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# Effects of Canadian Recession on University Students' Buying Behavior

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# Effects of Canadian Recession on University Students' Buying Behavior

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The global economic crisis in 2008, which impacted almost all countries, is seen by many analysts as the worst and deepest downturn in the post-Second World War period. The effects have been clearly felt in the United States as well as in Europe and Latin America. Parts of Asia and Africa, still struggling to recover from the 1990s financial storm, are facing real challenges following the 2008 global economic crisis (Elsby et al., 2010; Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2006). Some published studies argue that Canada has had negligible levels of home foreclosures, few bankruptcies, and lower unemployment rates, which were the main

consequences of the financial crisis affecting the United States. There is a little doubt the U.S. downturn infected Canada, where the annual GDP growth fell sharply to 0.5% in 2009 (Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada, 2009).

Despite these facts, there is a general perception by Canadian consumers that the worst has not yet been experienced and there is a need to control expenses and to budget daily purchases. According to Harris (2011), Canadian consumers have cut their home entertainment budgets, spent less money on new clothing, ordered fewer takeout meals, and opted for cheaper grocery brands. Canadians interviewed during a study by McDaniel et al. (2013) expressed worries about their later years in light of the recent economic situation. The economic recession has created huge uncertainty and insecurity around retirement preparedness as well as employment security (McDaniel et al., 2013).

Defined as "the acquisition, consumption and disposition of products, services, time and ideas by decision making" (Jacoby et al., 1998, p. 320), consumer behavior is the most elemental basis for any business organization and is of a great importance and significance for a successful marketing practice and financial prosperity. However, consumer purchasing behavior is not constant and can vary greatly with a very intricate trend. As a result of the level of intricacy of the process of consumer buying, the trend is very difficult to predict (Mansoor & Jalal, 2011).

Typically, consumer buying behavior takes many forms as consumers' choices can vary depending on a broad set of internal factors, such as earnings and demographics, as well as social and cultural factors. Beside these basic influential internal factors, there is also a set of external factors formed by external circumstances in the environment surrounding the consumer. Consumer behavior therefore is a combination of customer buying awareness combined with external motivators that result in a change in consumer buying behavior. External influence on internal community is a common financial problem shared by economies around the globe (Mansoor & Jalal, 2011). Changes in buyers' habits and consumer behavior due to the recent financial crisis are not very well understood within the Canadian market context. Information is limited to a few TV interviews and newspaper articles. The reason behind this knowledge gap can be related to

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the fact that the financial crisis in 2008 has not been greatly affected the Canadian economy in comparison to the neighboring U.S. markets and economic conditions. However, there seems to be a unique perception from Canadians that there is more than just a recession underway. Hence, there is a possibility of a longer lasting fundamental attitudinal shift in consumer values and habits than ever before experienced. Therefore, it is important to look into the period of recession as a turning point in our perceptions of consumer behavior. This study aims to highlight the major shifts in consumer behavior and buying habit changes among Canadian university students. The latest financial downturn had a great influence on the economic and social aspects of consumers in almost all countries. Different purchasing patterns and buying behaviors have been noticed through different levels of economies around the world. Canada is no exception. This paper highlights the impact of the recent global financial crisis on Canadian university students' purchasing behavior, investigating consumers' awareness and perception of this problem and examining whether their consumption behavior, buying habits, and trends have changed as a result. Being able to understand trends in consumer behavior under different circumstances is crucial for any business organization and of great importance for a successful marketing practice and financial prosperity. It is also important for individuals to be aware of the trend of consumers' behavior and changes to be able to make informed decisions on what to expect to purchase that suits current market conditions, especially during this era of economic uncertainty following the global financial storm and the financial burdens usually facing university students.

## II. NULL HYPOTHESIS

- a) Canadian university students are not aware of the financial crisis that caused the recent national recession and its effects on consumption, inflation, and Canada's economy.
- b) Canadian students' consumer behavior has not changed as a result and there is no increased tendency to purchase inexpensive products/services, no shift from luxury items to essentials, and no change in purchasing trends from large quantities to small quantities for saving purposes.

