



All hell breaks loose?

on mass buy hysteria during sale events



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ABSTRACT

Hours before the beginning of various sale events, such as the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the special designer collections at H&M, people wait in front of the stores and when the doors finally open, customers storm inside in order to obtain as many products as possible, creating mass hysteria along the way. Using a film and a documentary, observations during three well known sale events and interviews, this research shows that although stores use different kind of methods to lure consumers in, the ultimate reason for mass buy hysteria can be traced back to reduced prices.

1 Introduction

Four women. One department store. One mission: shop till you drop! This is in essence the summary of the musical ‘Crazy shopping’ that had its premiere in August of 2010 in the well known theatre Carré in Amsterdam (AD, 2010). The musical tells the story of four women who are, in their own words, addicted to shopping and are participating in every sale event that crosses their path, not caring about the long queues in front of the (department) stores, and after opening, the long lines in front of the cash register as well as the mass hysteria that usually is part of these events. As the story unfolds, these women realize that buying mass amounts of products during these events do not make them happy, and the bargains they thought they were buying are not that much of a bargain. And even more important, most of the products they bought, are never going to be used and end up in the back of the closet. Although this is a short outline of a musical, who doesn’t recognize the story and identifies with it? Who hasn’t spent hours in front of a store, where the sales season was about to begin just to be able to buy that one, or two, or three desired pieces with an added bonus of a marked down price. And who hasn’t come home from a sale having doubts about the products that were purchased thinking ‘do I really need this’ and ‘why did I buy this, I’ve never bought something like this before. You are not the only one! A look at the large sum of people who stand in front of a store, where the sale is about to begin, would be an indication of that. When the doors do finally open a feeling of want, want, want possesses the body occasionally resulting in running, screaming and sporadically a small fight when someone else wants to leave the store with the last item, that more than one customer has had their eye on. Add up all of the above, and a hysterical scene is the outcome. According to Forsyth (2006), mass hysteria is a form of collective behavior and can best be described as ‘the actions of a group of people who are responding in a similar way to an event or situation, including people who all occupy the same location’ (Forsyth, 2006: 557). More specifically Russell (1935), describes hysteria as an outbreak of emotional excess. To illustrate his point, he gives the example of a woman who notices that her house is on fire and as a result starts screaming uncontrollably. Russell (Ibid) states that ‘the screaming reaction is likely to develop when there is an imminent risk of physical injury (...)’ (Russell,

1935; 873). Thus, hysteria can be viewed as a result of imminent danger where it is likely to affect the individual. According to the British Medical Journal (1966), hysteria cannot be cured as its origin is not physical, but emotional, making it irrational. They also state that hysteria usually occurs ‘against a background of fear and ignorance, and are triggered by some particular event’ (The British Medical Journal, 1966; 1280). When the concept of hysteria is applied to various sale events, the hysteria in the form of screaming, running and pushing, is a result of fear that stems from not wanting to miss out on the desired product as well as the fear of not wanting to be trampled by the large hordes of people. The mass in hysteria comes from the fact that the individual excess of emotions is shown by a large group of people, all at the same time. Often, the way in which the group is responding is not in sync with the behavior of everyone outside of the group marking it as deviant behavior. The question that naturally arises is why? Why do consumers display some form of deviant physical behavior during sale events and maybe more importantly: how can it be explained?

Dutch hysteria

The most famous Dutch sale event is without a doubt the ‘Drie Dwaze Dagen’ at well-known department store the Bijenkorf. When it is that time of the year again, the streets surrounding the store are filled with the ‘famous’ yellow bags that accommodate all of the so called bargains that were purchased. Upon entering the store the air is filled with excitement that stems from the fantastic products and corresponding fantastic prices. According to van Raaij (quoted in Voormolen, 2010) popularity of the event can be explained by the fact that the sale items are only temporarily available, which creates a time pressure for consumers. They have to act now or otherwise deal with the consequences, which result in not owning the product. The birth of the ‘Drie Dwaze Dagen’ was twenty-seven years ago, in 1984, when its name was the ‘Drie Dolle Dwaze Dagen’. In that year, there was an economical crisis and the event was created to seduce consumers to start spending their money again. Flash forward to the year 2010 and the ‘Drie Dwaze Dagen’ are still about consumers spending money on numerous products, but this is being masked by the spectacle that is created around it, giving customers the idea that the event was created especially for them (Ritzer, 2005). The idea that the event is created just for the consumers is evident by the number of extracurricular activities being organized during the event. Examples of these extra activities include a celebrity opening the stores, small concerts and food and drinks for the customers. Question is whether or not these activities contribute to mass hysteria.

For the Bijenkorf, the ‘Drie Dwaze Dagen’ is the event of the year and is so popular, and lucrative, that they decided in 2008 (NRC Weekblad, 2010) to create another sale event that would become the little sibling of the already well known ‘Drie Dwaze Dagen’, called ‘de Maffe Marathon’. This event roughly follows the same guidelines as its predecessor with a great number of articles that are being sold for marked down prices. The only difference is that whenever customers spend a certain amount of money in one day, they receive a cash bonus that can be used to shop freely at the end of the two

week event. As is the case with the 'Maffe Marathon' as well, the event is hyped up to an extent that when the time comes to open the doors and enter, a large sum of people are trying to get in all at once, creating a mass hysteria. Which results yet again in the question why?

Besides the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the Maffe Marathon at the Bijenkorf another sale event generated hysteria in previous years namely the special designer collections being sold at H&M. Designers such as Karl Lagerfeld and Victor & Rolf have designed special collections that have been exclusively sold at Swedish fashion house H&M. These special designer collections attracted large numbers of customers who, when the doors opened, stormed inside and cleaned out the whole store in a matter of minutes. The hysteria surrounding this event is not limited to the Netherlands as H&M is a brand that has stores all over the world and the hysteria was and is therefore seen all around the world.

World Wide Sale Hysteria

As seen with fashion brand H&M, mass hysteria during sale events is not only visible during the sales season in the Netherlands, but has spread across the world with its most well known family members being Black Friday in the United States of America and the Boxing Day sales in the United Kingdom.

Black Friday

As stated earlier, Black Friday is notorious in the United States of America. It starts the day after Thanksgiving, a national holiday where thanks is given for a successful harvest. Who would have known that in the year 2011, the harvest would not be fruits and vegetables, but clothes, electronics etcetera and the festivities once linked to Thanksgiving have now shifted towards a celebration of the harvested bargains. In a New York Times article, Black Friday was described as followed:

‘A carnival of capitalism, Black Friday is the day after Thanksgiving, when retailers across the country open before dawn and dangle deep discounts to lure customers out of bed. Some deal-seekers even show up in pajamas’ (The New York Times, 2010).

Historically, just as was the case with the 'Drie Dolle Dwaze Dagen', Black Friday was designed to get companies back into the black. Meaning they were out of the red numbers and financially healthy again. In this day and age, Black Friday is still about companies gaining extra revenues during a short period of time, but the black in Friday is now being identified with injuries and in some cases even dead. In recent years a small number of people were trapped and run over by a mass of hysteric people who waited (im)patiently in front of different stores for the doors to be opened. An example is the case of well known American retailer Wal-Mart, who sells anything from food to furniture to apparel and everything in between. In the early hours of November 28, 2008 a Wal-Mart employee was trampled by a large crowd who went ballistic when the doors unofficially opened, due to large pressure from the crowd against the glass doors and windows. When it became apparent that the large group of people had overrun an employee, who died on the scene, the police and other employees swiped the store

clean, much to the dismay of other shoppers who were overheard saying that they were not happy about not being able to continue their shopping, since they had been waiting in line for several hours (The New York Times, 2008). Although little is known about the spectacle that is created during these events, other than large discounts, it illustrates that mass hysteria is not only restricted to the Netherlands. The reaction of fellow shoppers is especially intriguing when they found out that they could no longer shop, due to the fact that the arisen mass hysteria caused an employee his life. Are these so called bargains that could end up in the back of the closet, more important than life itself?

Boxing Day sales

The equivalent of Black Friday in the United States, are the Boxing Day sales in the United Kingdom. The sale traditionally starts the day after Christmas. Stores sell a large number of products against reductions that run up to 70% of the original price. One can imagine that such marked down prices can create mass hysteria. Last year, in 2010, even more madness was expected as it was one of the last days before the start of the new year when the Value Added Tax, VAT, was not yet increased from 17,5% to an all time high of 20% (the Daily Mail, December 2010).



Mass buy hysteria during the Boxing day sale (The Daily Mail, December 2010)

Black Friday and the Boxing Day sales are visible examples of how sale events can turn into a mass frenzy. In this era were a lot of shopping happens online and where hysterics are not tangible, an example can still be given of online hysteria. When online fashion distributor 'The Outnet', which sells designer items against reduced prices, celebrated its first birthday in April of 2010, an online birthday sale was organized where all the selected designer items in the sale were one pound, or the equivalent in Euros or Dollars. Through advertisement the sale was so hyped that when the birthday sale finally took place, servers soon cracked due to the unanticipated high demand. Eager shoppers were unable to reach the website for hours and therefore not able to purchase anything. Consumers were so frustrated that they created the Facebook page 'The Outnet stole my Friday!!!' to share their experiences and have group therapy (The Guardian, April 2010). Newspapers across Great-Britain reported on the disastrous sale, forcing the owners of the website to publicly apologize and offer some kind of enlightenment in the form of free shipping on the next order. The fact that numerous newspapers reported on the matter resulting in the public apology of the owners shows that it had an

impact on a part of (international) society and was not just something insignificant as some people might have thought or even hoped.

Other forms of hysteria

The previous makes it seem as though mass hysteria is always intertwined with sales at (department) stores. This could not be further from the truth. The most well known Dutch grocery store, Albert Heijn, creates an event every once in a while that generates so much popularity that it results in mass hysteria. Examples accompanying these events are the Disney dolls, the Toy Story dolls, musical points that can be used to earn a free ticket, and during football events like the European and World championships, football stickers and stuffed animals like the Wuppies and the Welpies. In the case of the football stickers, the frenzy inside the store became so obnoxious for fellow shoppers, having children asking them for stickers every other second, that it only became legal to ask for stickers outside of the store where a special area was set up complete with crush barriers. Albert Heijn even went as far as to release an official statement on the matter. The subject was highly publicized in the Dutch media as it was the first time any Dutch store decided to take such drastic measures in keeping consumers out while they usually do everything to lure consumers in. As was the case with the highly publicized 'The Outnet' sale, the fact that the media coverage surrounding these events is so considerable it contributes to an understanding that these events are not just insignificant, but are part of the lives of individuals and as such, are part of society. It is therefore interesting to do research on mass buy hysteria, how it comes about and what the roll of the consumer is in all of this.

Having described several events where mass hysteria occurs, the question that always arises is why? Why do people participate in such extravagant events when taken into account that a lot of products are not needed? And what about the physical aspect of mass hysteria, meaning consumers who run, scream and fight to assess their desired product. How can that be explained? And are these two in some way intertwined? The research question that naturally evolves and will guideline this thesis is the following:

How can mass buy hysteria during sale events be explained?

