose a sale or, worse, to lose a sale to a competitor (Dawson, 1990).

Many consumers found the shopping experience to be less than exemplary when receiving poor customer service such as interacting with unenthused and neglectful retail clerks (Duff, 1992). Research has shown that individuals who feel entitled to a better shopping experience are more willing to engage in aggressive behaviors when they perceive that their needs are not being met (Richins, 1983). According to Boyd and Helms (2005) in their analysis of the Consumer Entitlement Inventory, 70% of consumers feel that a store’s personnel should cater to their every whim; 67% of consumers believe that in this modern age of technology a salesperson should be able to answer any question about a product instantly, including any rebates and warranties; and 54% of consumers feel they deserve to be taken to where a particular item is located and not told “well it’s on Aisle 3.”

Consumers' Suggestions to Improve Shopping Experience

Previous research suggests that consumers have a number of ideas for how retailers could improve the shopping experience. At the top of the list was more checkout staff available at the right times, with 69% of respondents agreeing that this would improve the experience. Approximately 49% of respondents agree that better availability of products would improve their shopping experience and 35% of respondents would like to see improvements to the range of products offered. An increase in the number of express lanes is seen as a key improvement by 35% of respondents and 28% would like to see more knowledgeable staff throughout the store (Cooper, 2008).

Sleep Deprivation

Other variables that may cause frustration for the Black Friday consumer can include exhaustion and sleep deprivation. Many consumers will shop all night and into the early morning hours after only having a few hours of sleep the night before. Adults experience moodiness and irritability when they are sleep deprived which may lead to bouts of memory loss; such as where did I park, or what was I going to buy here. This can add to the underlying frustration of dealing with crowds of people. Adults may also find that they are unable to complete routine tasks, communicate effectively or maintain a normal level of alertness. All of these can lead one to become angry, sad, or frustrated (Williamson & Feyer, 2000).

A more serious consequence of sleep deprivation is driver fatigue which contributes to at least 55,000 car accidents annually, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2009). Drowsy driving is one of the most common effects of sleep disorders and sleep deprivation, and potentially one of the most dangerous. For

Black Friday consumers this is a concern with hundreds of people driving on the roads who have not had much sleep. Sleep deprivation has a similar effect to alcohol intoxication on driving (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2009).

Technological Tools to Aid Consumers

Retailers need to address the issue of frustration that occurs with consumers on Black Friday if they are serious about reducing consumer frustration and improving consumer satisfaction. In order to address this issue of frustration, some retailers are beginning to use new technological tools to aid consumers. One new tool involves integrating an online shopping experience with the in-store one. Instead of asking the sales associate to check another store for an item, some specialty stores are setting up their cash registers to take online orders. The sales associate even gets a commission for placing the order. Department stores are setting up in-store kiosks to let consumers order products online when they run out on shelves. Some stores are letting consumers scan bar codes with their smart phones, not only to find the product's price, but also to read online reviews and to compare prices from competitors (Shannon, 2010). Besides encouraging consumers to spend, the integration of Internet and smart phones into holiday shopping is creating a more informed consumer who is likely to be loyal to the most convenient and tech-friendly merchants.

Summary of Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine the causes of frustration, the use of shopping strategies, and the use of technology by consumers on Black Friday. Black Friday is traditionally known for long lines, packed stores, aggressive consumers and a limited amount of products available at a reduced price. As Black Friday approaches, the

overwhelming goal of the consumer is to purchase products at a discounted price, so consumers are being more aggressive about obtaining products at a lower price.

The Frustration-Aggression Theory was formulated to link frustrating scenarios to acts of aggression towards people. Frustration is defined as an interference blocking someone from obtaining a goal; aggression is a behavior in response to frustration intended to harm the person blocking the goal (Berkowitz 1989; Anderson & Dill, 1995).