## III. METHODOLOGY

To nullify the study hypotheses in order to understand the relationship between the global financial crisis and university students' buying behavior in Canada since the financial crisis storm hit global markets, the researcher collected data by distributing a questionnaire to get a more in-depth perspective on students' consuming behavior. Initially, the researcher

analyzed and differentiated the factors that impacted the Canadian university level students' behavior using the survey results. Once those variables were determined, then the researcher further analyzed the results of the questionnaire to understand and discover the relationship between these factors and the global financial crisis.

A quantitative method was adopted in the form of a questionnaire designed and distributed in a survey format as a mean of collecting data from a randomly selected sample. In order to fully understand consumers' perspectives, open-ended questions were posed to student consumers as part of the survey. This is important to enable consumers to express their views in a convenient, detailed, and effective way. Respondents were recruited from the city of Kingston, which is located between Toronto (known as the financial city of Canada) and Ottawa (the capital city of Canada); it is therefore believed to be fairly representative of the effect of the financial crisis on Canadian consumers. To verify the survey results, another set of the questionnaire was distributed to a group of students sampled at Lakehead University in the city of Thunder Bay, located in northern Ontario. These data results were compared to the results from the sample data obtained in Kingston.

## IV. STUDY LOCATION, POPULATION AND SAMPLE DETERMINATION

Situated on the shores of Lake Ontario near the entrance to the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Thousand Islands, and the Rideau Canal, the City of Kingston has a metropolitan area population nearing 150,000. With approximately 23,000 students attending Queen's University, the student population is a major demographic feature, as the majority of the rest of the population is comprised of senior citizens who have retired from different Canadian cities and provinces. For this reason and because students' limited financial options make them more vulnerable to changing purchase patterns following a financial crisis, the population for this study was selected to be Queen's University students. A stratified sampling method was adopted by grouping students into two categories: undergraduate students and postgraduate students. This helped increase understanding the variation of income effects on the purchasing behavior of the population. The sample size was determined using 5% confidence interval and 95% confidence level for a sample size calculated as 378, using the following statistical formula corrected for a finite population, where Z is 1.96 for a confidence level of 95%, P is the percentage picking a choice/participating (0.5 used for calculating sample size), and C is the confidence interval:

$$\text{Sample Size} = Z^2 \cdot P \cdot (1-P) / C^2$$

In order to verify the data and results obtained, another sample population was considered of Lakehead University students. Following a similar method for calculating the sample size, the questionnaire was distributed electronically to students at Lakehead University for additional data to improve the understanding of the research dilemma and to provide a basis for comparing results obtained through the sampled population at Queen's University.

Lakehead University is a public research university with a main campus located in Thunder Bay and about 7000 students attending undergraduate and postgraduate programs on a full-time basis. This is about one-third of the population at Queen's University. Similar to other Ontario public- and government-funded universities, most of students at Lakehead University and Queen's University receive government support and research funds as financial support for postgraduate studies.

## V. CONSUMERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire started with a brief presentation of the researcher to allow the respondents to know the researcher and understand the reason behind the study. Study purpose was also explained briefly, highlighting that it was very useful and appreciated to receive feedback and as many answers as possible from respondents, and finally a message of thanks to everyone who contributed was included as a mean of appreciating their time answering the questionnaire. This brief presentation aimed to familiarize the respondents with the researcher's background, since many, if not all, did not know the researcher or the study being conducted. It was also expected that including this message would increase the rate of responses, as respondents would feel that their time was valued and their contribution was appreciated. This non-economic reward seemed to be necessary to emotionally touch the respondents for them to feel the importance of completing the survey. It is described as the "use of multiple motivational features in compatible and mutually supportive ways to encourage high quantity and quality of response to the surveyor's request" (Dillman et al., 2009, p. 16). The brief presentation is followed by a structured questionnaire composed of closed-ended as well as some open-ended questions, allowing consumers to express their views and further communicate their opinions after responding to the closed-ended questions.

To target only those whose responses will be relevant, the first question posed in the survey determined if the respondent was in charge of shopping. Some students shop in groups, while others tend to shop individually, taking turns every month. It is therefore important to recognize that the responses

were from the person who was responsible for shopping at the time of the survey. Early questions cover demographic information, such as age and gender, to determine the profile of each respondent; other questions cover annual earnings, sources of income or support provided to students, and monthly expenses as well as other information with regards to buying patterns, such as purchasing frequency, preferred ways to look for product information, brand loyalty, product preferences, and finally current and future economic situations (such as savings or reduction in consumption and if a different approach was adopted following the financial crisis). The complete questionnaire is presented as Appendix A.

