

WAITING AS A DETERMINANT OF STORE IMAGE AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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OPSOMMING

Verskeie studies is beskikbaar wat die multi-dimensionele konseptualisering van diensgehalte, winkelbeeld en verbruikers se tevredenheid met dienslewering in die kleinhandel aanspreek. Hoewel wagtyd ingesluit word in die hiërargiese konseptualisering van verbruikers se persepsie van dienskwaliteit en pertinent oorweeg word in terme van die invloed daarvan op die onderskeie konstrunkte, is daar tot dusver in navorsing min aandag daaraan geskenk. Die meeste studies wat wel verbruikers se persepsie van wagtyd aangespreek het, is in die laboratorium gedoen. Ten spyte van die invloed van wagtyd op verbruikers se persepsie van diensverskaffers het navorsers tot onlangs nog daarna verwys as 'n konstruk wat onderskat word in terme van die invloed wat dit op verbruikers se gedrag het. Verskeie navorsers het ook tot die slotsom gekom dat die invloed van wagtyd in terme van verbruikers se winkelondersteuning en winkellojaliteit nie onderskat moet word nie. Verskeie teoretiese perspektiewe kan gebruik word om die gevolge van wagtyd vir verbruikers en vir die kleinhandel te verstaan. Uiteraard kan persoonlike faktore en persoonlikheid nie tot dieselfde mate as omstandigheidsfaktore in ag geneem word wanneer handelaars poog om hulle dienslewering te verbeter nie. Navorsingsbevindinge kan nietermin bydra om verbruikers se frustrasie, optrede en klagtes beter te verstaan. In hierdie literatuuroorsig word bestaande literatuur geïntegreer om die belangrikheid van die wagkonstruk

uit 'n verbruikers- sowel as 'n handelaarsoogpunt te bevestig. 'n Konseptuele raamwerk word saamgestel en voorstelle word gemaak om toekomstige navorsing op hierdie gebied te rig en aan te moedig, veral in die konteks van ontwikkelende lande.

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INTRODUCTION

Waiting is an almost inescapable part of a consumer's service encounter, whether in the queue at the check out point in a retail store, placing an order, or making an enquiry. According to Taylor (1994), waiting commences when a customer is ready for the service encounter and ends when personal interaction with the service provider commences. Waiting *per se* is a subjective experience and the associated frustration is not necessarily related to an objective measurement of time. Consumers' perceptions of waiting time mostly differ from the objectively measured time lapse (Baker & Cameron, 1996). When customers wait longer than expected, they become bored (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012) and inevitably assign some cause for the delay (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012). Negative emotions become more severe when the reason for the wait is attributed to slow or incompetent personnel or processes (Hartley & Ward, 2006). Waiting for a phone operator or waiting for response during internet shopping could cause as much frustration. While doing internet shopping which is supposed to save time, customers often abandon their shopping carts due to frustratingly slow service (Rajamma *et al.*, 2009). Mostly, waiting is resented and causes irritation, which creates a negative emotional state (Kostecki, 1996) that clouds a consumer's perception of a store's image (Deeter-Schmelz *et al.*, 2000) and the service experience (Verma *et al.*, 1999). Subsequent negative perceptions caused by waiting are undesirable in terms of store loyalty (Anic *et al.*, 2011; Durrande-Moreau, 1999). Retailers and other service providers could therefore benefit from initiatives that would reduce customers' frustrations due to long queues and extensive waiting times (Kumar & Krishnamurthy, 2008; Johnston, 2005).

Several changes, such as extended retail hours and internet shopping (Heineke & Davis, 2007) have been introduced in the retail sector in re-

cent years to improve services in accordance with consumers' changing needs and to limit time waste. Waiting, specifically queuing, is however still an under-researched and underutilized topic as a measure of consumer behaviour (Anic *et al.*, 2011) - even more so in terms of different contexts for example developing economies versus more developed First World contexts, or in terms of different service contexts. An integration of investigations from different underlying theoretical approaches, for example a marketing-, psychological- and social context would furthermore disclose different dimensions of the phenomenon that would be useful to formulate an integrated conceptualisation of the construct to expand existing literature (Bendoly *et al.*, 2006; Yan & Lotz, 2006). Previous investigations have *inter alia* dealt with consumers' emotional responses to waiting (Hui *et al.*, 1998; Pruyn & Smidts, 1999; Hui & Tse, 1996); consumers' association of wait and service quality (Yan & Lotz, 2006; Taylor, 1994) or store image (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012) and consumers' personal wait expectations (Durrande-Moreau, 1999). These studies were however performed in First World contexts and many studies that have dealt with time perceptions were carried out in laboratories (Anic *et al.*, 2011).