To answer this research question, data will be collected using three different methods. Firstly, the film Confessions of a Shopaholic and the documentary A Fun Fair Behind the Dikes will be used to give an insight look into the world of shopping and consumer behavior as displayed in the media making it an stylized version of the rational world. Secondly, observations will be used that were conducted during three of the Netherlands most well known sale events: the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon both at department store the Bijenkorf and the special designer collections sold at H&M. Thirdly, in-depth interviews will be held to gain insight into the motives of respondents to attend these sale events and whether or not they engage in mass buy hysteria.

In recent years, research on shopping has been done, but was mostly limited to the differences between actual in-store shopping compared to online shopping. Is online shopping safe when identity and account number theft are taken into account (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2000)? Another question that arises when talking about shopping is whether or not online shopping will eventually be the demise of tangible in-store shopping (Andrews & Currim, 2004). Research on consumer behavior, in more general terms, has been done by well-known Sociologists Colin Campbell and George Ritzer. However, research on consumer behavior, shopping, in relation to mass buy hysteria has, to my knowledge, never been conducted. For that reason this research will be a contribution to already existing research on shopping, but will also shine a light on a blind spot on current research, namely mass hysteria during sale events.

2 Theoretical framework

As stated in the introduction, mass buy hysteria finds its peak during a variety of sale events. It is also clear that there are certain mechanisms at work that can be used as possible explanations for mass buy hysteria. Many heard one-liners during these events were earlier described as buying things one doesn't need or want. Using the words want or need in relation to the consumed products indicates that consumer behavior is no longer restricted to buying the basic necessities and consumerism is flourishing. But what can almost be described as over-consumption was not always the case which means that somewhere down the line there was a shift towards excessive consumption. The shift towards a consumer society began in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when the Industrial Revolution took place and spread through Europe like a wildfire.

A shift in consciousness I: from production to consumption

Before the Industrial Revolution took place, people only produced for their own household, and in some cases a small market. The Industrial Revolution had its birth in Lancashire (England), and later spread through Europe at a faster pace as other countries used the trials and tribulations of the situation in Lancashire to their advantage (Riessen, 2003). In the eighteenth century several machine inventions rapidly exceeded each other which made it possible for farmers to produce, for example cotton, faster and in greater numbers. The growing amount of product meant that production was no longer reduced to the own household and the local market, but could be exported to a larger market. The export to larger markets goes hand in hand with an increase in capital, which in turn was used to invest in the business. When it became apparent that the growth of the business was happening at a rate that was difficult to maintain if stayed in the countryside, a lot of then small businesses moved to larger cities in hopes of more economical growth. With this move not only business owners acquired more capital, but also employees saw their capital grow, but not to the level of their bosses. With the move to the city, it is undeniable that both were now in the position to not only produce, but also consume.

The importance of brands

As an outcome of the Industrial Revolution both employers and employees had more capital to their disposal. In order to maintain the same living standard, again for both, it was important that the produced product was trustworthy, meaning having no problems with the export of the product and being able to produce a solid product without faults. Having an established trustworthy brand, would mean a continuum of the growth of the brand, indirect the capital, and as a result the growth of consumption. Flash forward to the twenty first century in which brands still play an important role in consumer society, perhaps in a slightly different matter as brand importance has now shifted more towards clothes, cars and electronics. Naomi Klein argues in her book *No Logo* (2000) that in the early to mid eighties, companies became aware of the fact that consumers do not buy products but brands. This was the beginning of a process which she calls 'branding'. Furthermore, Klein (2000) argues that due to the process of branding, consumers are being tricked into believing that they acquire a certain lifestyle, and accompanying status, if they buy for instance, a Chanel bag. The importance of owning a designer bag is nothing more than wanting to create an illusion for others that comes with being the owner of something, in this case a very expensive bag, suggesting that in other aspects of life the owner also has the ability to afford the finer things in life. Because of being branded as expensive and popular with a certain group of people, typically the rich and famous of this world, most of these products are not accessible for 'Henk and Ingrid'¹. Enter sale events. What if these products are suddenly within your financial reach due to marked down prices? And therefore the illusion of having a comfortable lifestyle? It would not be unthinkable that this contributes to mass buy hysteria as seen during the 'Drie Dwaze Dagen', Black Friday and the H&M designer collections.

The McDonaldization of society

In the eighties of the last century, famous brands such as Microsoft and Nike came to the realization that the production process was no longer the most important factor within companies, instead opting to shift the focus to marketing their brand (Klein, 2000). Companies would no longer produce products, outsourcing them to third world countries, but just consume them. The shift from handling the whole production process to just consumption is a consequence of what Ritzer (2001) calls the McDonaldization of society, named after the famous American fast food restaurant which can now be found in even the most deserted places on earth. The process can best be described as the following:

'...a process by which the principles of the fast food industry come to be applied to more and more features of social life' (Macionis & Plummer, 2005:134).

According to Ritzer (2001) there are five basic principles at the core of McDonaldization:

1. Efficiency - choosing means to reach a certain goal against the lowest costs.
2. Calculability – things that can be calculated, counted and quantified.

¹ The Dutch equivalent of Joe the Plummer frequently used by Dutch politician Geert Wilders to name the average Dutch inhabitants who seem to be forgotten by the current politicians.

3. Predictability – knowing what to expect upfront.
4. Control through automation – humans are not allowed to think anymore. More and more aspects of life are automatic resulting in the caging of creativity as the only thing to do is press a button.
5. Irrationality of rationality - the rational systems results in irrationality in the form of controlling human creativity. It is possible that people lose control over the rational system and the system ends up controlling us.

The power of McDonaldization lies in what Naomi Klein (2000) would call the importance of branding and marketing. McDonald's is marketed in such a way that it has the same visibility and reputation all over the world. Whether it is a McDonald's in Sydney, Australia or in the Swedish capital of Stockholm, they all have the same menu where the preferred choice can be made from. This is mainly due to predictability. There is however a downside to this seemingly perfect process. Ritzer (2001) argues that due to the process of McDonaldization human creativity and autonomy are being caged due to the fact that every step in the process has certain guidelines that must always be followed. The result of trying to over rationalize more and more aspects of life, with McDonald's as its blueprint, could lead to irrational behavior, from the consumers own perspective, which is the case during sale events where people sometimes try to kill each other in order to secure that last piece of foaming gel. The predictability and calculability of different sale events could contribute to mass buy hysteria. The fact that sale events at the same store are always that, the same, and consumers therefore always know what to expect could ultimately lead to irrational behavior. If due to predictability and calculability consumers know that certain products are in high demand, due to for example their own experience, having visited the event before, they could therefore turn to irrational behavior, which in this case translates to running, screaming and fighting, in order to secure their wanted item.

Bigger, brighter and even more beautiful

It has been previously mentioned that over the course of time there has been a shift from a production based society towards a consumer based society. Due to a growth of wealth, consumers are able to afford more than their parents, grandparents and great grandparents years and years ago. But the consumption of goods has gone a bit overboard as 'consumption defines contemporary American society, as well as much of the rest of the developed world' (Ritzer, 2005:1). Just as there was a shift within society from production to consumption, it can now be argued that there is a shift within consumerism itself. Consuming is no longer seen as an accumulation of the basic necessities in life, but consumerism is now being viewed as 'fun' and being an experience (Velthuis, 2006). Another observation is that in this day and age there are companies that allow customers to consume different things all under one roof. Ritzer (2005) names Disney World as an example of a company that is handling the production, the distribution and the marketing, among many other things, all by themselves without outsourcing them to other companies or even to other parts of the world. Being in

the same place and being able to consume different kinds of products is a phenomenon that Ritzer (Ibid) calls the new means of consumption (NMC). Within these new means of consumption there is an exchange between buyers and sellers, mostly in the form of money. But what is cleverly masked by these new means of consumptions is that they try to lure customers into consuming more, sometimes excessively more, using advertisement and marketing to their advantage. It is almost as if consumers are not immune to the visual violence that is being used to try and force products upon consumers in order for them to consume. As consumerism shifts towards an all embracing experience, it could just be that the experience of shopping, within the new means of consumption, is organized in such a way that it results into mass buy hysteria during sale events.

Cathedrals of consumption

The new means of consumption (NMC) are described by Ritzer (2005) as all consuming experiences which take place at 'cathedrals of consumption'. Examples of these cathedrals of consumption are shopping malls, casinos and chain stores such as Starbucks. Other cathedrals of consumption such as museums and luxury gated communities do not necessarily speak for themselves, but they are places where people can consume different things all under the same roof. Was a museum in earlier years just a place to look at art, which is still possible, nowadays museums branch out into other territories. Aside from the consumption of art, guests can visit the ever expanding gift shops who sell anything from key chains to jewelry. In most cases it is not possible to avoid these gift shops as walking through them is often the only way to exit the museum. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City it is even possible to consume an opera within the museum. Luxury gated communities, which are more an American phenomenon than to be found in Europe, are also an example of a cathedral of consumption. The difference between these gated communities and for example shopping malls, is that the inhabitants of these communities shield their consumption from people who cannot financially afford to live there, making them highly privatized. But within these gated communities, consumption still occurs, only on a different level. Residents consume luxuries such as private sport clubs, golf and tennis, and private security. Whether it is a shopping mall, for the common man, or luxury gated communities, fact is that in order for them to maintain their existence they need to attract consumers who are willing to do just that: consume. Ritzer (2005) argues that in order for these cathedrals of consumption to attract more 'visitors' they need to do the following:

'(...) such cathedrals of consumption need to offer, or at least appear to offer, increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume' (Ritzer, 2005:7).

Roughly said, people do not consume in places that have the visible appearance of a prison in Eastern Europe during the cold war, concluding that the external look of stores does have influence on where people consume. In an attempt to enchant consumers, companies turn to extravaganza and spectacle to disguise the fact that increasing revenues is at the heart of, in this case sale events. But this will all

become more apparent in the nick of time. Lets return to an example of a cathedral of consumption, to be precise the chain store. The characteristic of a chain store is that it can be found in different places nationally and even internationally. 'As is the case with religious cathedrals, the cathedrals of consumption are not only enchanted, but also highly rationalized' (Ritzer, 2005:8). The growing number of consumers who visit these stores, results in the cathedrals of consumption recreating the enchantment over and over again. Because chain stores are found in different places around the world, and from what we know from Naomi Klein (2000) about the importance of branding, sale events must be the exact same at every store around the world that is part of that particular chain, making the process of setting up these events highly rationalized. The same event has to have the same ground rules so that it does not matter whether consumers attend the H&M designer sale in New York City or in Amsterdam. So the process of McDonalidization that was mentioned earlier, can also be applied to the cathedrals of consumption. Furthermore, rationalizing the process of setting up these events can also result in the same outcome at different, for example, H&M stores. Meaning the same mass buy hysteria that is an irrational outcome of a rationalized process which is being applied worldwide.