## VI. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### a) *Questionnaire Participation*

The questionnaire was distributed to satisfy the sample size, calculated as 378 individuals attending Queen's University and 365 students at Lakehead University, all of who responded by accepting to complete the survey. The number of respondents who responded to the questionnaire at Queen's University was more than 378 when considering the pilot survey outcome. This demonstrated that people were really interested in participating in this study. Of approximately 400 distributed questionnaires, 380 responded, among which 378 were utilized for further analysis and the two uncompleted copies were excluded. The support of the Queen's University Students' Union in distributing the survey to cover the selected sample size and encouraging students to participate was very appreciated. Electronic mail addresses of students were also obtained through the Lakehead University Student Union, which provided support by speaking to students until the calculated sample size was obtained. The survey started with a question to determine whether the respondent would be able to provide the information required in an accurate way. People who were not in charge of shopping as well as students who lived in a house with their parents were eliminated. It is expected that parents likely share the responsibility for shopping with the student. In other words, the possibility that a student living away from their parents will be solely responsible for shopping is higher. The 378 sample size obtained from the Queen's University students' population as well as the 365 respondents from Lakehead University who successfully responded were all eligible and satisfied these requirements and therefore were taken for further analyses.

### b) *Demographics and Personal Factors*

The size of the sample population recruited at Queen's University was 378 respondents who were living in Kingston, Ontario and attending Queen's University and were of the following ethnic backgrounds: 48% Caucasian, 15% Chinese, 14% Black, 14% Arab,

and 9% Aboriginal Canadians. As was expected, the majority of respondents were North American Caucasian students. In regards to gender of the respondents, 63% were female and 37% were male. In absolute figures, 140 men and 238 women answered the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the sample population recruited from Lakehead University showed slightly lower diversity in regards to ethnic groups. With 56% Caucasian, 12% Chinese, 8% Black, 6% Arab, and 18% Aboriginal, it is clear that Lakehead University's population has a greater percentage of White and Aboriginal students compared to Queen's University. The gender of the respondents was almost identical to that at Queen's University, with 64% female respondents and 36% male.

To better determine the profile of the respondents, it was useful to group them in relation to age. It is believed in the literature that buying behavior will be dependent on consumers' age, as young generations tend to purchase cheaper products or services than their progenitors. With the exception of 4% of the sample size who were between 36 and 40 years old comprising 15 respondents, the remainder of participants at Queen's University all ranged in age from 21 to 35 years old, with 40% being between 21 and 25 years old comprising 151 respondents, 30% being between 26 and 30 years old comprising 114 respondents, and finally 26% being between 31 and 35 years old comprising 98 respondents. None of the respondents were below 20 or above 40 years old. These results matched the data obtained from Lakehead University, with the majority of participants' ages falling between 21 and 35 years and only about 3%, comprising 11 respondents of the sample size, falling between 36 and 40 years old. As was the case of Queen's University students, none of the participants from Lakehead University were below 20 or above 40 years old.

Out of the 378 participants at Queen's University, 70% were single or never married, 15% were separated or divorced, 10% were living together as a couple with no children, and 5% were married. This was typical for a student community, therefore suiting the purpose of the study. Among those participants, and diversifying the sample population, there were respondents from different religious beliefs. Of the respondents, 40% were Christian, 20% were atheist, 22% were Muslim, 10% were Buddhist, and 8% were Hindu. The majority of the participants were undergraduate students comprising 257 students, representing 68% of the sample. The remainder of the participants, 121 students, representing 32% of the sample size were postgraduate students, among which 30 students were at the PhD level and 91 were at the Master's level.