This literature review aims to integrate the contribution of various researchers who have investigated waiting and queuing from different theoretic approaches as part of the servicescape and to make propositions for future research. It is hoped that suggestions would inspire researchers to generate empirical evidence that would aid to understand consumers' store patronage and buying behaviour in developing countries so that ultimately, service delivery could be augmented keeping in mind competitive international, First World standards.

WAITING AS A DIMENSION OF STORE IMAGE

The image of a retailer differentiates it from its competitors and provides the backdrop that portrays its service and merchandise offering. Store image may be one of the most important reasons why consumers prefer specific service providers and avoid others. For the prestige seeking consumer, store image is even more significant (Deeter-Schmelz *et al.*, 2000). In a highly competitive environment retailers therefore have to be highly cognisant of the dimensions of their service, specifically the “mental pictures” that consumers develop of the various dimensions of their service and how that might influence the image of their organisation (Lewison, 1997:11). Since consumers’ choice of a store and their loyalty towards a specific store or service provider are influenced by their image of the service provider, it is crucial that the image of a service provider should be crafted with its target market in mind. That would help consumers to identify and positively associate with it (Newman & Cullen, 2002:243). An aspect that could be detrimental in terms of a store’s image, even if all the other elements of the service offering have been attended to meticulously, is waiting. Waiting and queuing, for whatever reason at any point in a store such as the fitting room or at the check out point, is even associated with service failure and injustice (Craighead *et al.*, 2004; Tom & Lucey, 1995).

The following is therefore proposed:

H_{1a}: When aware of crowded check out lanes in a store, consumers will consider an alternative store especially when one is located nearby (e.g. in the same shopping mall).

H_{1b}: When aware of crowded check out lanes in a store, consumers will reconsider the urgency of their intended purchases (e.g. opting to return to the store at a later stage).

Conflicting perspectives about waiting

Nguyen and Belk’s investigation (2007) of consumers’ reaction during service encounters concluded that a single service encounter actually comprises of a series of snapshots that may consist of extreme moments ranging from absolute excitement (e.g. when finding an impressive product) to utter dismay (e.g. when delayed at the check out counter). Researchers have hence concluded that waiting, which is only one of the snapshots of a service experience, breeds consumer dissatisfaction (Tom & Lucey, 1995; Clemmer & Schneider, 1993). The amount of time used to purchase products and services can be a crucial discriminator in terms of consumers’ choice of service providers.

Probably the biggest hurdle in a discussion of this nature is retailers’ desire to encourage customers to “linger longer” to increase the probability of sales despite knowing that time has become one of consumers’ scarcest resources. From a marketing point of view, in-store distractions and deflections are often intentionally positioned to capture customers’ attention and to keep them occupied in the store a bit longer. From a consumer’s perspective these detours may however become particularly annoying, especially when delays are created near or in the check out lanes (Raghubir & Morwitz, 2005). Waiting, for whatever reason, negatively impacts on store image and consumers’ eventual satisfaction with the service encounter (Hartley & Ward, 2006). Waiting also breeds negative emotions, which negatively affects a store’s image and customers’ satisfaction with a service encounter. Positive evaluations of a service provider prior to the wait may even be negated by negative emotions caused by waiting at the check out (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012).

Any obstacle in a store that causes a delay and that creates the impression that time is wasted may therefore encourage a consumer to use alternative service providers (Yan & Lotz, 2006).

Consumers in developing countries, especially in smaller towns, unfortunately do not always have alternative service providers to go to. When having to wait repetitively, they could therefore become particularly frustrated. On a more positive note, other researchers have found that the effect of waiting could be reduced or negated if waiting is well managed or when sufficient distraction is provided during waiting (Rafaeli *et al.*, 2002; Katz *et al.*, 1991). Solutions to problems associated with waiting therefore exist, provided that a conclusive understanding of the phenomenon is reached.