Spectacle and extravaganza

In order for cathedrals of consumptions to remain viable they have to repeat their enchantment. In the constant recreation of enchantment, the usage of spectacle is a key mechanisms which Ritzer (2005) describes as followed:

'(...) a dramatic public display' (Ritzer, 2005:93).

Examples of the usage of spectacle can be found at Mardi Gras in New Orleans and the famous carnival in the Brazilian town of Rio de Janeiro (Ritzer, 2005). Creating spectacle with the use of shop windows, color schemes, interiors and seasonal displays almost implies that it is used to make consumers a part of the spectacle and that it is being created for them. This could not be further from the truth. Spectacle is simply being used to disguise the rationality of the system, which can be traced back to attracting more customers in order to secure more revenues. The usage of spectacle as an illusion during sale events does seem to work as the external look of a store is the first acquaintance consumers have when they are passing these stores. A beautiful decorated store, again an illusion, could reinforce the desire to enter the store and ultimately consume. And when the passing by occurs before opening hours and on the way to work, it could result in joining the queue that is undoubtedly in front of stores when a sale event is about to begin. This can ultimately result in mass buy hysteria if the spectacle is put on in such a way that it creates a feeling of must have within consumers. In order to secure their financial future, companies turn to an extension of spectacle, named extravaganza which Ritzer (Ibid) describes as the intentional display of a show. He uses the example of Las Vegas where over the tops shows, hotels and casinos are rather rule than exception. The intentional showcasing of even bigger and better things could lead to an enchantment of every day boring life

where hotels do not look like pyramids and Celine Dion and Elton John do not perform on a daily basis on a stage that resembles the colosseum that is normally found in Rome. In regards to sale events, stores put on a show in different ways. Let the employees dress in costume, having a celebrity open the sale, which happens every year at famed London department store Harrods, live music etcetera, etcetera. This is all being used to create an illusion for products that are bigger, brighter and even more beautiful than the products that can already be found in the back of the closet.

A bridge too far?

In order for stores to be able to continue their existence, it has been made clear that spectacle and extravaganza are being used to lure consumers into the stores, and when they are actually inside, persuade them to ultimately consume to an extent that consumers leave the store with more products than they initially came in for and are often not wanted and/or needed. The accumulation of more and more goods and overspending on consumption, is called hyper consumption (Ritzer, 2005). Hyper consumption can be seen as an extreme form of consumer behavior as consumers buy more than they need and therefore spend more on their consumption. A second form of extreme consumer behavior is oniomania, also known as obsessive compulsive buying. Oniomania is an actual disease and people who suffer from it constantly feel the desire to shop (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). The obsessive desire to shop is not a disease that is visible when looking at people, but having the disease could contribute to hyper consumption as patients often buy product that they do not need, but feel the desire to buy nonetheless. Hyper consumption on the other hand is visible during sale events. A characteristic of sale events is that they have a limited duration creating a time frame in which consumers are forced to buy products or else miss out. The scenes displayed at sale events such as the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the H&M designer sales where customers tumble over each other in order to secure their wanted item, can almost be described as a form of moral panic or fear. According to Cohen (quoted in Thompson, 1998:7) moral panic can be defined as the 'emerging of a condition, episode, person or group of persons who are defined as a threat to societal values and interests.' Thompson (1998) states that although different theorists have different opinions on the definition of moral panic, there are two characteristics that can be found in each theory, namely the 'high level of concern over the behavior of a certain group or category of people' (Thompson, 1998:9) and the hostility towards the group who are being labeled as a possible threat. Thompson (Ibid) also states that volatility is also part of moral panic and states that they suddenly appear and fade away after a short period of time. This is in sync with the short duration of sale events which often span over a time period of a few days. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) also address the shared concern of a threat by a certain person or group. They however define this shared concern more in terms of mass hysteria. Moral panic and mass hysteria thus share the same belief in a threat, in whatever form that may come in. When looking at sale events where customers run, scream and fight in order to secure their wanted item, it could be that this is an outcome of moral panic. In this case, the threat is not opposed by a person or group of persons, but comes from the knowledge that products are only available on a certain day and have a limited stock.

The possibility not to be able to buy the wanted products could be a trigger for moral panic which can further lead to physical behavior in the form of running and fighting.

A shift in consciousness II

As various sale events return every year, and always attract large groups of people it is extraordinary that no one has raised a single eyebrow where hyper consumption is concerned. But no longer as now there is Reverend Billy and his church of Earthalujah, formerly known as the church of life after shopping, formerly known as the church of stop shopping. Reverend Billy, who also made a brief appearance in the musical Crazy Shopping which was mentioned in the introduction, tries to make consumers aware of the fact that the rationalized consumer world is straying us away from the notion that humans are creative and decisions can be made by individuals. The church holds services for its followers in concert halls, mall atriums and even inside stores. Which is kind of a paradox as these are all cathedrals of consumption and Reverend Billy is enabling something that he is critically against. Making it quite clear that no one can really escape consumerism.

It has been made clear that branding, McDonaldization, spectacle and extravaganza could play a role in the creation of mass buy hysteria during sale events. All four mechanisms are rationally created by companies and often have an irrational outcome in the form of erratic consumer behavior. The process of branding could contribute to mass buy hysteria as it gives consumers the opportunity to buy certain brands that are normally above their spending limit. When such products come within financial reach, it is not unthinkable that consumers will want to purchase them. A famous English say is that ‘great minds think alike’. If minds of other consumers have the same idea about buying products that are normally too expensive, it could create mass hysteria during sale events, McDonaldization is being described by Ritzer (2005) as a rationalized process where 5 key points, modeled after famous fast food chain McDonald, are applied to day to day life. Mainly due to efficiency and predictability, sale events at the same store across the nation and even globally, have the same ground rules in order for the events to be the same everywhere. The rational set up of sale events, in order to create extra revenues, is being masked with the usage of spectacle and extravaganza. Stores are being decorated with different colors, live music is playing, well known Dutchmen and women visit the stores, all in order to garner extra publicity and attract more consumers. These mechanisms could all play a role in mass buy hysteria. All four mechanisms will be covered in the analysis to research if they contribute to mass buy hysteria.

3 Methods

This thesis entails a qualitative research. This method was chosen because, although research has been done on shopping, specific research on mass buy hysteria during sale events not yet been done. This research is therefore an explorative research and can serve as a base for future research. The research question guiding this thesis is ‘*how can mass buy hysteria be explained?*’ This questions attempts to

give insight in the motives of respondents to participate, or not, in sale events. These motives are best to be researched by talking to respondents about their motives (Baarda, 2005).

Collecting data

In order to collect data for this research, it was chosen to collect data using three different methods: firstly a film and a documentary as an illustration that various media outlets draw inspiration from the world of shopping and mass buy hysteria. Secondly, three real life case studies, the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the Maffe Marathon both at Dutch department store the Bijenkorf and the designer collections at Swedish high street brand H&M. The third method of data collecting comes from in-depth interviews with respondents.

Films and documentaries

To have an insight look into the world of shopping, and sale events, I decided to analyze a movie and a documentary on shopping and consumer behavior. This choice was made because it stipulates that consumer behavior is important, as it is a multi-billion industry, but is not only restricted to real life. The fact that movies and documentaries are being made on the issue of consumer behavior proves that it is a subject that generates attention and paradoxically generates more income as people are going to see it and spent money on it, resulting in consumer behavior and revenues for the companies. The documentary that was chosen is called A Fun Fair behind the Dikes by Dutch filmmaker Michiel van Erp. I became aware of this documentary through the thesis supervisor. Initially, the documentary was only watched to see if it could serve as an inspiration for ideas on shopping, but it later turned out that it entailed a lot of aspects that were interesting to incorporate in this thesis. The same was the case with the chosen film Confessions of a Shopaholic. This movie also served as a base for ideas on shopping, but displayed so many interesting points into the world of shopping and mass buy hysteria, that it was decided to incorporate it into this thesis. The usage of visual material in an analysis is a form of what Wolff (2007) calls content analysis. According to Wolff (Ibid) the benefit of using content analysis is that the material being analyzed provides a precise illustration of society and different parts of society. Grady (2007) adds that an image, still or moving, can serve as a form of data to various questions. Wolff (2007) calls these questions the 'framework for the examination'. This framework is a result of the theoretical display that was mentioned earlier. Thus, the mechanisms spectacle, extravaganza, McDonaldisation and hyper consumption have formed a framework, in the earlier stages, that are later being used as points of analysis when watching the film and the documentary.

Observations: three case studies

The aim of this thesis is to research which mechanisms underlie mass buy hysteria and how their contribution to mass buy hysteria during sale events can be explained. For that reason sale events in the Netherlands had to be selected. The selection process began with writing down a number of sale

events from the top of my head, also asking people in my social network if they could also name sale events. Eventually a list of about eight events emerged. The actual selection process then took place. It was important that the sale events generated media attention, largely due to the fact that they generate mass buy hysteria. Having taken this into account, three major sale events, that were also on the list, were selected for this reason. Two sale events are from the Dutch department store the Bijenkorf, called 'De Drie Dwaze Dagen' and the 'Maffe Marathon' and the third one is from Swedish fashion house H&M with its special designer sales. Having selected the three sale events that would serve as case studies for this research, I looked online to find out when these events would take place. When the day finally came to go to these events, it was important to be there before opening hours. The reason for this was that mass hysteria surrounding these events takes place before the doors open, so it was important to capture that. During these events I also took notes on the observations that were being made. Because the 'Drie Dwaze Dagen (DDD)', is a three day sale event, actually four when you count the last day, Sunday, when products that were not sold during the three-day period are marked down further in hopes of selling them, all four days were visited. Every day, I was present around the same time and repeating the same steps: taking pictures of the situation, make videos and audio fragments. This was necessary to see if there were similarities and/or differences in group dynamics. Photo and video material was not only needed to visualize the mass buy hysteria but also to have material that would display the decorations of the store that were being used to create possible spectacle and extravaganza. Sunday, which was the last day, I was present just before 11.30 a.m. The collecting data phase that was described, also occurred during the 'Maffe Marathon' and the designer sale at H&M. As the 'Maffe Marathon' is a two-week event, I visited the event twice. Once in the first week, march 28,2011 through april 3rd,2011 and once in the second week, April 4, 2011 until April 10, 2011.