Likewise, out of the 365 participants from Lakehead University, 80% were single or never married

comprising 292 participants, 14% were separated or divorced, and the remaining 6% comprising 22 students were married. Unlike the sampled community at Queen's University, no participants at Lakehead University fell into the category of living together. Generally, these marital statuses matched to a large degree the situation found at Queen's University, also suiting the purpose of the study. The religious groups of the sampled community at Lakehead University were also comparable to those at Queen's University. The majority of respondents at Lakehead University were Christian with 46% comprising 168 participants, 23% were atheist comprising 84 participants, 17% were Muslim comprising 62 participants, 8% were Buddhist, and finally 6% were Hindu, totaling 51 participants for the latter two groups. The majority of the participants at Lakehead University were also undergraduate degree students with 259 students representing 71% of the sample size. The remaining 106 postgraduate degree students included 24 students at the PhD level and 82 students at the Master's level.

It is necessary to know the number of people living with each respondent, as people who live alone do not normally have similar purchasing patterns compared to students living together. Even married students living together will behave differently if they have children compared to couples without children. It is important therefore to have knowledge about the size of household of respondents and the number of children in the case of married students who represented 5% and the 6% of the sample size at Queen's University and Lakehead University, respectively. The majority of the students at Queen's University lived in groups of 4 students, with 257 of the respondents comprising 68% of the sample size. The rest either lived in Queen's University students' housing who were 102 of the respondents comprising 27% of the sample size, or were married couples with 19 of the respondents comprising 5% of the sample size. Those households consisting of two married members were couples with children were 5% of the sample size. The number of children however was not considered, as it is assumed to have minimal impact on the purchasing behavior of consumers. This is also expected to have minimal effect on the results because of the small number of those respondents.

On average, consumers went shopping once or more than once per week, represented by 25% of respondents in each case, which constitutes 189 of the respondents. The lowest percent recorded for households to go shopping was once per month, which was 5% of the respondents. The remaining respondents went shopping approximately twice or three times a month were 170 respondents, which is 45% of the responses.

Correspondingly, the majority of the students at Lakehead University lived in groups of 4 students with

259 of the respondents comprising 71% of the sample size confirmed so. The rest living in Lakehead University students' housing were 84 of the respondents comprising 23% of the sample size or were married with children comprising 22 of the respondents or 6% of the sample size. Similar to the findings at Queen's University, students at Lakehead University went shopping once or more than once per week were 26% of respondents in each case, which constitutes 190 of the total participants. The lowest percent recorded for households at Lakehead University to go shopping was once per month, which comprised only 6% of the respondents or 22 participants. The remaining respondents at Lakehead University were 153 participants comprising 42% revealed a similar shopping frequency compared to Queen's University of approximately twice or three times a month.

#### c) *Media, Economic and Social Factors*

Earning per year that consumers obtain is a very important factor to consider for understanding consumers' purchasing behavior. Usually, high-income people spend more than those with lower purchasing power. With the Canadian government support for research degrees, it is expected that postgraduate students have sufficient income to cover their needs. Undergraduate students also rely on their parents and families for financial support. Results show that on average, annual income of respondents was either \$30,000 with 55% of the participants confirming so; comprising 208 students or \$20,000 with 40% respondents; comprising 151 students. Few students reported earning \$40,000, those were 5% of the participants; comprising 19 students. No one reported income above \$40,000 or lower than \$10,000. The results obtained from students at Lakehead University were similar to those obtained at Queen's University with 60% of participants at Lakehead University; comprising 219 students reported annual incomes of \$30,000 while 37% of participants; comprising 135 students reported annual incomes of \$20,000. The remaining 3% of respondents were 11 students reported incomes of \$40,000, and no respondents having income above \$40,000 or below \$10,000.

According to the questionnaire results obtained at Queen's University, 60% of consumers, comprising 227 participants, considered the opinions of their family and friends when it comes to purchasing products or services, while the remaining 40% of respondents; 151 participants; were either neutral or disagreed that friends and family influenced their buying decision. This is relatively similar to respondents from Lakehead University, where 63% of participants; 230 students; revealed they take into account the opinions of their family and friends when deciding to purchase products or services. The remaining 37% of respondents comprising 135 students were either neutral or

disagreed about the influence of family and friends on their purchasing decisions. The majority of consumers at both sampled universities showed an interest in learning about products or services before deciding to purchase. Most of the respondents at Queen's University comprising 65%, representing 246 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they seek relevant information before deciding to purchase a product or a service, and only 5% indicated that they did not do so and the remaining 30% comprising 113 participants were neutral towards looking for information before making a decision to purchase a product or service.