The following is proposed:

H₂: Consumers who have a choice of similar service providers (for example several adjacent clothing retailers in a shopping mall, or closely located supermarkets) will prefer the stores where purchases can be made promptly, without wasting time.

H₃: Consumers will tolerate longer than expected waiting times at check out points if distractions at the check out points are captivating.

An operationalisation of store image

Despite scholars' attempts to describe the influence of queuing and waiting time on consumers' satisfaction with service encounters, its inclusion as part of store image dimensions has been neglected (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012; Anic & Radas, 2006). In a recent attempt which followed an extensive literature review, Van Riel and co-workers (2012) compiled a nine construct, 37 item measuring instrument in which store image was operationalised as a formative construct that involved three fundamental dimensions, namely *store layout*, *merchandise* and *employee interaction*. Realizing that waiting can contribute to negative service quality perceptions and subsequent dissatisfaction with a service and customer complaints, the existing instrument of Deeter-Schmelz and co-workers (2000) was

adapted to include antecedents (predictors) of store image in accordance with empirical findings relating to the waiting construct. The revised instrument treated "negative emotional response to the wait" (NER) as an independent antecedent of store image. In turn, NER is predicted by "attribution to the store" (3 items), "distractions" (3 items) and "perceived wait duration" (3 items). The latter is predicted by "waiting area attractiveness" (2 items), "social injustice" (3 items) and "value of purchase" (4 items) to demonstrate the complex interactive effect of waiting time on store image in different contexts. The instrument also includes a *satisfaction measure* which distinguishes a *rational* and an *emotional* component (4 items). An application of the instrument in a supermarket context revealed that *perceived duration of the wait* and *attribution to the store* (apparent store negligence that may have caused the wait) were the two most important antecedents of negative emotional responses to waiting. A significant negative relationship between *negative emotional response to waiting* and *satisfaction* was confirmed. *Negative emotional response to waiting* was also detrimental in terms of perceived store image overall. The researchers (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012) concluded that any investigation of customers' satisfaction with a store that disregards customers' reaction to waiting provides incomplete evidence.

The following are proposed:

H₄: Consumers who have experienced longer than expected waiting times in a particular store, will make unfavourable comments about the image of the store.

H₅: Consumers who have experienced longer than expected waiting times in a particular store will express dissatisfaction with the entire store.

H₆: Consumers who have experienced longer than expected waiting times in a particular store

will reflect negatively on the performance of the store's personnel.

H₇: Consumers' expression of dismay with longer than expected waiting (queuing) times in a particular store will include comments about the waiting area.

Waiting as a time construct

Apart from its influence on store image (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012), consumer behaviour literature (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; McDonnell, 2007) also acknowledges waiting as a *time* construct that involves four dimensions. The *subjective* dimension of time involves a consumer's estimation of waiting time; the *objective* dimension encapsulates the actual duration of the wait; the *cognitive* dimension reflects a consumer's view of the acceptability of elapsed time; while the *affective* dimension involves a consumer's emotional responses to the time duration (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007; McDonnell, 2007).

In their store image instrument, Van Riel *et al.* (2012) distinguished two of the four dimensions of the formal time construct, namely the *subjective*- and *affective* dimensions (Bielen & Demoulin, 2007). They then added two auxiliary dimensions namely *attribution to the store* and *value of purchase*, which are both associated with the so-called Time Structure Questionnaire (TSQ) that was originally developed by the psychologists, Bond and Feather (1988 in McDonnell, 2007) to determine individuals' perception of their use of time as structured and purposive, or wasted. The TSQ enables some quantification of consumers' need for certainty and structure during a typical retail encounter and the probability that waiting would frustrate and annoy them.

A consumer's experience of time style culminates as a combination of personal- and socially constructed traits that relates to the individual's cultural affiliation (Mattila & Hanks, 2012). Time

style comprises three dimensions that influence consumers' reaction to waiting, namely *monetary value of time*, *temporal orientation* and *psychological dimensions*, such as motivation and anxiety. Time styles are useful to understand why consumers may become extremely frustrated when waiting at times (Usunier & Valette-Florence, 2007).

The following are proposed:

H₈: Professional people (consumers) who have experienced longer than expected waiting times in a particular store will convert their dismay with time wasted terms of monetary waste.