The media has documented aggressive behaviors of consumers on Black Friday including deaths, stabbings and shootings. The current research suggests that while a few shoppers demonstrate aggressiveness, this small number poses a safety concern to store personnel and other consumers. Furthermore, the findings provide implications for safety and well being for consumers and employees and creating a customer service oriented philosophy and approach.

Besides encouraging consumers to spend, the integration of Internet and smart phones into holiday shopping is creating a more informed consumer who is likely to be loyal to the most convenient and tech-friendly merchants. It is the intention of the principle investigator to explore in more detail how technology is integrated into the Black Friday experience.

The research questions that will be examined in this research study include the following:

- 1) What are the causes of frustration among Black Friday consumers?
- 2) What kinds of strategies are used by consumers on Black Friday?
- 3) How is technology incorporated into the strategies used by consumers on Black Friday?

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of frustration, shopping strategies, and the use of technology by consumers on Black Friday. An observational instrument was developed by Simpson, Taylor, O'Rourke, and Shaw (2011) to document consumer behavior and emotions while they waited in-line, when they entered the retail location, while they shopped, and while they waited to pay for their merchandise. The current study used the observational research that was obtained by Simpson et al. in 2010 to determine sources of frustration for consumers, strategies used to obtain products, and how technology was incorporated into the consumer experience. The quantitative data was analyzed and reported by Simpson et al. in a separate document; the current study examined the qualitative data that was collected at the same time.

Research Design

The current study used a qualitative research design. In previous Black Friday research by Simpson et al. (2011), a convenience sample was utilized to analyze consumer emotions and behaviors using an observation instrument (Appendix A) that was developed by Simpson et al. (2011). Included within the instrument during the 2010 data collection were six open-ended qualitative items. The qualitative items were the focus of this research. Institutional Review Board approval was received in 2006 from the University for the original study, and has been approved for subsequent research.

Procedure

Undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Family and Consumer Sciences at Eastern Illinois University were trained for six hours by Simpson et al. on

how to conduct and code observational research. Trained observers then individually visited retail locations near their hometown (most of the observers were home on Thanksgiving break when the research was conducted) and observed consumers in line for at least two hours prior to store opening. The observers then selected three consumers to follow throughout the store while they shopped and paid for their merchandise.

Instrumentation

Simpson et al. (2011) developed an observational tool in order to monitor and record consumer behavior on Black Friday (see Appendix A). The tool was first used in 2007 and has been evaluated and revised several times since then. The original instrument was developed by examining previous research literature regarding the measurement of behaviors, emotions, and aggression. The current form of the observational instrument is divided into four sections: 1) in-line observations prior to the store opening, 2) store entry observations, 3) individual consumer observations, and 4) in-line-to-pay observations. Demographic information is difficult to assume based upon appearances only; thus, only a few demographic items were included on the measure. The observers were asked to record approximately how many of the consumers in line appeared to be male versus female, and what age groups appeared to be represented. The same data was collected for all of the individuals that were observed.

Limitations

Limitations of the current research study include the reliance on a convenience sampling procedure, limited ability to discern consumer demographics, and the small sample size. In addition, using a secondary data source limits the researcher's ability to control which variables were measured. In spite of these limitations, the current research

adds an important contribution to the empirical foundation of studies on the Black Friday consumer.

Six qualitative open-ended questions were added to the instrument in 2010. It is these questions that the current study analyzed to answer the research questions.

Specifically, the six questions asked:

1. Did you notice anything else of interest in regard to customer behavior prior to store opening?
2. Did you observe and/or overhear any shoppers discussing any specific Black Friday shopping strategies or rituals (circle one)?
3. Was there chaos at the door when the store opened?
4. Did the customer appear to have a deliberate shopping plan or strategy?
5. Did you observe the customer utilizing technology (e.g., cell phone, Blackberry) in their shopping plan or strategy?
6. List all of the products that the customer selected (place in their shopping cart, basket, or held in their arms) while they were under observation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data that was described above was analyzed by first transcribing observers' field notes. After the transcription was complete, the data was organized into themes that fit within the existing literature on Black Friday and consumer buying behavior. Once themes were identified by the principle investigator (PI), the PI's thesis advisor examined them and confirmed their face validity. Another graduate student was then asked to examine the data and literature and sort the data into the themes developed by the PI to test for inter-rater reliability. There was a great deal of consistency and

overlap between the graduate student's sorting and the PI's sorting.