This was also consistent with Lakehead University students' responses, where 71% of the respondents, indicating 259 participants, agreed or strongly agreed that they sought relevant information when deciding to purchase a product or service, and only 3% specifying 11 participants indicated that they did not do so. The remaining 26% comprising 95 participants showed neutral feeling towards looking for information during the purchasing decision process. The main source students used to seek relevant information about products or services was the Internet. With limited time available for students and the convenience of using the Internet on the campus, students at Queen's University mostly used the Internet to seek product or service relevant information with 80% of respondents comprising 302 participants confirming so and only 20% of respondents comprising 76 participants preferred store visits to seek information about a product or service. Browsing the Internet was also the preferred option for students at Lakehead University. Among the 365 participants, 60% confirmed preferring using the Internet while 73 participants constituting 20% of the sampled population preferred store visits to seek information about a product before making a purchasing decision. The remaining 20% of the sampled population sought information about a product or service through newspapers and distributed store flyers, a trend that was not found in the sampled population at Queen's University. This can be related to the availability of flyers, which are easy to distribute throughout a smaller campus area, such as at Lakehead University, compared to the large campus of Queen's University.

#### d) *Marketing Mix*

Marketing mix is defined as a tool used for marketing decision improvement and consists of the following "Four P's," (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Similar to students in most other nations, price is a very important factor for Canadian student consumers when buying a product or service. A total of 95% of the sampled population at Queen's University stated that price is a major factor that influences their purchasing decisions. A quite comparable percentage of 92% was also obtained from the sampled population at Lakehead

University. Other related product-factors included for the research were quality and brand as well as customer service and post-purchase service. The quality of the product or service was also rated as important as the price, with 90% of respondents at Queen's University selecting quality of the product or service as important and about 92% among Lakehead University respondents choosing the quality option as an important factor. Very few considered brand as a main contributor to their purchase decision comprising 10% of the sampled population at Queen's University and 12% at Lakehead University. For 65% of the sampled population size at Queen's University, customer service and post-purchase service were rated as important for purchasing behavior. Place and promotion were also considered as other factors specified by the respondents. At Lakehead University, however, only 51% of the sampled population rated customer service and post-purchase service as important factors to consider when purchasing a product or service. For slightly more than half of the participants with 58% of the total sample size, the accessibility of the products and services for purchase in the region of Queen's University campus was considered important, however, the rest of participants comprising 42% of the total sample size were more concerned with sales and seasonal promotions, including discounts, allowances, and end-of-year specials. That is almost consistent with Lakehead University participants' responses, where 63% of the total sampled population considered the accessibility of products and services within the region of Lakehead University campus as an important factor and the remaining 37% were more concerned with sales and seasonal promotions. In general, the results of the marketing mix demonstrated that almost all of the Four P's impacted the purchasing buying behavior of the university students. Deciding to purchase from store brands versus famous brands was not a big deal and the majority of respondents at Queen's University as well as Lakehead University were not concerned with this factor, however, the main concern was the four P's. This was evident by most of participants at Queen's University where 340 participants representing 90% of the sample size have chosen both store as well as famous brands, with a comment confirming both brands work well as long as it is a quality product and/or service at a reasonable price. A majority of the sampled population at Lakehead University comprising 91% have also confirmed no preference between store and famous brands as long as the product or service offered was of good quality at a reasonable price.

#### e) *Financial Crisis and Consumer Preferences*

The last sets of questions in the questionnaire were all related to whether respondents are concerned or not about the consequences of the financial crisis and the current Canadian economic situation. These

questions were proposed to collect facts about savings and consumption trends as well as trends associated with the behavior during the financial crisis. It is usually expected that economic concerns would impact individual buying behavior. Under more economic uncertainty conditions, the more money-driven people may be worried about their economic standings, leading to changing their buying behavior. This is reflected in the results during times of high levels of uncertainty, where 82% of respondents sampled at Queen's University were at least worried or very concerned because of the recent financial crisis, which is a clear signal of a possible change in buying behavior. The remaining 18% of the respondents were at least concerned. Concerns about uncertain financial conditions were also noticed among the population sampled at Lakehead University, where 89% of the respondents confirmed being worried or very worried because of the recent financial crisis. The remaining 11% of the respondents were at least concerned. For a student community, the financial crisis was expected to be of a great concern, knowing that tuition fees have been higher than usual in Canada during the last decade; limited financial support has been available; and uncertain futures in the job market await students following graduation, which is also potentially threatened by the financial crisis through lower employment rate.