H₉: Consumers who have experienced longer than expected waiting times in a particular store will express their dismay in terms of an unacceptable sequence of events.

H₁₀: Consumers who have experienced longer than expected waiting times in a particular store will experience negative psychological responses such as anxiety and tension.

The two time dimensions that were excluded in the instrument of Van Riel *et al.* (2012) encompass consumers' *cognitive evaluation* and the *objective measurement* of waiting time. Researchers will therefore have to take cognisance of the possibility that an objective measurement of time may be required to make a fair judgement of waiting because customers might overestimate the time spent in a store (Anic *et al.*, 2011; McDonnell, 2007). According to research consumers' perceptions of waiting time however seldom match objective waiting time measures. Efforts to improve customer service should therefore rather focus on customers' subjective perceptions of waiting time although not necessarily correct or realistic, because people who feel that they have been waiting too long, tend to respond negatively regardless of whether they are realistic or accurate (Usunier & Valette-Florence, 2007).

The following is proposed:

H₁₁: Consumers who have waited in the same queue will express dissimilar versions of the actual time spent queuing.

Waiting as part of a consumer's shopping orientation

A consumer's tolerance of waiting is furthermore determined by an individual's shopping orientation. *Utilitarian shoppers* who like to plan their store visits in advance and who shop with a purpose would most probably become more frustrated (McDonnell, 2007) and even furious when waiting longer than expected (Fraser, 2005). *Hedonic shoppers*, on the other hand, may be more tolerant under the same conditions (Matilla & Hanks, 2012).

The following is proposed:

H₁₂: A consumer's shopping orientation will determine his/her waiting tolerance at any point in the store, i.e. utilitarian shoppers are less tolerant of crowded queuing areas than hedonic shoppers.

WAITING AS A DIMENSION OF SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality as a multi-dimensional construct has been the topic of investigation for several years and many renowned scholars (Dabholkar *et al.*, 1996; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, 1985; Grönroos, 1984) are associated with the conceptualisation and empirical measurement of the service quality construct over time. Specifically relevant to an investigation of the waiting phenomenon is the categorisation of service quality by Grönroos (1984) in terms of two distinct dimensions. He distinguished *technical service quality* that encapsulates the benefits received by consumers as a result of the contribution of personnel who inevitably influence time issues

during service quality perceptions. *Functional service quality*, on the other hand, addresses the actual service delivery process.

During the following decades scholars have proposed and investigated several revisions to the operationalization of the service quality construct. Martinez and Martinez (2010) for example critically reviewed the interpretation of various service quality models but specifically important for this discussion is Mayer and Morin's proposition (1987) that service quality is influenced by additional factors which includes *waiting time*. Similarly Solomon *et al.*, (2006:308) concluded that consumers' perception and satisfaction with service quality is influenced by their experience of waiting. The more recent model of Brady and Cronin (2001) therefore contains waiting time as an explicit sub-dimension of the service quality construct. Hartley and Ward (2006), on the other hand, assessed waiting time in terms of acceptability of the wait and reason for the wait as a dimension of service quality. A timeliness dimension is also incorporated in the service quality model developed by Dagger *et al.* (2007) to acknowledge customers' time related concerns.

The following are proposed:

H₁₃: A negative waiting experience will have a negative influence on a consumer's perception of the service quality of the store.

H₁₄: A consumer who has waited in a queue longer than expected, will be more forgiving when judging the service quality of the store if a valid reason for an extensive wait in the store is provided.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CONSUMERS' WAIT PERCEPTIONS

Numerous *psychological*-, *personal*- and *situational factors* could influence an individual's time

(wait) perception and subsequent reactions (Durrande-Moreau, 1999).

Psychological factors

Psychological factors include consumers' expectations, habits, motivations, mood and reaction to time pressures. Frustration caused by waiting at any point in a store such as waiting at the check out point could be reduced by captivating displays, a television monitor with interesting visuals in the waiting area, attractive décor and books or magazines (Anic *et al.*, 2011; Durrande-Moreau, 1999; Baker & Cameron, 1996). However, if these distractions, for example the television programmes and music, do not interest customers, it could fuel irritation and elongate customers' psychological time frame (Kellaris & Kent, 1992). Hurried, time sensitive consumers and utility shoppers are inclined to become irritated more easily when waiting (Anic *et al.*, 2011).