After the themes were identified and confirmed by the PI's thesis advisor and an independent graduate student (that was not involved in the study), direct quotes were selected by the PI to use to help illustrate the themes for the reader. The findings were reported and organized by the research questions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide an empirical perspective on Black Friday consumers' emotions, behavior, and strategies on one of the busiest shopping days of the year. The current study used a qualitative research design and a convenience sample to analyze consumer behaviors. Included within the observation instrument were six open-ended qualitative items. Undergraduate and graduate students in the Midwest were trained as observers and were trained on how to conduct and code observational research. Observer's field notes were transcribed and organized into themes.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine causes of frustration, shopping strategies, and the use of technology among consumers on one of the busiest shopping days of the year; Black Friday. The study used a qualitative observational research design to answer the research questions. Overall, 242 individual observations were completed by 24 observers. The data analysis started by recording all of the interesting consumer behaviors that were reported by the observers. All of the comments that were overheard in-line prior to the store openings and as the consumers were waiting in-line to pay were also transcribed. After all of the notes were transcribed from the observers' completed instruments, themes were developed by the researcher and confirmed by an independent graduate student to provide answers to the research questions. Direct quotes were selected from each of the categories to help illustrate each of the themes. The research questions that were examined in this research study included the following:

- 1) What are the causes of frustration among Black Friday consumers?
- 2) What kinds of strategies are used by consumers on Black Friday?
- 3) How is technology incorporated into the strategies used by consumers on Black Friday?

The results are organized by the research questions.

Causes of Frustration among Black Friday Consumers

Concern about others cutting in line. One of the first themes identified to answer this research question concerned consumers cutting in line when waiting to pay. Many observers noted that frustrated consumers tried to cut in line in order to complete

their shopping experience quicker or to make sure they got their desired product. Some of the comments overheard by the observers that confirmed this theme included “I am blocking these people they just keep getting in front of me!” and “I’ll knock them down if they don’t stop getting in front of me.” Other comments overheard were “The line is back here!” “Get to the back of the line,” “Don’t think you are sneaking in here before us,” “Those girls better not be cutting in line,” “I am blocking these people, they just keep getting in front of me,” and “did you see that, she stepped in front of me!”

Impatience. A second theme identified as a cause of frustration among Black Friday consumers was impatience. Impatience with long lines of consumers and the frustration of dealing with crowds of people. Several observers noted that consumers were almost in tears and extremely overwhelmed by the swarms of people. Comments that were overheard that confirmed this category included “Isn’t this line ridiculous?” and “I am so sick of this.” Another consumer was overheard saying “You can’t get down the aisles at all. There is no way to get through!” and “I can’t believe the line is this long! I’m not staying here, this is unbelievable.” One consumer was overheard complaining “that lady just ran right over the back of my legs, it hurt!” Still another woman was overheard saying “I’m going to punch someone’s eyes out!” One consumer even yelled out “If this isn’t the line for electronics I’m gonna kick that lady’s butt!”

Store employee’s lack of knowledge about products and/or promotions.

Frustrations appeared to escalate when consumers sensed that employees did not know about products and warranties. The limited amount of salespeople on the floor to help consumers find products was another cause of frustration. One observer reported that she heard an employee telling a consumer that he had to “help other people and did not have

time for questions.” Almost all of the observers noted that the consumers that were observed that day seemed irritated and confused by the line formations; first for how many people were in line and then which line to stand in for cash only, credit cards only etc. One observer noted that one woman was in such a hurry to get rid of her cart that she almost dropped her baby out of his car seat which made her angry and that she then pushed the cart into a group of people who were standing in line. Overall, observers’ comments indicated that consumers in general seemed to be very tired and defeated by the crowd, particularly when they got into line to pay.