Interviews

In order to gain insight into the motives of respondents to attend sale events and engage in mass buy hysteria, in-depth interviews have been held that were, in some degree, structured. The choice for in-depth half structured interviews can be seen in relation to the type of research question (Baarda, 2005). The research tries to gain insight into the personal motives of respondents to engage in mass buy hysteria during sale events. It was therefore necessary to let them tell their stories. Nonetheless, there were several topics that needed to be covered in order for the research question to be essentially answered. Examples where the personal motives respondents had to attend sale events, if they engaged in fighting to obtain a product and if the products offered during the sale event made them buy more products than they originally set out to buy. It was therefore necessary to structure the interviews to a certain extend. The interviews started with several general questions such as name, age and gender. Subsequently questions were asked about subjects that were stated earlier. Respondents were given the time to answer these questions. When something was not particularly clear, it was asked to elaborate a bit more. This raised the reliability of the collected data. During the interviews a topic list (see

appendix I) was at hand to make sure all the information that was needed did in fact get asked (Baarda, 2005). The list was composed using the research question and the theory as a guiding principle. With consent of the respondents, all the interviews have been recorded. At the same time, notes were made. Later, the interviews have been transcribed and analyzed.

The choice to do in-depth interviewing was not the first choice of collecting data to gain insight in personal motives. It was initially planned to host a focus group with five or six participants to talk about the subject of mass buy hysteria during sale events. The day the focus group was supposed to meet, more and more members of the original group cancelled their appearance. This led to an overall cancellation of the focus group, as it would only consist of three people, including myself. The cancellation of the focus group meant that an insight into the personal motives of consumers was still needed. It was for that reason that it was decided to collect data by having personal interviews with correspondents. This more one on one approach would give the respondents the opportunity to give the interview on their own terms, meaning date and time, and not be dependent on others, as was the case with the focus group. Eventually ten interviews were collected. After seven interviews no new information was given, thus there was saturation (Baarda, 2005). It was decided to conduct three more interviews to make sure that there really was a case of saturation. After ten interviews, it was concluded that the interviews did not produce any new information.

The results of the interviews cannot be generalized, as they are personal motives. The outcomes can however serve as a base for possible continuation research. It must be noted that, as described earlier, hysteria can be defined as the outbreak of emotional excess that is triggered by a particular event. Because hysteria deals with emotions, hysteria can be seen as irrational behavior. The behavior of the respondents during different sale events is therefore in the moment irrational and perhaps unwanted yet necessary, but when they are given the opportunity to speak freely about their experiences in a less dynamic environment, they are likely to approach their behavior more rational. This could result in a limited view of an irrational phenomenon.

Respondents

It was previously reported that a total of ten interviews were conducted.. The respondents came from my own social circle. Respondents were approached by a personal email asking if they wanted to participate, what the research was about, how long a possible interview would take, that the interview would take place on a by the respondent chosen date and time and lastly if they wanted to participate if they would give notice within seventy-two hours. It was also asked if they knew other possible respondents that would be open to be participants of the research. This resulted in two more respondents who wanted to participate. Some of the respondents thus have been selected by usage of the snowball method (Babbie, 2004).

Method of data analysis

After the data was collected, using three different methods, the information was coded. The film and documentary, the real life experiences and the interviews have all been categorized with the usage of entries that stem from the theoretical framework (Baarda, 2005). Subsequently, especially with the interviews, the data was united so all the information belonging to a certain entry was displayed together. The categorization of the data was used to have a better overview of the collected data: the links, differences and similarities were much easier to point out.

The most important analytical technique that was used is called 'relying on theoretical propositions' as described by Yin (2003). The collected data was analyzed using the theoretical framework. The usage of this technique is therefore logical. The theory gives direction to the eventual data collection. The technique also assures that only information relevant for the research was collected, leaving out non relevancies.

4 Analysis

Based on the theories previously mentioned, certain mechanisms can be used as a possible explanation for mass buy hysteria during sale events. But are mechanisms such as spectacle and extravaganza also present in real life sale events such as the Maffe Marathon and the H&M designer collections? Or are there other mechanisms presents that are contributing to mass buy hysteria?

A film and a documentary

Confessions of a Shopaholic

Confessions of a Shopaholic is a film that had its premiere in February of 2009 and is altered after the successful Shopaholic books by Sophie Kinsella. The films tells the story of Rebecca Bloomwood, a journalist in New York City, who is so obsessed with the act of shopping, that the line between burden and pleasure is completely invisible, resulting in a credit card dept of over sixteen thousand dollars. Of course, in most Hollywood movies a happy ending is rule rather than exception, which is also the case for the main character as, in the end, she is able to pay off all of her dept and start her new life dept free. But before that dept free time is an actual reality she must first acknowledge the fact that she has a problem as well as take steps to earn more income. In the beginning of the film it becomes clear that although Rebecca also played a pivotal role in her own financial demise, the way stores use spectacle and extravaganza to lure consumers in, is also important to note. Rebecca describes the magic of the stores as followed:

‘But when I looked into shop windows, I saw another world. A dreamy world full of perfect things’²
(Confessions of a Shopaholic,2009).

And also:

Cause you know that thing, when you see someone cute and he smiles, and your heart kind of goes like warm butter sliding down hot toast? Well, that's what it's like when I see a store. Only it's better. (...) And a store always smells good. A store can awaken a lust for things you never even knew you needed’ (Confessions of a Shopaholic, 2009).

It becomes clear that stores use spectacle and extravaganza to lure consumers in. They try to create an enchanted dream world that is so opposite from normal rational life that it becomes a place where people can escape their day to day life and live in a fantasy. A fantasy in which everything goes and anything can happen. A world where anything can happen also has its downsides as the main character soon discovers. The usage of spectacle and extravaganza, such as colors and even smell, trigger a feeling of a blurred avarice, which results in buying things that are not wanted and/or needed. This becomes all too clear when Rebecca Bloomwood visits a designer sale event. Waiting in line to be let in, along with numerous other consumers, when suddenly a second door opens. And that is when the hysteria of running screaming and fighting begins.



It is clear that during this display of mass buy hysteria, consumers are influenced by behavior of other shoppers in order not to be excluded from the opportunity to buy the wanted product on sale. They throw their own values overboard and conform to the collective behavior of irrational behavior, because otherwise the wanted products are less likely to be harvested. Hours after the collecting of

² Film script retrieved from http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/a1/confessions-of-a-shopaholic-script.html.

³ Stills from Confessions of a Shopaholic, retrieved from <http://hauteworld.blogspot.com/2010/04/sample-sale-ing-in-paris.html>.

goods, the main character comes to the conclusion that her hyper consumption does not make her happy, for a moment there she thought that buying that pair of shoes bought her a piece of happiness. Ultimately resulting in the feeling of having bought a false sense of happiness. In order to get her life, and her financial affairs in order, she decides to make the most out of her job at a, ironically, economical journal. Hoping to one day be working at a fashion magazine called Alette, comparable to Vogue magazine. Not only is it interesting to see that stores create an artificial feeling of greed, but also that wanting to buy certain upscale brands gives the illusion of a certain lifestyle. This becomes clear in the purchases that she does over the course of the movie. A Gucci bag here, a pair of Pucci shoes there, not to mention the stores on one of the most expensive street of the world 5th Avenue in New York, where most products do not even have price tags. The costs to uphold her illusion, for others, but first and foremost, herself are high. But living in a worldly city means obliging to certain standards and if you cannot afford that, forge the exclusiveness. In order to keep her shopaholic behavior, in clinical terms oniomania (O'Guinn &Faber 1989), somewhat under control, she ultimately resorts to group therapy known as shopaholic anonymous. Of course this has its ups and downs, but because it is a Hollywood film, there is always a happy ending and Rebecca ends up depth free and with valuable lessons learned.

What this film shows is that mass buy hysteria during sale events arises when a group of consumers are all after the same thing, a bargain. Fear to not be able to buy the wanted item triggers a feeling of wanting to do anything to not let that happen. But after a few hours the feeling of wanting and needing has dissolved and has shifted towards a sense of unhappiness. Purchasing in the spare of the moment does not always result in the wanted feeling. Stores use spectacle and extravaganza to persuade consumers to buy products that are not essentially needed, but display a short term of happiness. The conclusion afterwards is that consumers are stuck with unwanted products where money was spent on what could have been used for the greater good, whatever that may be. Stores however, are left with a financial turnover, of that single sale event, that is almost as much as the financial revenues of several months. Lesson learned is that sale events are being advertised as being put on for consumers when in reality this is just a cover up in order for stores to expand their financial revenues and consumers are left to suffer alone with their unwanted product and a false sense of happiness.

A Fun Fair behind the Dikes

Other than Confessions of a Shopaholic, A Fun Fair behind the Dikes by Dutch documentary maker Michiel van Erp offers an inside look in what can be seen as the portrayal of the Netherlands as an amusement park complete with different rides and festivals. Some of the 'rides' that are being featured are the Gay Pride and the Elf fantasy fair, but also outlet shopping centre Bataviastad as well as the famous concert on the canals of Amsterdam, called the Prinsengracht concert. Michiel van Erp gives his viewers an inside look into the creation of an enchanted world for consumers. An employee of the Elf fantasy fair describes it as the following:

Employee Elf fantasy fair: 'People who want to experience that whole Fantasy fair for a day, are able to escape their boring reality for one day and set foot into a world that is beautiful and complies with their fairytale expectations (A Fun Fair behind the Dikes, 2005; 39,12).' ⁴

The creation of an enchanted world is thus not restricted to just sale events, but does however result in the same outcome, mass hysteria. In the case of the Elf fantasy fair without the sale products. What does entail mass buy hysteria during sale events is outlet shopping centre Bataviastad. It is known as a place where designer items are being sold against marked down prices. When taken into account what Klein (2000) argues about buying luxury product insinuates the affordability of a upscale lifestyle, it certainly would explain why mass buy hysteria would occur at Bataviastad. Although it is not really a place where sale events take place, but sometimes do happen, most stores sell items that are from previous collections and can therefore be sold against vast low prices resulting in a more or less a continuing sale. What is interesting to see is that Michiel van Erp follows the CEO of Bataviastad, and therefore gives an inside look into what companies, and stores, undertake to lure consumers in and are therefore a key player in creating mass buy hysteria. The CEO of Bataviastad says the following as he explains that sale events such as buy two, get one for free, in Dutch, 3 halen, 2 betalen:

'(...) and that is of course very well known in the Netherlands. If something is for free, you can almost instantly set crush barriers, as it is a guaranteed success (A Fun Fair behind the Dikes, 2005; 32,35).' ⁵

So, entrepreneurs use tactics such as the illusion of getting something for free to persuade the consumer firstly to come to, in this case Bataviastad, and secondly to consume more then they officially wanted, making it borderline hyper consumption. Because the documentary focuses on several different events, it is difficult to find spectacle and extravaganza that contribute to mass buy hysteria. Still it can be found at the, what ladies of a certain age consider their ultimate sale event, Libelle zomerweek. An event organized by the magazine with the same name. The spectacle comes from the event itself being a public display, with several decorated tents and stands where consumers, mostly women, can have professionals do their hair and nails for example. The extravaganza comes from the intentional display of a show. For example, famous Dutch musicians are being booked to perform for visitors. They are being used to attract more visitors in order to ultimately benefit financially from the large number of visitors.