Personal factors

Personal factors such as a person's personality type which is revealed through the typical circadian orientation, and a Type A or B behaviour pattern will influence a consumer's experiences and behaviour when waiting (Marquis *et al.*, 1994). One's circadian orientation refers to one's behaviour during different times of the day as a result of an internal biological rhythm that causes dissimilar behavioural cycles which even influences body temperature. Certain individuals may therefore become more agitated when having a bad waiting experience in the morning while the reverse is true for others. Type A or B consumers may also react differently when waiting because type A people are typically more competitive, achievement striving and are hence inclined to become hostile when agitated due to waiting. Type A individuals' typical behaviour is even related to the development of coronary heart disease. Studies have shown that they rate slow service as inappropriate. In contrast,

type B people are more tolerant, relaxed and forgiving in terms of real life obstacles such as waiting (Marquis *et al.*, 1994).

Situational factors

Situational factors will also influence consumers' waiting time perceptions, specifically distractions during the wait, uncertainty about the wait and the condition of the environment (Durrande-Moreau, 1999). Situational factors that may have a significant effect on customers' perceived waiting time *inter alia* include crowding in a store. Crowding increases consumers' perceived shopping time and waiting, especially at the check out points (Eroglu *et al.*, 2005) where the layout and management of queues may cause frustration (Machleit *et al.*, 2000). The Affiliation Theory (AF) (Schachter, 1959 in Pruyn & Smidts, 1999) and the Social Facilitation Theory (SFT) (Zajonc, 1965 in Pruyn & Smidts, 1999) explain that consumers may experience solo waits differently to group waits but that experiences are also context specific (Durrande-Moreau, 1999; Pruyn & Smidts, 1999). The AT proposes that people might prefer to wait solo in certain contexts and in a group in other contexts. People who are anxious, for example patients at a hospital, may prefer to wait with others and might find some comfort in their distress when sharing the wait with others who are in the same awkward situation. In other contexts, for example when waiting at the fitting rooms of a clothing retailer, group waits may however be perceived as social intrusion (Baker & Cameron, 1996). The SFT specifically acknowledges consumers' perceptions of waiting time and the acceptability of the wait, e.g. that a long wait in the presence of others in a retail store may increase distress while the presence of others during a short wait may enhance relief.

The following are proposed:

H₁₃: Consumers who have waited longer than expected in a specific context will perceive a group wait differently to a solo wait.

H₁₄: Certain consumers will perceive waiting as intolerable, irrespective of the time spent waiting or reasons for the wait.

WAITING IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONAL CONTEXTS

While one may assume that all customers expect to queue at some point during a service encounter, consumers are inclined to behave differently in various situational contexts (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012). Tolerable waiting times therefore differ for different types of services (Dasu & Rao, 1999). Patients are apparently more willing to wait for a medical examination. Similarly, airline passengers are more accustomed to wait compared to customers waiting in a supermarket or a bank (Pruyn & Smidts, 1999; Dawes & Rowley, 1996; Chebat *et al.*, 1995). Consumers furthermore anticipate and tolerate longer waiting times during peak hours for example at month end. Generally consumers are more willing to wait when paying for expensive items than when purchasing items for everyday use such as groceries, probably because waiting time of frequently recurring situations are easier to compare. Customers therefore tend to become more irritated when waiting in supermarkets, filling stations and banks (Dasu & Rao, 1999). Certain service providers should therefore be particularly interested in solutions that may limit customers' frustrations.

The following is proposed:

H₁₅: Customers are more tolerant of extensive waits during peak hours (or peak times such as

during a sale) compared to other times of the day or week.

THE DILEMMA OF QUEUING AS PART OF WAITING

Queuing is probably the most prevalent cause of waiting and time spent queuing is generally regarded as a waste of productive time. Mostly, waiting in a queue is a major inconvenience and unpleasant (Bennett, 1998; Hui & Tse, 1996) – even more so when the cause is attributed to the store, e.g. when there is too few check out counters and when personnel are slow or appear incompetent (Van Riel *et al.*, 2012). Unfortunately queuing has become a part of the business culture. Yet, very few stores indicate empathy with their customers by making provision for customers such as the elderly or the handicapped who are unable to stand for long (McDonnell, 2007; Hui & Tse, 1996; Leclerc *et al.*, 1995). Queues should therefore be monitored and managed continually because it can be a critical issue in terms of customer retention (Barlow, 2002). Abandoned trolleys at the check out area in supermarkets and during internet shopping confirm consumers' dismay with extensive waits (Rajamma *et al.*, 2009). Consumers may even go elsewhere when they observe long queues at a service provider even if the alternative transaction might be more expensive. Consumers such as those in smaller towns or less developed countries do unfortunately not always have an alternative store to go to.