Strategies Used by Consumers on Black Friday

Having a plan. The second research question sought to determine what types of strategies were used by consumers on Black Friday. The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was that consumers seemed to have deliberate shopping plans. Observers noted that consumers were “making lists from various store ads” and “assigning certain products to be purchased by different members of their group.” Consumers’ first tasks upon entering the store appeared to be to secure a shopping cart and then find a store map. Other consumers had specific game plans: get cart, obtain item, wait in line, and have their partner shop for other merchandise. One consumer stated that “If one of us gets left behind, keep running and get in line for that television.” It was obvious that consumers were not just there to see what they could find; they had specific items in mind and a plan for obtaining those desired items. One consumer was heard saying “I’m here for the camera and I better get one, I am not sitting here in line for nothing!” Another consumer said “I want the Kodak digital camera and memory card too; I have been here a long time.”

Assigning specific tasks to members of the group. Another theme that surfaced from the data analysis was that consumers seemed to have specific orders and/or tasks for group members. For example, one observer indicated that one group of consumers surrounded the television pallet (at the retail location) in order to grab televisions before other consumers. A mother and daughter were trying to decide where they were going to position themselves and what they were going to get. In some instances, consumers had their hands already on the items that they wanted prior to the official opening time. One man yelled to his wife “Grab as many as you can!”

Technology Incorporated into the Strategies used by Consumers on Black Friday

Cell phones. The third research question examined how technology was incorporated into the Black Friday experience. The use of cell phones seemed to be a major theme with Black Friday consumers according to the observers that recorded their behavior. Many consumers were observed either talking or texting constantly on their mobile devices. Consumers were using cell phones to communicate with their companions by asking “Where are you guys?” “Have you found the items?” and “Go over to toys and grab it.” Some consumers called family and friends at other stores to see if they could find products that had sold out at their own location. Other consumers called other stores to find out availability of products. Cell phones appeared to be a central component in the Black Friday shopping experience; they assisted consumers in finding the products they needed at the various retail locations and helped consumers coordinate their shopping strategies.

Summary of Results

Overall, 242 individual observations were completed by 24 observers. Categories were developed to answer the three research questions. Findings showed that causes of

frustration included long lines, consumer impatience, and employees' lack of knowledge about products and/or promotions. Strategies for Black Friday consisted of having a specific shopping plan and assigning tasks to group members. Finally, when the use of technology on Black Friday was examined, it was clear that cell phones (mobile devices) were a central component of the Black Friday experience.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide an empirical perspective on Black Friday consumers' causes of frustration, shopping strategies, and the use of technology on one of the busiest shopping days of the year. A qualitative research design was used to analyze data that was collected by trained observers on Black Friday in 2010 at various retail locations in the state of Illinois.

Shopping on the Friday after Thanksgiving, commonly referred to as "Black Friday" has long been fraught with aggressive human behavior as consumers struggle to obtain the best deals they can on products that are on sale. According to popular media, consumers are often frustrated by long lines, crowded stores, and limited product availability of sale items and display aggression as a result of their frustration (Crowley, 2008; Jablon, 2011). While the media has documented aggressive behaviors of consumers on Black Friday, empirical research based on observations of consumer behavior is minimal. In one such study conducted by Simpson et al. (2011), findings showed that the majority of the consumers that were observed demonstrated calmness, courteousness, and happiness; however, a smaller number of shoppers exhibited negative and potentially dangerous behaviors which could pose a safety concern for store personnel and other consumers.

In the current study, observers indicated that consumers expressed frustration with others cutting in line, having to wait in long lines, impatience, and employees' lack of knowledge about products and/or promotions. Examples of aggressive behaviors that were noted by the observers included people yelling at other consumers and making

hostile comments to one another while waiting in line. As the doors were opening people started to cut in line. Some consumers arrived right as the doors were opened and ran to get in instead of going to the back of the line. Once consumers entered the stores, aggressive behaviors were exhibited by people rushing to where the items were going to be and then lying on pallets to protect what they had come for.

