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Black Friday Online Sales Trending Up, In-store Sales Trending Down

Winthrop University

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Quick Facts

- At its peak, Black Friday would bring in 30 percent of annual retail sales.
- In 2011, the average Black Friday shopper would spend \$398, compared to only \$299 in 2015, said Peters, who studies shopping with Winthrop Professor of Marketing Jane Thomas.
- Four themes emerged in 2015 from interviews with shoppers: family versus consumerism, fun versus stress, online versus in-store shopping and Me versus My Children.



Cara Peters

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – Although **Black Friday** has traditionally been the busiest shopping day of the year, retailers have stretched out the shopping time through the Thanksgiving weekend but are not necessarily increasing sales, said two Winthrop University marketing professors.

Online sales are trending up, while in-store sales are trending down by about 1.5 percent annually over the past five years, said **Marketing Professor Cara Peters**. At its peak, Black Friday would bring in 30 percent of annual retail sales.



Jane Thomas

In 2011, the average Black Friday shopper would spend \$398, compared to only \$299 in 2015, said Peters, who studies shopping with **Marketing Professor Jane Thomas**.

Four themes emerged in 2015 from interviews with shoppers: family versus consumerism, fun versus stress, online versus in-store shopping and Me versus My Children.

Some consumers now want the convenience and calming environment of online shopping. They avoid long lines and heavy crowds and don't experience as much frustration with items being out of stock. Peters found that many consumers question the excessive consumerism, and that they are celebrating shopping, not their families. They also felt guilt that shopping was encroaching on their family time and the family traditions for retail workers who have to work long hours.

Back in 2010, Peters and Thomas interviewed more than three dozen Black Friday shoppers to find that consumers enjoyed the "**consumption ritual**." They enjoyed forming a detailed strategic plan based on newspaper and television advertisements, getting up early and then the adventure and competition in completing their missions.

"Sharing the consumption ritual with family and friends was important," Peters said. "Multiple generations participated in the event."

One woman related that she has gone Black Friday shopping for 18 years with the women in her husband's family. They used to start at 5 a.m., but now since the stores open at midnight on Thanksgiving, they start at midnight.

The shoppers revel in the "**mad dash**" for the best sales and coming home with great bargains.

By 2015, the Winthrop faculty members found through 45 Black Friday shopper interviews that strategies have changed. November shopping was no longer a one-day event but had evolved into a five-day, gigantic shopping weekend.

“Black Friday shopping has always been a fun, adventurous event but it is also quite stressful as social dynamics have changed over time,” Peters said.

They also observed that shopping for some involved a tension between buying for themselves and buying Santa gifts for their children. One woman said she only went shopping because her teen-age daughter enjoyed it and she wanted to fulfill her child’s wishes.

Peters and Thomas have found that the **meaning of Black Friday** has changed for both retailers and shoppers alike. Retailers are extending the idea of Black Friday to the whole season in an effort to try and leverage the meaning of the event into increased profits. But fewer consumers are participating and, of those who do, they are spending less on the event.

“It’s losing its significance for consumers and negatively impacting sales over time,” Peters said.

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