What Michiel van Erp has tried to expose is that putting on a show, whether in the form of a sale event or an elf fantasy fair, it is all a false enchantment of a rationalized world that everyone wants to escape

⁴ 'Mensen die die hele Elf fantasy fair willen beleven, zijn in staat om eens een dag te ontsnappen aan die hele saaie realiteit en gewoon te stappen in een wereld die gewoon mooi is en voldoet aan allerlei sprookjesachtige verwachtingen.'

⁵ '(...) en dat is natuurlijk in Nederland heel beroemd, als er iets gratis is, kun je dranghekken plaatsen, bijna succes verzekerd.'

every once in a while. The escape into a world of fairy tales, where everything goes, does sometimes result in irrational behavior, because the rules of the rational world do not seem to apply, but as van Erp notes, mass buy hysteria is not only restricted to sale events, but is also found during other events.

Real-life experiences

To collect data on mass buy hysteria during sale events, three famous Dutch sale events were visited and observed, namely the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the Maffe Marathon both at the Bijenkorf and the special designer collections at H&M.

The Drie Dwaze Dagen (DDD)

Upon arrival at the Drie Dwaze Dagen on September 30th 2010, music can be heard from a Caribbean band that plays music to entertain waiting consumers. The front of the store is decorated with yellow flags and the shop windows have been plastered with yellow banners with a large three on it, or a person of a special police unit complete with matching safety helmet. Because it is not yet time for the doors to be opened, and temperature is low, Bijenkorf employees walk around giving out free cups of hot chocolate. There are three entrance doors at the Bijenkorf in the Hague, two located at well know shopping street the Grote Markt and a third located at the side of the building at the Wagenstraat. When it is time for the doors to open, consumers count from ten to zero and at zero all the three doors are opened at the same time. Wanting to observe the first signs of hysteria, I entered the store about five minutes after opening at the Wagenstraat entrance. Upon entering it is clear that the store has been decorated with yellow banners with a large three on it. All the banners that have been used to give direction to where to find certain items and what their price is, are also yellow. All the employees are dressed the same way, in a dark grey suit, a white blouse and a yellow scarf. Some employees who have the duty of walking around and offering customers candy, are dressed up as fairy's with large wings and extravagant makeup. The on sale products on the ground floor have been displayed in large cases which form a large square. The color of the cases has been masked by yellow crêpe paper. Walking over to the cosmetics and perfume department, women try to force their way in front of the queue, but they are being scolded by personal who send them to the back of the line. Arriving at the perfume department, it is so crowded making it very difficult to even reach the products without pushing someone aside. Women walk by with more than four boxes of the same perfume. Same is the case with foaming gel of the brand Rituals. When eventually reaching the table with the perfumes, most fragrances have been sold out after only twenty minutes.

On the first floor, it is equally crowded at the women's lingerie department. The items that are being presented can be found in large cases that form a half square. The color of the cases is being masked with the usage of yellow crêpe paper. Because bras and briefs, that are from the same line but have different sizes, are being presented in the same case, women slightly push each other in order to search for their perfect size. An employee of the Bijenkorf tries to help search for the correct size, but this is

difficult as a lot of hands dive into the same case. The same is visible at the men's underwear section. A few men, but mostly women try to find the right size in an overflowing case. On the same floor, the children's sections is rather quiet compared to the ground floor and the lingerie section on the first floor. There are no lines in front of the cash register and you can walk around freely without bumping into other consumers.

The second floor covers the women's clothes and the shoe department. The section where clothes are found for young adults is not that crowded. You can easily walk around and search through the racks. Walking over to the shoe section, through the designer clothes section, it becomes more crowded. At the shoe boutique, employees have not even tried to organize the shoes. All the different shoe boxes with different styles of shoes, have been piled up. In the midst of the large piles, is a bench where women can sit and try on their shoes. The bench is however so overcrowded, that fitting has been taking place everywhere. Even in the women's clothes section making it hard to find way through the mazes. Next to the shoe boutique is a section of clothes for more mature women. A male employee of the Bijenkorf is standing a few feet away, dressed in a bright yellow suit and a matching construction helmet. With his microphone he announces to the store that he is standing in front of a rack of women's dresses that are being marked down extra in the upcoming fifteen minutes. From all over the store women make their way to the rack, some semi running, and snatch a dress, and in some cases more. Throughout the fifteen minutes, the male employee announced how many minutes are left and that this is a special deal. After the passing of the fifteen minutes, he closed the sale and walks away.

The third floor houses home accessories such as linen, towels, kitchen tools, couches and tables. The section where lamps, couches, chairs and tables are being sold is almost deserted. There are no yellow banners that indicate where the sales can be found. Employees working at the home accessories seem to have nothing to do and are chatting to each other at the cash register. In the section where kitchen tools, towels and linen are being sold, is also the place where the Nespresso booth is located. It is very crowded in this section. The queue for the Nespresso counter is so long, that it is hard to see where the line ends, as it twists and turns across the third floor. Nespresso has its own little shop within the Bijenkorf where only these items can be bought and paid. Other items need to be paid for at the 'normal' cash register. At the towel section, which is located next to cash register, a small shoving and pushing is seen as three women try to make a dash for a purple towel. This did not result in a fight, as an employee of the Bijenkorf promises to check if there are any more towels available.

The fourth floor is where the books and cd's can be found. Only three customers are walking around here. There are some yellow banners hanging from the ceiling indicating that there are some sale items to be found here, but not nearly as much as the lower floors. Half of the fourth floor has been appointed to companies such as mobile telephone company, a fitness company and company that sells water coolers. They offer special deals, in cooperation with the Bijenkorf, which can only be offered

throughout the three days. In a corner of the fourth floor an area is marked with tall crush barriers, decorated with yellow crepe paper. This is a wardrobe section where shoppers can stall their bought items for free so that they have their hands free for some more shopping.

The Drie Dwaze Dagen are a three day event that stretches from Thursday September 30th 2010 until Saturday October 2nd, 2010 . Sunday October 3rd, 2010 is the unofficial fourth day where all the on sale products that have not sold out are being sold for further reductions. On this day, the interior as well as the exterior of the store is the same as the previous days. It is much more crowded. The store is filled with families with children often accompanied by grandparents. It is particularly full at the perfume the shoe department.



Online observations

During the Drie Dwaze Dagen, most of the items that can be found in stores, can also be bought online. On the special webpage of the Bijenkorf, setup especially for these three days, consumers can flip through the books that entail everything that these three days have to offer. There is also a link to their Facebook page as well as their Twitter page. Both social media outlets have been used to answer questions from consumers regarding everything. They've also been used to organize a scavenger hunt, and other games, using the website of the Bijenkorf where participants got clues in order to find a certain product on sale. The winner would get a prize in the form of a gift card that could be used to spent on items during the Drie Dwaze Dagen. The games were held several weeks in advance of the beginning of the events. The section of the special webpage where consumers can flip through the famous books, click on items and buy them is in very high demand and visiting the webpage was

sometimes hard as it was out of service. When it could not be reached, a message occurred saying that the page was popular today and that they were sorry and that you should try again soon.

Theoretical implications: spectacle, extravaganza and hyper consumption

Stepping into a world full of magic starts outside with the exterior of the building. The famous yellow flags grace the front and side of the building and the shop windows either display products that can be bought during the sale event, or the shop windows are covered with large yellow stickers with a large number three. The spectacle that is being displayed also comes in the form of the interior design. Large banners are hanging from the top of the building and there are posters everywhere. They all contribute to the idea of an immense event. For consumers to be part of such an event contributes to the idea that the event is being put on especially for them. Why would companies create such events for themselves? Because of economical factors, but that line is being blurred. According to Ritzer (2005) extravaganza is an extension of spectacle. During the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Bijenkorf uses different forms of extravaganza to make the sale event even more extravagant. On the day of the opening the flagship store in Amsterdam started with a morning concert, which would later travel to the different sister stores in The Hague and Rotterdam. It is interesting that this show was advertised as a great and fabulous show suggesting that missing it would mean that you lost out on something incredible that can never be watched again. By creating a timeframe in which things, in this case the concert, happens, it creates a feeling of not wanting to be left out of the festivities. Another timeframe that is being created is by the usage of the fifteen minute limit. During the Drie Dwaze Dagen, from time to time, a male employee announced special deal that will only last for fifteen minutes. The creation of a time frame for these special reductions, indicates a special feeling of not wanting to be left out when those fifteen minutes are up. It also makes sure that the items are being sold as it is being sold for even less than the marked down price.

Theoretical implications: the rise of social media

The Bijenkorf puts on quite a show in the form of the Drie Dwaze Dagen. When the doors open at 08.00 a.m., it is immediate chaos. With the rise of social media such as Twitter and Facebook the anticipation leading up to the actual event start as early as four weeks prior to the event. Not only are social media followers kept up to date about the Drie Dwaze Dagen, but the Bijenkorf also gives them the chance to play games in which they can win beautiful prizes, such as gift cards that can be used to spend during the Drie Dwaze Dagen. The usage of social media contributes to the anticipation of the actual event and contributes to mass hysteria online as well as in real life. Ritzer (2005) argues that stores use spectacle and extravaganza to lure consumers in and persuade them to buy more. But with more and more people shopping online, this is not visible in his theory. De Bijenkorf uses the online world to their full extend knowing that more and more people will visit the website. The fact that the webpage of the Drie Dwaze Dagen was frequently difficult to reach indicated that the mass hysteria has also moved to the online world.

The Maffe Marathon

Arriving at the Maffe Marathon at Wednesday March 30, 2011 at 7.45 a.m., there are a few people waiting in front of the main entrance located at the Grote Markt. The other entrances do not have any customers waiting in front of them. When the doors open the few customers who were waiting in line go inside, but there are no physical altercations. Upon entering it is clear that the setup of the store is precisely the same as the Drie Dwaze Dagen. The only difference is that everything that was yellow during the Drie Dwaze Dagen, has now made way for its green counterpart. The interior of the store is the same with now green banners hanging from the ceiling indicating where the sales are and how much the product costs. The setup with the cases, where the products have their home, is also the same as with the Drie Dwaze Dagen only this time the color of the cases has been masked by green crepe paper. Personal working during the Maffe Marathon are dressed in their normal work attire, meaning a grey suit and a white blouse. In the staircase area, there is a booth setup where people can subscribe for a Bijenkorf membercard. This card will give ten percent off immediately and subscribers will also receive coupons which they can use for further reductions on items that are listed on the coupons. Half an hour after the grand opening, and walking around there is no mass buy hysteria to be seen.

Because the Maffe Marathon is a two week event, I visited the event in the second week, a day before the closing date. This was a Saturday April 2, 2011. Arriving around 11.30 a.m., there were no customers waiting in front of the store as it had already been open for a few hours. Inside the store, it was more crowded than the previous week. Music was being played by a live orchestra, located at the top of the stairs next to the subscribing booth for the Bijenkorf card. An employee explained that only Bijenkorf member card holders are eligible to save for a cash bonus, which could be used to shop for free during the last day. At the bags department, women were pushing and bumping into each other, grabbing different purses from different cases and looking in the mirror which one suited them best. But this was the only display of physical behavior during the second visit. The set up was still the same as the first week and going further back, the Drie Dwaze Dagen.