To understand changing patterns of student consumers as a result of being concerned or worried about the financial crisis, participants were asked directly in multiple-choice questions if they had cut their expenditures to save or reduce consumption. Additional multiple-choice questions reconfirmed the trend of consumption by allowing respondents to describe their consumption after the financial crisis. It appears that Canadian students tended to save more as opposed to consume more since the financial crisis hit back in 2007. Among participants at Queen's University, 70% of the respondents confirmed their tendency to save more frequently comprising 265 of the participants, compared to the remaining 30%, who showed a tendency to have a mix of saving and consuming behavior totalling 113 of participants. A similar trend was noticed from respondents at Lakehead University, where 74% of the respondents totalling 270 participants confirmed a tendency to save more frequently compared to the remaining 26% comprising 95 participants, who tended to have a mix of saving and consuming. Further, the consumers at both universities not only choose to either consume or save more during the recession, they also thought about other options, such as not purchasing expensive items or postponing unnecessary purchases and spending less on entertainment. Despite this fact, it also appears that necessary expenditures were not affected, which is reflected by respondents not choosing to try to cut power, phone, and gas bills. After becoming aware of the financial crisis, the majority of

respondents confirmed they have either tended to postpone or ignore purchasing expensive items, spend less on entertainment, or a combination of both, while only 5% of the sample population at Queen's University, totalling about 19 respondents, and only 6% at Lakehead University, comprising about 22 respondents, revealed no change on their purchasing behavior and confirming that their consumption level remained the same as before the financial crisis. For the reconfirmation of the changing trend of purchasing pattern, most of the respondents at Queen's University revealed that they had either decreased or considerably decreased their consumption following the financial crisis with 359 of participants, comprising about 95% of the sample size confirmed so, while 19 participants comprising 5% of the sample size, responded that they had maintained the same consumption rates before and after the crisis. The population sampled at Lakehead University showed a similar trend, with about 94% of the participants totalling 343 students revealing they had either decreased or considerably decreased their consumption following the financial crisis. The remaining 6% totalling 22 participants revealed they had maintained the same consumption rate before and after the financial crisis. These results are consistent with responses to question 18 on the questionnaire, which confirmed that a minority of participants of only about 6% maintained the same level of consumption during and after the financial crisis.

For the purpose of saving money as a way to respond to the recession impact, 73% of the respondents at Queen's University totalling 276 of the sample size confirmed purchasing cheaper store brand products is a good way to save, compared to 27% respondents totalling 102 of the sample size, who loyally purchased brand products. A similar trend was noticed among the population sampled at Lakehead University, where 74% of the participants totalling 270 students found purchasing cheaper store brand products a good way to save money compared to the remaining 26% of the sampled population totalling 95 students who preferred being loyal to brand products. To further address the trend of changing purchasing patterns, a follow-up question sought to understand the tendency to seek additional information when purchasing a product or a service after becoming aware of the financial crisis. The respondents showed the changing trend of being more sensitive than before the crisis towards looking for information before purchasing or making a decision to purchase a product or service.

Most of those who were neutral towards looking for information showed more concern when being allowed to choose if they would seek information in case of a financial crisis. From the total sample size at Queen's University, 246 participants comprising about 65% looked for information about a product or service regardless of the economic situation, while 113

participants, comprising about 30% of the sample size showed more interest towards seeking information following the financial crisis. Only 19 participants representing 5% of the sample size bought what they liked regardless of the economic situation. On the other hand, the majority of participants at Lakehead University showed a trend of looking for information about a product or service before deciding to purchase. Out of the 365 participants, 270 respondents representing 74% looked for information about a product or service regardless of the economic situation. The remaining 26% showed more interest in seeking information about a product or service, while no respondents at Lakehead University bought a product or service regardless of the economic situation.