Dealing with the crowds of consumers was also a source of frustration for the Black Friday consumers that were observed. Observers reported that consumers were sprinting and bumping into others and that people were getting rammed with carts. Shopping carts were being tossed aside as consumers realized they no longer needed them, and were abandoning them everywhere. This caused even more chaos and confusion among the crowd. People in general seemed to be very tired and defeated by the crowds and long lines.

Observers noted that the consumers in the current study often used strategies to gain the products that they were seeking and that technology was often used in these strategies. Consumers appeared to have specific plans of action and assigned tasks for group members. For example, many consumers were overheard discussing product location and comparing what had been obtained with others in their group on their cell phones. Group members were instructed to retrieve certain products and to hold places in line. In fact, strategies seemed to be a successful manner for negotiating the chaos on Black Friday, according to what the observers recorded in their field notes.

Cell phones were the “stars” of Black Friday and were used to look up which products were on sale at different locations, to send out “scouts” to determine if the products the group sought were available at other stores, and to communicate with group

members that were at the same location. Technology appears to be an important tool to the Black Friday consumer and it is likely that this trend will continue.

With advances in technology, several new trends in consumer shopping have emerged; such as incorporating the Internet for online shopping, using smart phones to scan bar codes and setting up in-store kiosks to let consumers order products when they run out on shelves. Some retailers are beginning to use new technological tools to aid consumers. One new tool involves integrating an online shopping experience with the in-store one. Instead of asking the sales associate to check another store for an item, some specialty stores are setting up their cash registers to take online orders (Shannon, 2010) and the sales associate gets a commission for placing the order. Other retailers are setting up in-store kiosks to let customers order products online when they run out on shelves. Still other stores are letting shoppers scan bar codes with their smartphones - not only to find the product's price, but also to read online reviews and to compare prices from competitors. Besides encouraging consumers to spend, the integration of Internet and smartphones into holiday shopping is creating a more informed consumer who now has access to store maps to help locate items, product reviews and coupons to download. (Shannon, 2010).

Another trend for consumers is Cyber Monday, the online equivalent to Black Friday. Shoppers in 2012 were expected to spend \$1.5 billion on Cyber Monday, up 20 percent from last year, according to the research firm comScore (Huffington Post, 2012). This is the latest sign that Americans are becoming addicted to the convenience of the Internet. With the growth in smartphones and tablet computers, shoppers can buy what they want, whenever they want, wherever they want. As a result, retailers have ramped up

the deals they are offering on their websites during the holiday shopping season, a time when stores can make up to 40 percent of their annual revenue (Huffington Post, 2012).

While the current research suggests that a few select shoppers demonstrated aggressiveness, this small number still poses a safety concern to store personnel and other consumers. Another safety concern is that the stores are overly crowded with no room to move down the aisles and shopping carts are blocking exits. Furthermore, the findings provide implications for safety and well being for consumers and employees and creating a customer service oriented philosophy and approach.

Future Recommendations

Future research on the Black Friday consumer should utilize larger sample sizes and incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect data. For example, interviews with Black Friday consumers would provide much more information than observers are able to discern. There are very few empirical studies of the Black Friday consumer and this research is needed in order to continue improving the shopping experience for consumers and larger profits for retailers.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that increased training of store personnel prior to Black Friday would serve in the retailer's best interest. Employees should be trained about merchandise rebates and warranties, location of sale items, coupon procedures, sale prices and consumer shopping behaviors. Store management should have knowledgeable staff throughout the store, extra checkout staff available with more checkout lanes open, a range of products available and increased inventory of hot items.

Retailers should also continue to use new technological tools that aid consumers. With the integration of Internet and smart phones into holiday shopping it is creating a more informed consumer who is likely to be loyal to the most convenient and tech-friendly merchants.