Online observations

During the Maffe Marathon, a special website was created for customers where they could and also buy products by clicking on them in the online books. Social media phenomenon's Twitter and Facebook have been used to promote the event, upfront as well as during the event. On both sites, customers could ask questions ranging from opening hours to random citations. The website, Twitter and Facebook all had the same outline throughout the duration of the Maffe Marathon: everything was bright green with the silver logo of the event and its associated slogan 'Voed je verlangen', feed your desire in English. During the two week sale event, the website never seemed to be out of order when I visited it.

Theoretical implications: the Maffe Marathon

When the Bijenkorf decided in 2008 that they needed a sibling for their famous Drie Dwaze Dagen, they created the Maffe Marathon. It was modeled after the DDD, making it a masked version of its big sibling. Making it the same event under a different name, makes it clear that the owners of the Bijenkorf wanted to create the illusion that this is another special, and different, event that is being held for the pleasure of consumers. Using the same model to create the event, also indicates that the outcomes of both sale events are the same; mass buy hysteria. Which results in extra financial revenues on top of the extra financial income that is gathered during the Drie Dwaze Dagen. Making it nothing more than the same cash cow under a different name. What is interesting to note is that the catchphrase of de Maffe Marathon is 'Feed your desire'. This insinuates that the sellers know what consumers want and tap into that feeling of greediness, by selling items that can still our hunger. Another difference between the DDD and the Maffe Marathon is something that is called a cash bonus. During the Maffe Marathon, there is a system that is called the cash bonus. If consumers spent a certain amount of money on any product per day, they receive a cash bonus beginning at five Euros, which they can spent freely on the last day of the sale event. The cash bonus received corresponds with the amount of money spent on the original purchased items, but can lead up to a hundred Euros. In previous years the Maffe Marathon was for everyone who wanted to partake. However, 2011 marks the first year that the extracurricular activity of saving for extra cash bonuses, was only predestined for the consumers who own a Bijenkorf customer card, making them privatized for only people who own such a card. Consumers who do not have a card could just enjoy the regular bargains or sign up for a customer card. Which a lot of consumers did if looking at the queue in front of the signup register. So, when there are extra free items and free cash to collect, even if that means signing up for a not really needed customer card, mass buy hysteria is still being displayed. What is however, blurred is that this Bijenkorf customer card is also a credit card. So, the line between lust and burden is completely vague. But that is what creating an illusion is all about. Not making it known that the creation of a show is nothing more and nothing less than financial gain for store owners (Ritzer, 2005).

The H&M designer collections

The H&M for Lanvin collection went on sale on Tuesday November 23th 2010. The sale started at 08.00 a.m. Arriving at 7.40 a.m. there was already a long line in front of the store. Crush barriers were set up to make sure the line stayed in the direction H&M wanted. Queuing at the end of the line, almost immediately an employee of the store approached, explaining the rules of the sale. She gave out colored bracelets that corresponded with a certain time when a group of fifteen customers were allowed to enter the special section with Lanvin clothes. My bracelet said 09.15-09.30 a.m. It was only 7.45, which meant a 90 minute waiting time. When it was 08.00 a.m. everyone was allowed inside of the store being directed by H&M personnel and security guards towards the section where the Lanvin collection was displayed. At the entrance way to the special section, there were two security men, who checked wrist bands and times, making sure everyone who was supposed to shop at a certain time was

allowed in. The rest of the customers who were not yet allowed to shop, queued in front of the security guards. Looking around, the store was not decorated. Only the smalls section of the Lanvin shop in shop was marked with crush barriers and billboards from the collection were hanging on the wall. Several tailor dummies were placed throughout the shop in shop dressed in a Lanvin outfit. All the H&M personnel were dressed similarly. Black suit pants, a black long sleeve and a white t-shirt decorated with a large red flower broche. On the way to the cash register, customers exited the shop in shop where a security employee also stands. When customers bought items, they were wrapped in special designed bags by Lanvin.



Online observations

Even before the Lanvin collection hit the stores, H&M used their Facebook and Twitter account to make customers aware of the fact that the Lanvin collection was coming. H&M also had a special website set up where customers were kept up to date about everything that had to do with the collection. On the day of the sale this special website turned into a virtual showroom where it was possible to not only look at the collection, but also purchase items. The outlook of the special website resembled a boutique, just as was the case with the shop in shop in the real life store. On certain moments during the first day of the sale, the servers cracked under the large amount of visitors. When this happened, H&M said that the online store was busy and advised customers to keep trying.

An actual sale?

Since a few years, the popular Swedish high street brand H&M is known for its collaboration with high end fashion houses and designers such as Karl Lagerfeld, Victor & Rolf, Stella McCartney and more recently French haute couture house Lanvin. Whether these designer collections are sale events to begin with, can be disputed. If these temporary collections are being compared to the 'real deal', meaning items not specifically designed for H&M, the collections at H&M are, in a way, sale items. If garments made for the H&M collections are being compared to the designer pieces being sold in the high end couture boutiques, they have a larger edition and are therefore less exclusive, resulting in a lower price, they are made with lesser fabrics and their finishing is not what is expected when you buy an expensive designer item, having threads hanging everywhere. So in that sense, when compared to

their more exclusive counterparts, the H&M designer collections are sale events, but the knowledge of that notion is not widespread.

Theoretical implications: fashion brands and McDonaldization

Over the course of time, from the launching of the first H&M designer collection in November of 2004, by Karl Lagerfeld, until 2009 when Sonia Rykiel was the last to design a special collection for H&M, the sales always generated much attention from consumers, and media, as it was first a new phenomenon, designer items for H&M prices. But as time went by and popularity grew, so did the mass buy hysteria. Before the doors even opened, a long line of hopefuls had gathered in front of the store in hopes of scoring several items. Note that H&M has stores all over the world and sell the same clothes in every store, it is no wonder that the designer collection events are the same everywhere and have the same predictable outcome: large crowds with matching mass buy hysteria eventually resulting in guaranteed financial revenues. A process which Ritzer (2005) calls McDonaldization. With that mass buy hysteria also comes the disappointment for a lot of consumers who were not able to secure an item, due to the hyper consumption of others before them as well as not being able to fight through the masses in order to even get to a rack of anything at all. H&M noticed this too and with the launch of their latest collection by French couture house Lanvin, they introduced a set of rules which would result in a controlled version of mass buy hysteria. The set of rules starts in front of the doors, when the event is about to begin. The first three hundred and twenty people will receive a colored bracelet. There are sixteen different colors which translates into twenty consumers having the same color bracelet. The bracelet corresponds with a certain time at which costumers can shop. It is interesting to note that customers who want to shop for the men's collections do not need a bracelet. Indicating that the mass buy hysteria during H&M events is more of a woman's thing. This is in accordance with the notion of the British Medical Journal (1966) who state that hysteria involved women more than men. When that times finally comes to consumers can shop in the special Lanvin shop-in-shop they only get a maximum of fifteen minutes. In those fifteen minutes they can search through the racks, in quest for that perfect item. To reduce mass buy hysteria, customers are only allowed to purchase one piece or size per product. In previous years the designer collections generated a lot of hype and hysteria, but by incorporating the set of rules into the process of buy hysteria, the mass hysteria that was part of the sales in previous years, is now being controlled and therefore has the exact opposite effect. Question is what happens after the first three hundred and twenty costumers have shopped? By being the lucky few who are able to choose from the collection, it makes it somewhat privatized. With also includes the mass buy hysteria. But when the collection becomes available for the masses, after a few hours when consumers with a bracelet have shopped, can mass buy hysteria still be seen. The rules set by H&M do not apply to the masses that can shop in the shop-in-shop after the lucky few had their way. If items are still available, and rules and regulations are no longer applicable, that could mean that the so called controlled mass buy hysteria in the first few hours

is now shifted to the normal mass buy hysteria that has characterized the H&M designer collections for so long.

Theoretical implications: spectacle and extravaganza

H&M also used spectacle and extravaganza to make the launch of the Lanvin collection an event. The extravaganza started when H&M launched the collection with the help of a look book, where all the pieces in the collection were featured, and several videos that gave a sneak peak of the collection that were 'leaked' online weeks before the launch of the collection on November 23, 2010. When that time finally came for the collection to be launched, the extravaganza continued inside the store. The employees were all dressed in black and white, with a simple H&M for Lanvin t-shirt topped with a large red flower brooch. The collectiveness of the personnel, with the help of what can be seen as a uniform, contributes to the illusion that the event is put on for consumers by creating a barrier between employees and consumers. Because all the employees dress the same, they exude a feeling of wanting to serve the masses which translates in a feeling for costumers that they are special and are wanted. When in reality the work uniform is nothing more than to be able to identify who works there if there are any questions. With the latest designer collection, designed by Lanvin, the spectacle was not so visible outside, but was transferred to the inside where a shop-in-shop was created that was modeled after the designer boutiques in for example Paris. This creates the idea that consumers are shopping in a high end luxury boutique. But this display of grandness is nothing more than an illusion, in which H&M tries to enchant costumers by making them feel special, as they can shop in a designer boutique where the prices are not corresponding normal designer prices.

Having analyzed reality in the form of three sale events the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the special designer collections sold at H&M, the table below visualizes what theoretical mechanisms are present during the three mentioned sale events and contribute to mass buy hysteria during as well as the differences and similarities between different events.

Table 1: characteristics of the world of fiction and reality

	Confessions of a Shopaholic	A Fun Fair behind the Dikes	DDD	Maffe Marathon	H&M designer collections
Naomi Klein: 'No Logo'	X	X	X	X	X
McDonaldization:	-	-	-	X	X
Spectacle:	X	X	X	X	X
Extravaganza:	X	X	X	X	X
Hyper consumption:	X	X	X	X	X

What do consumers say?

In order to gain insight into the personal motives of people on why, or why not, they attend sale events and perhaps engage in psychical contact with other shoppers. A total of ten interviews have been conducted, subdivided between seven females and three males. The characteristics of the respondents can be seen in table 2.

The names of the respondents have been altered to assure their privacy as some of the respondents requested. Also, some of the participants did not want to state their actual age, so their age is given in an interval. The table below also shows the motives of respondents to participate in sale events. Their motives are presented with abbreviations. There are four different shortenings: DO, attending the event as part of a day out; C, attending the sale event out of curiosity; GD, attending the sale event browsing for a good deal without a particular deal in mind; SD, attending the sale event for a special deal.

Table 2: Characteristics of respondents

Name	Gender	Age	Attending	Motives
Paige	F	18-25	No	-
Joanna	F	45>	Yes	DO, C
Roman	M	25-35	Yes	GD
Jane	F	18-25	No	–
Felicia	F	18-25	Yes	SD
Dexter	M	18-25	Yes	SD
Celine	F	25-35	Yes	DO
Sabrina	M	25-35	Yes	GD
Ryan	M	25-35	Yes	SD
Audrey	F	18-25	Yes	SD

To attend or not to attend, that is the question

All of the respondents gave different motives whether or not to attend sale events such as the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and de special designer collections at H&M. Based on the collected data, a distinction can be made between respondents who choose to attend sale events and respondents who choose not to.