For the purpose of obtaining qualitative feedback, the last two open-ended questions of the questionnaire sought to understand the negative and positive factors that potentially affected purchasing patterns. One of the major influences for improving students' rate of purchases was the amount of funding available from the university and from the government scholarships. Another important factor that students mentioned was annual tuition fees. In general, most of the students at both universities confirmed they would be more likely to make frequent purchases if the costs of education were lower and scholarships were increased, especially during recession times. Some other factors that would enhance the buying pattern of students reported by the respondents included the financial situation of the market and whether there were financial risks at the time of purchase as well as if offers were available for students from service providers and product brands. Almost half of the respondents at both universities considered the global financial crisis as a negative factor that influenced their buying behavior. The comments focused on the reduced funds available from Canadian education institutions and government scholarships that affected the students' financial situation and, in turn, their buying behavior. Other comments showed some fears of the future after graduation and instable jobs that graduate students may get following the financial crisis, which could also negatively affect buying behavior though a tendency to save more as a result of predicted periods of unemployment and products or services price increments.

## VII. LIMITATIONS

Consumer behavior is a complex field of study and is linked to many factors; hence, research at a large scale is always preferred to provide a more detailed understanding about the impact of the financial crisis on Canadian consumer behavior. More results could have been obtained if the sample was spread over other Canadian universities in different provinces and



territories. However, due to limited resources, this study was limited to a sample from Queen's University and Lakehead University, with the results generalized across other Canadian universities. Although the sample size was determined using a 5% confidence interval level and 95% confidence level within the population of the two universities, the sample obtained only represented a small percentage of Canadian university students' throughout Canada. The students' source of income is expected to be significantly lower than that of working professionals. With increased tuition fees and low financial resources available for students, it is expected that their purchasing behavior will be different than that of other working professionals, especially during recession times. However, the generalization of research results is always a consideration, with the accuracy of the research findings varying with study sample sizes. Consequently, it is assumed that this study acts as the foundation for further future research efforts about changes in Canadian university students' buying behavior following a financial crisis. Another limitation is related to the timing the study was conducted. With the end of the academic year, it was expected that most of the students had a minimum amount of funds available to purchase goods or acquire services. In addition, most of the students were expected to reserve available funds to book travel back to their homes rather than purchase unnecessary goods or services. In other words, students' purchasing behavior may have shown some changes if the survey had been conducted at the beginning of the year, a time government and university financial support for students is provided.

Despite these limitations and given the lack of time and financial resources to conduct the questionnaire among a larger sample covering several Canadian universities, the obtained study data and analyzed results can provide reliable indication about how Canadian university students might alter their purchasing behavior following a financial crisis event. The findings obtained using the survey questionnaire distributed to the selected sample had high relevance and confidence to show that the sample size was valid and to draw some conclusions from this research effort.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Similar to other world economies, and as is the case with large economies in other nations, the Canadian economy has suffered and was affected by the global financial crisis. The sequenced recession forced economies around the world, including Canada, to implement measures and downsize large national and international economic activities. This placed a lot of pressure on the local economy in Canada, as the unemployment rate increased. Consequently, the effects of the recession were felt in almost all the details of people's lives, as unemployment greatly impacts consumers' available funds to purchase goods and

services. In turn, drastic measures were required at individual and family levels to maximize the greatest value of the money people earned. Among other groups within society, students were especially concerned, as a result of the burden of their financial obligations and uncertainty of their future because of the lower employment rates expected during and after times of financial crisis. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether there had been any change in Canadian students' consumer behavior as a result of the global financial crisis that started in 2007.

Generally, this crisis created an opportunity for Canadian students to become more conscious about their level of consumption of goods and services. In such recession circumstances, people are expected to save more given the uncertainty of the global financial situation, which renders the job market unsecured. After analyzing the data collected through the questionnaire presented in Appendix A, some conclusions can be formulated, confirming that some changes to Canadian students' consumer behavior were noticed following the financial crisis. It can be assumed that Canadian university students became more rational and careful when evaluating possible product and service alternatives, focusing on efficient, reliable options at more reasonable prices. A trend of reduced consumption can be noticed among participants, with more attention being paid to fulfilling basic needs and avoiding unnecessary spending. Among other reasons, unemployment rate and the ambiguous future of the career market were of great concern to the consumers. Therefore, student consumers looked to satisfy basic needs first and eliminated entertainment costs. In addition, student consumers showed a trend of seeking more information and evaluating available alternatives before making a purchase decision as a result of the increased worries associated with the uncertain, ever-changing economic situation.