While the current research suggests that a few select shoppers demonstrated aggressiveness, this small number poses a safety concern to store personnel and other consumers. Major retail chains should take precautions, such as having trained security personnel on site explaining entrance procedures to consumers, and setting up barricades for pedestrians so lines do not start directly in front of store doors (Black Friday, n.d). Strategies implemented by retailers to curtail consumer frustration prompted by standing in long lines have included distributing tickets for purchases of specific sale items, passing out a bracelet which entitles consumers to come back at a specified time to purchase an item, providing holiday music, providing hot chocolate, donuts, candy and inline entertainment. Another suggestion is to display sale items throughout the store instead of concentrating them in a few areas, holding staggered sales, and providing a detailed map of store layouts (Abelson, 2011).

Retailers need to address the issue of frustration that occurs with consumers on Black Friday if they are serious about reducing consumer frustration and improving consumer satisfaction.

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Appendix A

Names of Observer(s):

Observation Instrument

1. Store/Mall Name: _____
2. City: _____
3. Time of opening of store/mall _____
4. Approximately how long did you wait in line before the store opened (in minutes)? _____

In Line Observations

5. Approximate number of customers in line prior to (right before) the doors opening: _____
6. In chatting with and observing the customers in line, indicate the approximate number of customers that arrived at the store:

 ≥2 hours prior to store opening: _____

 1 hour prior to store opening: _____

 ½ hour prior to store opening: _____

 ≤15 minutes prior to store opening: _____
7. As a whole, the customers seemed to be (circle all behaviors that were observed):

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 8. Aggressive | 19. Irritated |
| 9. Angry | 20. Loud |
| 10. Anxious | 21. Quiet |
| 11. Belligerent | 22. Rude |
| 12. Bored | 23. Sad |

- 13. Determined
- 14. Disgusted
- 15. Distressed
- 16. Domineering
- 17. Excited
- 18. Happy
- 24. Socializing
- 25. Tense
- 26. Tired
- 27. Whining
- 28. Other, describe:

29. Did you notice anything else of interest in regard to customer behavior prior to store opening?

For the next set of demographic questions, please record the approximate percentage of customers that fit the characteristic under question. **Remember that for each category, the overall range should add up to 100% (e.g., if the customers were approximately 30% male, they must have been 70% female)**

30. What percentage of customers in line were

- a. Women? _____%
- b. Men? _____%

31. What percentage of customers in line were:

- a. Under 18? _____%
- b. Between 19 – 30? _____%
- c. Between 31 – 50? _____%
- d. Between 51 - 65? _____%
- d. Over 65? _____%

32. Did you observe and/or overhear any shoppers discussing any specific Black Friday shopping strategies or rituals (circle one)? Yes No
Don't know

33. If you answered “yes,” to #32 - please record what was observed or overheard:

Store Entry Observations

Circle any of the emotions and/or behaviors below that the customers appeared to exhibit upon store opening, towards shopping companion(s), other shoppers, and/or store personnel:

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 34. Courteous | 42. Cursed | 50. Held another customer |
| 35. Calm | 43. Yelled | |
| 36. Pushed/shoved | 44. Called others names | |
| 37. Took off running | 45. Kicked | |
| 38. Walked hurriedly | 46. Tripped others | |
| 39. Punched | 47. Bumped others' carts | |
| 40. Choked | 48. Grabbed another customer | |
| 41. Used a weapon | 49. Grabbed products | |

Describe weapon: _____

51. How many customers fell down or appeared injured during the store/mall opening

(check one)?

- ____ None (0) ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4
 ____ 5 or more

52. Was there chaos at the door when the store opened (circle one)? Yes No

53. If so, how long did the chaos last (in minutes)? _____ minutes

54. Please describe the chaos if you answered "yes" to #52:

Name of Observer(s) _____

Individual Customer Observation

55. How long observation lasted: _____ minutes
(Note: Please observe each customer until they leave the store – even while they’re in line to pay!)