I say yes to sale events!

There were eight respondents who have said that they have attended the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and/or the special H&M designer sale. Their motives to do so can be divided into three categories: DO, GD and SD. Joanna is the only respondent who attended the most recent Drie Dwaze Dagen as part of a day out:

Joanna: ‘I always do research for these sale events, but that time there wasn’t anything of interest for me. So, I still decided to go, but just for pleasure, not business.’

So Joanna did do research prior to the event, but found that there were no items that catered to her then desire. Despite this, she still decided to go which is an interesting note. Why would you still go to an event if there is nothing for you there. When asked this question Joanna replied with the following answer:

Joanna: ‘(...) it was out of curiosity (...)’

Joanna is the only respondent whose motives for attending the Drie Dwaze Dagen can be put in the category of a day out and out of curiosity.

The second category of respondents who attend these sale events can be placed in the group of attending sale events looking for a good deal. There is a difference between going for a good deal and going for a special deal, which is the third category, as Roman points out:

Roman: 'Checking for a good deal on certain clothing products. No specific deal in mind. Should there be something interesting, then it would be a plus. If not, no harm done.'

How different is his approach to that from Felicia and Audrey who both attended the Drie Dwaze Dagen in hopes of scoring a specific item on sale:

Audrey: 'I did research prior to the Drie Dwaze Dagen. Flipping through their folder and such. I circled everything I wanted not knowing if I would get it, but still. I really had my eyes set on Estee Lauder mascara and everything from Rituals. I use them anyways and they don't go on sale in like ever! So those were my main focus point.'

Audrey mentioned that she attended the Drie Dwaze Dagen mainly because items that she normally uses, were on sale. Buying something for a reduced price that you would normally use, is an added bonus. Felicia on the other hand also attended the Drie Dwaze Dagen in search for her specified deal, however she ended up with much more products, even ones that she never used before:

Felicia: 'The last time I was there I bought more products than I had in mind.'

When asked why she ended up buying more products than she originally came in for, she replied:

Felicia: 'Well...o whatever! I am not ashamed to say it. I bought more because, some that I didn't even needed because it was on sale and I liked the price. Yes, I am that person!'

For Felicia, the fact that she bought more than she intended to can be traced back to the fact of the large discounts that were offered. Reductions are indeed a factor in buying more products than upfront calculated.

How far are you willing to go?

Mass buy hysteria often is part of these sale events. But what do respondents say when asked if they ever participated in physical contact with other consumers, in order to get a certain product? The eight respondents who have said they attend these sale events all denied that they had ever been part of an

abusive mob. They have however witnessed such physical violence during sale events, as Joanna recalls:

Joanna: 'I remember going to the very first Drie Dwaze Dagen and I saw posh ladies fight over a silk blouse. I was shocked and disconcerted that I just left and never came back for the remaining two days.'

Celine also recalls a similar incident at the H&M designer sales:

Celine: 'I went to one of the very first H&M special collection. I think it was by Victor & Rolf. It was absolute madness. Women went mad. No one tried anything on so I guess more than half of them didn't even have the right size. But I guess that is normal. There is no way you can look for your size without being pushed to the ground. I was just in awe. I didn't buy anything. I think I was in absolute shock.'

The sight of a large crowd who run amok during these sale events fighting over products is a reason for Joanna as well as Celine to leave the store in a state of shock. They could not believe what was happening in front of them. For Joanna, being the witness of a fight resulted in her not coming back for the remaining two days of the Drie Dwaze Dagen. Had she not been an observer of physical abusive, she would have returned the following days.

The effect of the created show

As mentioned in the introduction, sale events like the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the H&M designer sales are only available during a certain time span. After these events the stores return to their normal setup. When asked if respondents notice the different set up of the stores during these events, they all concurred. Sabrina gave the following answer specially concerning the Drie Dwaze Dagen:

Sabrina: 'At these sale events, the employees are dressed differently. More festive. There is this weird guy, who I call a ladies speaker, who is walking around with a microphone and he wants to make sure that you are aware of extra deals that only last for 15 minutes. Talk about a time crunch. And there is life music. The outside of the building is also decorated with flags.'

Audrey also noticed the different setup of the store, only in a more minimalist matter than Sabrina:

Audrey: 'I don't even notice all the extras that go on in the store. I only see the bags and the flags. But who doesn't? When I'm inside a just go straight for the stuff I want and be on my way. In and out.'

When asked if these special decorations add to their feeling of a different world where they are buying more things than usual, Sabrina gives the following answer:

Sabrina: '(...) I do like music, extra festivities, but it does not seduce me to buy more products. I am always careful when it comes to spending money.'

For Sabrina, the fact that these stores look different during sale events is noticeable, but the special setup during these days is not a trigger for her to buy more products, as she is always conscious when it comes to spending money. Sabrina also added that it is probably because of her personality that she is immune to these persuasions.

Where is everyone?

As mentioned earlier, special sale events attract a lot of people for different reasons, as mentioned earlier. Some of the respondents however, mentioned that when they were at the last H&M and the Drie Dwaze Dagen, but didn't see an overcrowded store. In Ryan's opinion this all has to do with the internet:

Ryan: '(...) that's what the internet is for. In the comfort of your own home, with a cup of tea. But I must add that it is more difficult with shoes and clothes. You just want to feel them and try them on. But everything else click, click, click and buy online, if the website is not out of order. That happens sometimes.'

There is a shift perceptible from buying in stores during these events towards and buying product online in the comfort of your own home. That is not to say that mass buy hysteria is not extinguished, it is only less tangible. Ryan points out however that it is sometimes difficult to buy everything online as certain products need to be tried on, because you cannot judge the fitting by just looking at a picture.

Roman and Joanna also mentioned that when they visited the Bijenkorf, during the Drie Dwaze Dagen en the Maffe Marathon respectively, the store was somewhat more crowded than usual, but not packed to the masses. Roman has his own explanation for his observation:

Roman: 'I was not there during 'prime time' though.'

According to the data collected from the respondents, the lack of mass buy hysteria that some respondents mentioned can be explained by two factors: firstly, a lot of shopping during these events happens online. That is not to say that mass buy hysteria no longer exists. It just happens on another level where it is not visible for everyone, just for internet employees who manage the stream of data information. Secondly, there are different time periods during which it is more crowded than during other periods. Roman mentioned this in his interview. He went to the Drie Dwaze Dagen at the end of the day, because he had to work during the day.

All the respondents who have said that they go to the three most well known sale events in the Netherlands, do so for a specific reason. To browse for a good deal, a specific deal or treating themselves to a day out. According to Ritzer (2005), companies use spectacle and extravaganza to lure more consumers in and persuade them to buy more. This however does not stem from these respondents. They acknowledge the fact that stores have a different interior as well as exterior during these events, but in most cases it did not persuade them to buy more and different products. Felicia is the only one who mentioned that she bought more during the Drie Dwaze Dagen, as there were a lot of items with reduced prices that seemed interesting to her. Some of the respondents also mentioned that when they visited the store, it was not packed with the expected amount of people. Ryan argues that this has to do with the fact that a lot of people do their shopping online these days. In Roman's opinion it is due to the fact that there are 'prime times' during these events in time periods where it is quieter.

Rather Not!

Paige and Jane are the only two respondents who said that they didn't partake in any sale event. Paige said the following about her personal motives not to attend the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the Maffe Marathon:

Paige: '(...) I don't need or want the items that are on sale.'

It is clear that Paige does not go to sale events as the products that are offered during those particular events do not match her personal interest. When asked if there were any other reasons for her not to attend these sale she mentioned the following:

Paige: 'I also don't want to go shopping in an overcrowded store as I need peace and quiet.'

For Paige, not attending sale events is a combination of a lack of demand and overactive other participants. She is not the only one mentioning her aversion of shopping in large crowds. Jane also mentioned her similar distaste of shopping during sale events:

Jane: 'I don't like mass shopping of any kind, especially in crowds.'

Jane mentioned that she does not like to shop in large crowds as she does not think it is worth her time, instead opting to put her energy into activities that she does like:

Jane: 'On these days of crazy shopping, I would rather be spending quality time with my family and friends than in a packed shopping center buying stuff that I don't really need.'

Again, just as Paige mentioned, Jane too has no desire to walk around a shopping centre looking for and buying products that she does not need. When asked if they ever went to the special designer collections sold at H&M, both again replied that they have never attended. But besides not willing to shop in large crowds, both Paige and Jane give another reason for why they do not want to part take in the H&M designer sales:

Paige: '(...) the items are so well known because of the media (magazines, tv, internet), and that makes me feel like the items are "common" and go out of style quickly.'

The fact that the designer collections at H&M are so highly advertised makes them well known and attractive to a large group of people. And that is something Paige does not like. She likes to wear clothes that are not sold in masses, because it shows her individual personality by wearing clothes not a lot of people have. She finds it important not to blend in with the masses and in her opinion that is exactly what these H&M designer collections do. Because there are only a limited amount of different designs within each collection and they are often so outspoken, it is easily spotted who wears a designer piece especially designed for the H&M masses. Paige would rather wear clothes were it is not visible where they came from, choosing to be unique in her choice of clothing. Just as Paige mentioned to want her clothes to be different from the masses, Jane recalls a similar desire as she too feels like the H&M garments are made only for the masses, despite liking some of the designs:

Jane: 'I do like seeing some of the fashions at H&M but I find that they often produce huge amounts of clothing that turns everyone into clones.'

Instead of turning into a 'clone', Jane opts to shop at 'vintage stores, thrift shops and other small scale establishments' as it gives her the opportunity to buy one of a kind pieces. The choice not to shop in large establishments also has ethical reasons for Jane:

Jane: '(...) it's better for the environment and more economical (...).'

Jane acknowledges that the collections offered by H&M through their special designer pieces are sometimes likeable, but the fact that the production process of these garments is not known, possibly being damaging to nature, is a reason for Jane to only shop for products, clothes, that have a label that says that the piece is made from organic cotton or something else that states that during the making of these products, no harm was done to the environment.

Both Paige and Jane have argued that they do not like to shop during sale events, their main reasons labeling these events as too crowded and often not offering products that they are interesting in. For Jane, ethical reason also play part in her choice not to attend sale events that are on a large scale. The creation of a sale events, with the usage of spectacle and extravaganza, is nothing more than a masked

attempt to lure people in and try to let them consume (Ritzer, 2005). This does not however effect the choice of both Jane and Paige, as their personal believes are stronger than the attraction of these events.

Theoretical implications: what do respondents say?

Having interviewed ten respondents and gaining insight into their personal motives such as the reasons for attending Dutch sale events and how far they are willing to go for certain deals.