More planned buying behaviors are believed to be practiced more following the fears of recession consequences, with increased searching for more product and service information through different possible sources. The purchasing decisions seemed to shift from simple uninformed to comprehensive decision-making behavior that is more informed and rational with more involvement from consumers towards knowing about a product or service before actually deciding to make the purchase. In other words, student consumers become more money minded as a result of the financial crisis. Different ways to save money were acceptable to student consumers, among which switching to store brands was welcomed by most participants. It is always expected by marketing researchers that some people will continue purchasing leading brands, however, when it comes to saving, it is also expected that consumers will not hesitate to shift to store brands. All in all, a clear change in Canadian

students' purchasing behavior as a response to the financial crisis was clearly noticed, with saving tendencies, a focus on basic needs, and more product/service information sought.

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## APPENDIXES

1. Appendix A: Consumer's Questionnaire

### APPENDIX A

#### Consumer's Questionnaire

To know if a respondent belongs to the targeted sample, please answer the following first:

1. Are you one of the persons in charge for shopping at home?

Yes

No

If your answer to above question was "Yes", please proceed to the next questions. For those respondents who answered "No", we thank you for your participation and the support you have shown.

2. How old are you? Please select your age range.

0

21-25

26-30

31-35

36-40

> 40

3. Gender?

Male

Female

4. What is your ethnic origin (e.g., Caucasian)?

.....

5. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married
- Living together
- Married
- Separated or divorced
- Widowed

6. What is your religion?

- Atheist
- Christian
- Muslim
- Jewish
- Buddhist
- Hindu

7. What is your level of education?

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate (Master's level)
- Postgraduate (Doctorate level)
- Other? Please specify .....

8. How many people are in your home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- > 4

9. How many times do you go shopping?

- Once per month
- Twice per month
- Three times a month
- Once per week
- More than once a week

10. Earnings per year, including government support, family support, and academic support.

- \$10,000
- \$20,000
- \$30,000
- \$40,000
- > \$40,000

11. Do your friends and family influence your buying decision?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. Do you search for relevant information before deciding to purchase a product or service?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Strongly disagree

13. What media do you use most to get relevant information? (Indicate more than one if valid)

- Newspaper
- Internet
- Advertisements on TV and radio
- Store visits
- Other? Please specify

14. When you make a purchase, what are the most important factors for you? (More than one can be selected)

- Price
- Quality
- Brand
- Customer service and post-purchase service
- Other factors? Please specify

15. What brands do you usually buy from?

- Store brands  
 Famous and leader brands

16. Are you worried because of the recent financial crisis? Please rate your concern on a scale between 1 and 5 (1: not concerned, 5: very concerned)

- 1   
2   
3   
4   
5

17. How is your saving tendency compared to your consuming tendency since the financial crisis initiated in 2007?

- Save more frequently  
 Consume more frequently  
 Combination of saving and consuming

18. Have you reduced your consumption after becoming aware of the financial crisis?

- Yes, I spend less on entertainment now  
 Yes, I try to cut some expenses and bills (e.g., power, phone, gas, etc.)  
 Yes, I tend to postpone purchasing or not purchase expensive items  
 No, my consumption level remained the same

19. Choose one of the following to describe your consumption after the financial crisis

- Considerably increased  
 Increased  
 Remained the same  
 Decreased  
 Considerably decreased

20. Have you considered purchasing store brands as a way of saving money?

- Yes, it is a good way to save  
 No, I am loyal to the brands I have always purchased

21. Compared to before the crisis, do you now look for additional information when you purchase a product or a service than before?

- I always do this regardless of the economic situation
- Yes, now I am more inclined to look for information than before the crisis
- No, I buy what I like no matter what

22. What factors do you think positively enhance your buying patterns (e.g., security in job, lower taxes, etc.)?

23. What factors do you think negatively affect and restrict your buying patterns (e.g., financial situation, new technologies, sudden changes, etc.)?



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