56. Customer gender: _____ Male _____ Female
 _____ Unsure

57. Customer age range:
 _____ 18-30
 _____ 31-50
 _____ 51-65
 _____ over 65

Please indicate whether the customer exhibited any of the following behavior(s) by circling “no”, “yes”, or “unsure”

- | | | | |
|-----|--|----|-----|
| 58. | Have a specific product in mind to purchase? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 59. | Purchase items because they were on sale? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 60. | Appeared to buy gifts for others? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 61. | Appeared to buy products for self? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 62. | Compare products and prices? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 63. | Examine products? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 64. | Communicate often with shopping companion? | No | Yes |
| | Unsure | | |
| 65. | Grab as many items as s/he could? | No | Yes |

Unsure

66. Did the shopper appear to be alone? No Yes

Unsure

67. If the shopper was with companion(s) (i.e., answered “no” to #66):
68. Did you observe and/or overhear them discussing any specific Black
Friday shopping strategies or rituals (circle one)? No
Yes Unsure

69. If you answered “yes,” - please record what was observed or
overheard:

70. Did the customer appear to have a deliberate shopping plan or strategy
(circle one)?

No Yes Unsure

71. If you answered “yes” to #70, did you observe the customer utilizing
technology (e.g., cell phone, Blackberry) in their shopping plan or
strategy?

No Yes Unsure

72. If you answered “yes” to #70, please describe the shopper’s deliberate
shopping plan or strategy:

73. List all of the products that the customer selected (place in their shopping
cart, basket, or held in their arms) while they were under observation:

74. Circle all of the following emotions that the customer appeared to exhibit
while under observation in the store/mall:

75. Anger

83. Excited

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 76. Anxious | 84. Happy |
| 77. Belligerence | 85. Irritated |
| 78. Boredom | 86. Sad |
| 79. Calmness | 87. Tension |
| 80. Courteous | 88. Tired |
| 81. Disgust | 89. Whining |
| 82. Distress | |

Circle the following type(s) of aggressive or non aggressive behaviors that the customer appeared to exhibit, towards shopping companion(s), other shoppers, and/or store personnel, while under observation in the store/mall.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 91. Aggression | 102. Holding customer |
| 92. Dominance | 103. Kicking |
| 93. Fear | 104. Name Calling |
| 94. Irritable | 105. Punching |
| 95. Territorial | 106. Pushing |
| 96. Maternal/Paternal | 107. Shoving |
| 97. Cart bumping | 108. Tripping |
| 98. Choking
(describe:_____) | 109. Weapons used |
| 99. Cursing | 110. Yelling |
| 100. Grabbing products | |
| 101. Grabbing customer | |

In-line-to-pay observations

111. How long did the customer wait in line? _____ (in minutes)
112. Circle the following emotions that the customer appeared to exhibit, while
IN LINE TO PAY.

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 113. Anger | 121. Excited |
| 114. Anxious | 122. Happy |
| 115. Belligerence | 123. Irritated |

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| 116. Boredom | 124. Sad |
| 117. Calmness | 125. Tension |
| 118. Courteous | 126. Tired |
| 119. Disgust | 127. Whining |
| 120. Distress | |

128. Circle the following type(s) of aggressive or non aggressive behaviors that the customer appeared to exhibit, towards shopping companion(s), other shoppers, and/or store personnel, while IN LINE TO PAY.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 129. Aggression | 140. Holding customer |
| 130. Dominance | 141. Kicking |
| 131. Fear | 142. Name Calling |
| 132. Irritable | 143. Punching |
| 133. Territorial | 144. Pushing |
| 134. Maternal/Paternal | 145. Shoving |
| 135. Cart bumping | 146. Tripping |
| 136. Choking
(describe:_____) | 147. Weapons used |
| 137. Cursing | 148. Yelling |
| 138. Grabbing products | |
| 139. Grabbing customer | |

Please note any additional comments you think are important on the back of this page. Thank you for your participation in this research!