Ritzer (2005) argued that companies use spectacle and extravaganza to create an enchanted world, away from the day to day rationality, in hopes of extra consumption by consumers. The outcome of the interviews showed that, although the respondents notice the different set up of stores during the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the special H&M designer collections, it does not persuade them to buy more products. As Felicia pointed out, she only bought more products because the reduced prices. The fact that consumers stipulate that the spectacle and extravaganza surrounding these events do not contribute to mass buy hysteria in an excessive way, shows that the putting on of a show does, perhaps lure people in, but does not persuade them to buy more.

In part 2 of this thesis, where the theoretical framework is presented, it was discussed that extreme consumer behavior during sale events can result in hyper consumption and, taking it a step further, oniomania. The short lived duration of these sale events lead to a feeling of moral panic as there is a threat of not having to opportunity to purchase items during the specified time of these sales. Joanna pointed out that the ladies speaker who announces deals every once in a while, that last for only fifteen minutes, creates a time frame in which consumers have the ability to snag up an item for an even more reduced price. This created time frame results in a feeling of moral panic where the enemy is not being able to buy the wanted items, because it has sold out due to various reasons such as the mass buy hysteria from other customers.

Putting it all together

Having collected data using two different research methods, observations during the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the H&M special designer sales, and interviews with respondents several things can be summarized.

An altered version of reality

In the film Confessions of a Shopaholic, the mass buy hysteria during sale events can be explained by the fact that in fashion stated New York, where image is everything, a sample sale which sells designer items against reduced prices. As the main character mentions in the film, she wants to work at a fashion magazine. A part of functioning within the world of fashion means that her appearance ,her clothes in particular, need to be up to par with the magazine is expecting, namely designer brands.

Because she is not financially eligible for buying these expensive brands, the sample sale event is a positive outcome as it gives her the option of buying her wanted designer items for less. And with her, a large number of fellow New York women. In the film the motives of these women are not made known, but if they are modeled after the same personality as the main character, it is understandable that a mass buy hysteria is seen at this sample sale.

The documentary A Fun Fair behind the Dikes

A Fun Fair behind the Dikes by Michiel van Erp offers an insight look into the Netherlands as an amusement park, complete with rides. It is particularly interesting to have an insight look into the methods stores and companies use in order to lure consumers in. They use 'specialized deals', such as buy two, get one for free, to trick consumers into believing that they are getting an item for free as they know that is always profitable. Putting on a show seems designed to make it all seem to be about the consumers. This is however not the case, as it is designed for economical reasons to attract consumers.

Observations and interviews

The second and third stage of collecting was done by observing the three most well known sale events in the Netherlands, the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the H&M designer sales and in-depth interviews with respondents. In the introduction, several examples of mass buy hysteria were being mentioned. Large crowds of people standing in front of the doors in hopes of being able to buy their desired product(s). When doors do finally open, chaos immediately erupts as everyone is trying their best to get inside, all at the same time. This vision however has not been observed at the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the H&M special designer sales as well as an non outcome of the in depth interviews. Although it was crowded at all three events, and there was an occasional push and shove, scenes of earlier H&M sales were a mob of costumers fought their way to several racks of clothes. The reason for the lack of mass buy hysteria during the H&M designer sales is that the hysteria is being managed. Due to experience from the previous years, H&M introduced a system in 2010 that made it only possible for fifteen shoppers at a time to shop in the specialized area where the designer items were on display. The introduction of this system resulted in a lack of mass buy hysteria, as there were rules to which to obey.

Mass buy hysteria during the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the Maffe Marathon was seen especially at the perfume department where women were seen who bought several boxes of the same perfume. One of the respondents also said that during these events, she bought more products, particularly for price reasons, not really caring if she had ever used it before. No fights or other expressive outcomes of physical abuse were noted. None of the respondents had ever engaged in a physical altercation with other customers in order to score an item.

The interviews especially made it clear that most of the respondents who said to attend these sale events, mentioned that during their visit, the population within the store was lower than they expected. One respondent said that this has to do with the rise of online shopping as another said that it probably was, because there are times when the store is less crowded due to the fact that people still have to work.

Another interesting thing that was concluded from the interviews is that although respondents notice the fact that during these events, stores are decorated and other festivities are being organized around these events, it does not persuade them into buying more products. One respondent even mentioned that although she acknowledges the differences in the store, her personality is so, that that she is always careful when it comes to spending money.

The usage of internet and social media

It has become clear from the observations of the websites, Facebook- and Twitter page of the Bijenkorf and H&M that both use social media in order to built eagerness in the weeks prior to the Drie Dwaze Dagen, The Maffe Marathon and the H&M designer sales. The Bijenkorf used Facebook and Twitter to give visitors the opportunity to play games such as a virtual scavenger hunt in which participants can win gift cards that can be spend during the Drie Dwaze Dagen and the Maffe Marathon. H&M used Facebook and Twitter to leak sneak peeks of the Lanvin collection to the world. What is interesting to see is that when the day of the sale arrived, for both the Bijenkorf as well as the H&M, the online world was used to give customers the opportunity to buy their products online. The event was build up using Facebook and Twitter and stretched to the web shops of the Bijenkorf and H&M respectively making it a kind of marketing channel. As was clear from the online observations it sometimes happened that web sites of the Bijenkorf and H&M were unavailable due to the large number of consumers who wanted to reach the website. This could indicate that mass buy hysteria is not only restricted to the real-life world, but that there has been a shift towards the online world.

5 Conclusion: the explanation of mass buy hysteria

The question that this thesis was set out to answer is the following: *'how can mass buy hysteria during sale events be explained?* Based on the film *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, the documentary *A Fun Fair behind the Dykes*, observations during three well known Dutch sale events and in-depth interviews with respondents, mass buy hysteria can be explained by the marked down prices that are offered on products during these events. Whether or not consumers attend sale events for a good deal or a specific deal, they want the best reduced price possible. In most cases, it is not important if the product was ever bought before, as it is only the product price ratio that is important. With the importance of this product price ratio, brands that have been used before, because they are too expensive, suddenly come within the financial reach of consumers. This results into being the product, and usually more than one

as was the case during the Drie Dwaze Dagen at the perfume department. Based on the product-price ratio, and the knowledge that consumers are likely to buy more expensive products when they are on sale, the product price ratio can be completed with a certain brand, making it the product-brand-price ratio. Having added the brand concept into the equation, it is understandable that customers are willing to engage in physical altercations with other consumers in order to gain their wanted item for the price they want to pay for it. Although this has not been an outcome of the interviews with the respondents, it was visible during the film *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, as well as the real-life observations. During the observations and the interviews it became clear that mass buy hysteria is an outcome of moral panic amongst consumers. As was seen during an observation at the Bijenkorf, during the Drie Dwaze Dagen, when there is a certain time period in which a product is marked down an extra few percents, customers were running towards the rack and grabbing everything that they could. The panic came from the fear of not wanting to miss out on the opportunity of owning the product.

Theoretical implications

Ritzer (2005) argues that companies, stores, use spectacle and extravaganza to create an enchanted world where everything goes and anything is possible. In the case of the three attended sale events, it has been made clear that these three stores also use spectacle and extravaganza to lure consumers in. Respondents have mentioned that they are aware of the differences in exterior and interior of the stores during these events when compared to the normal set up. Asking if this difference in set up makes respondent want to buy more, most of them give a negative answer and only a single respondent acknowledges that being at a sale events, enlightens a fire within her that makes her want to buy more products. An outcome of this research, which is not mentioned by Ritzer (2005), and is therefore his blind spot, is the usage of internet and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Not only do stores turn to spectacle and extravaganza in real-life, they also try to create spectacle and extravaganza in an online world. Facebook and Twitter are used to build up anticipation prior to the event and when the event starts, shift towards their web world to sell their items.

In the theoretical framework, it was discussed that hyper consumption could be an outcome of extreme consumer behavior. The short duration of sale events leads to moral panic as there is only a certain period of time in which consumers can consume the items on sale. The moral panic due to a certain time period was visible during the Drie Dwaze Dagen and was also mentioned by one of the respondents. Perhaps moral panic is more of an outcome of reduced prices than it is of spectacle and extravaganza.

Discussion

This research has been exploratory as there was, to my knowledge, no previous research on mass buy hysteria during sale events. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, some suggestions can be made:

Firstly, although having visited the Drie Dwaze Dagen, the Maffe Marathon and the H&M designer sales, I was always present at the beginning of the event for a maximum of ninety to a hundred and twenty minutes. Being at these events for a few hours in the morning could have led to missing possible mass buy hysteria during later hours. This could have led to a somewhat different conclusion than being at these events from opening to closing.

Secondly, interviews have been held with respondents from my own social circle, and knowing most of them had at some point visited one of these events, it could have led to a different outcome if consumers who attended these events were directly questioned about their motives for coming to the events and their behavior, on different levels, during these events.

Thirdly, the view the companies have regarding these sale events are missing. I have not spoken to anyone from the Bijenkorf or the H&M, but retrieved their opinions about these sale events from interviews. Interviews with people who actually design these events could have been a contribution to this research as it would allow me to answer the questioned I wanted answered in order to gain insight information as well as add another dimension. It must be stated however that it would have been difficult as the outcome of many read interviews was that, especially the Bijenkorf, could not say anything the turnover of their events.

Future research

This study is an explorative one meaning that it can be used as a base for further research. Mentioned previously, future research can be done on mass buy hysteria including the online web shop that companies always have for these special events. According to Marketing tribune, an online marketing magazine, the number of consumers who have visited the Drie Dwaze Dagen website during the year 2009, has grown towards an astonishing one and a half million single visitors. Although there is no insight into the fact if all these visitors bought something, it would be a possible explanation for the lack of large number of people in the stores. Future research could be a combination between in store mass buy hysteria and online mass buy hysteria. Future research can also be done on the differences between men and women during these sale events. It became clear that during the H&M designer sale only women who wanted to shop needed to follow the rules. There were no rules for the men's department. Apparently, stores also calculate that women are often the one who attend these events and need protection from themselves in the form of rules. It also became clear that during the Drie Dwaze Dagen, women searching through the cases at the men's department. This indicated that they are shopping for their significant other. It would be interesting to say if men do not like sale events or they do, but just have a different interest in products. A third future research direction could be a comparative study between the already mentioned Dutch sale events on the one hand and the Boxing Day sales and Black Friday on the other hand. What are the differences between these events and what

are the similarities? A fourth future research project has a more psychological approach. In her interview, Sabrina said that she is immune to spectacle and extravaganza due to her personality. It would be an interesting research to see if some people or groups are more or less subjective to the putting on of a show by stores.

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Appendix I

Topic list

- **Personal characteristics**

- Name
- Age
- Gender

- **Attending sale events**

- Which events
- Motives (whether or no attending)
- Expectations
- Hyper consumption
- Popular products
- Satisfaction
- Mass hysteria

- **Spectacle and extravaganza**

- Store set up
- Differences in set up during sale events and normal days