Appendix B: Comments recorded from observers' field notes

Aggressive comments in-line and in-store

- The line is back here!
- Get in line!
- Don't think you are sneaking in here before us!
- To security guard "Were you here last year? Those people are going to try and jump this barricade and cut in front of us".
- That guy's trying to squeeze in front of me, watch him!
- Those girls better not be cutting in line.
- I'll knock them down if they don't stop getting in front of me.
- You can't get down the aisles at all. There is no way to get through!
- I am blocking these people with my cart, I am tired of them getting in front of me!
- B...ch I know you didn't just step in front of me!
- If he was serious I would have punched his lights out!
- You can't take a whole box on the day after Thanksgiving!
- If this isn't the line for electronics I'm going to kick that lady's *@@!
- These workers are idiots!
- Never again!
- I am so sick of this! (pushed cart into other people and left the line)
- This is ridiculous, let's get out of here!

Customer (Whining) Comments in-line and in-store

- I'm scared
- I'm tired my back hurts
- Seems to me they should just get started now
- Is it 5 am yet?
- I should have gotten a cart, we are not moving now
- I wish I was in bed sleeping!
- Isn't this line ridiculous
- I am too old for this I can't do this anymore.
- I'm cold
- I have to go to the bathroom
- We should have come earlier
- Are these doors going to open
- I'm hungry
- Why is everything so spread out, for those of us who are disabled we can't get to the stuff before it's gone! Not fair to the elderly or disabled.
- They will be out of stock by the time we get up there!
- That lady just ran right over the back of my legs, it hurt!

Comments made to shopping companions

- Last year things got taken from my cart
- There are cops outside

- Find a store map, find out where sale flyer items are located
- Do you think they will notice if I tear the package and take one before 5am
- They have great deals on DVD's
- I'm here for the camera and I better get one, I am not standing here in line to come away empty handed!
- Kohl's is my next stop
- I am doing most of my shopping online tomorrow
- Wal-mart has games for \$4
- What do you want to get first?
- I just came for fun.
- We came for this tv and that is all. If we don't get it we just plan to go get a different one that isn't on sale.
- I just came for the Christmas decorations and this microwave that is on sale.
- This is crazy.
- You owe me. (mother said to daughter)
- On cell phone: "Go over to _____, and grab it."
- I could be in and out of line in 30 minutes, you are not aggressive enough! (man to wife)
- Should I get this?
- Is it cheaper at Target? Get it now I am not coming back here!
- Talking about the chaos in Wal-mart that happened.
- As soon as I grab the camera that is on sale, we are so out of here!
- Hurry up and pick one!
- Man telling wife to buy son indoor basketball hoop that was on sale because it would keep son out of her hair and occupied.
- After we get this tv, we are going straight home and back to bed
- If one of us gets left behind keep running and get in line for that tv
- I can't believe there's this many people in line, there are other stores that are open by now.
- Grab as many as you can we will sell them on Ebay or Craig's List.
- What is taking him so long (wal-mart employee) shouldn't they have more than one set of keys for the video cabinet?
- Same woman was cursing a lot to her daughter about the employee who couldn't find his keys and to the overall disorganization of wal-mart.
- Such a great deal!
- Going to save so much!
- My favorite time of year!
- Let's do this again next year!
- I'm off to see what else I can find, have fun with this mess!
- I don't know why I am here, its my first time. I thought it would be fun.
- What did you guys manage to get?
- Mom said to daughter "I can't believe you are buying that!" Daughter's response "It is only \$5.00 lay off!"
- This product is twice as much, do you think it is better?

- One woman had a shopping companion and she was grabbing all the “good deal” electronics that were available. At one point, I heard her say she didn’t even know what she was going to use the items for, but they were cheap.

Emotions exhibited by customers

- One customer almost in tears, extremely overwhelmed by the swarms of people.
- Mad about long lines
- Mad about others cart bumping