Mathematical models associated with queuing theory propose that waiting is an inevitable outcome in any system where consumers' demand for the service exceeds the service capacity (Dawes & Rowley, 1996). These models are used to predict a variety of measures pertaining to waiting times, such as the distribution of waiting times with differing numbers of servers.

There may be several causes for unacceptable queuing and increased frustration during queuing (Whiting & Donthu, 2009; Durrande-Moreau, 1999). Zeithaml *et al.* (1985) nevertheless caution against harsh critique, explaining that waiting lines are sometimes inevitable. In developing countries the introduction of ATMs, telephone banking and internet banking (McDonnell, 2007) partly explain the aggravating queuing conditions in certain geographic areas. The number of check out points at service providers is possibly the most prevalent cause for consumers' disgruntlement. Customers find it unacceptable that supermarkets and banks are designed with multiple check out points and that only a few are operational at any point in time, even during peak hours. This creates the impression that the business was designed with customers' needs in mind but that it is not managed accordingly. More over, when additional personnel are visibly engaged with other tasks behind the counters when customers are waiting in long queues, the situation is aggravated. Businesses have subsequently begun to conceal staff who are involved in administrative duties and who are not meant to serve customers in the queues (McDonnell, 2007).

The following is proposed:

H₁₆: Customers who are waiting in a queue are less tolerant when there are more vacant than operational check out points where transactions can be concluded.

SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE WAITING TIME MORE TOLERABLE

Suggestions that distraction should be used to alleviate the tension associated with waiting (Rafaeli *et al.*, 2002; Katz *et al.*, 1991) need to be explored.

Alternating service process designs

Extant research confirms that queuing affects a consumer's mood and that waiting in a queue deters spending (Anic *et al.*, 2011; Pruyn & Smidts, 1999). Negative experiences at check out points should therefore be prevented. Matching actual and perceived waiting times, Jones and Peppiatt (1996) reviewed how queue management may be carried out more effectively, while Barlow's audit (2002) of hospital queuing distinguished between actual waiting times, perceived waiting time and expected waiting time. Both studies concluded that consumers'/patients' waiting experiences affected their overall satisfaction and evaluation of the respective service encounters negatively. Customers' perceptions of waiting should therefore be taken very seriously. Confirmation that prompt service is highly appreciated and that it can provide an important competitive advantage in the marketplace, suggests that retail should pay more attention to queue management (Davis & Heineke, 1994).

Sheu *et al.*, (2003) investigated the waiting time performance of alternative service process designs, namely using a single lane that is served by multiple check out operators, or using multiple queues that are served individually. They pertinently proposed the use of alternative queuing strategies in accordance with the traffic in the store at a specific point in time because theoretically, none of the service process designs provide the single best solution for all operating conditions. The recommended flexible approach requires a rotation of design strategies in response to on-going changes in service system input parameters, acknowledging peak hours and peak traffic to reduce waiting times (Sheu & Babbar, 1996). Mathematical break-even models that reflect the contingent nature of the performance of alternative designs confirm the value of such flexibility. Unfortunately many service providers choose a specific design strategy in their business and seldom consider alternative

strategies for different periods of the day or month. Adjustments of this kind may however cause dismay amongst consumers. While some customers may appreciate express lanes during peak hours when they have limited transactions to conclude, customers who remain waiting in long queues may perceive the quick progress of express lanes as unfair (Jones & Peppiatt, 1996). Express lanes should therefore be monitored very carefully to prevent customers' aggravation. It is recommended that banks and supermarkets utilise all available check out points during peak periods and even create additional, temporary check out points to clear queues faster (Barlow, 2002). A maximum waiting time of less than four minutes is proposed as a norm for check out points. Otherwise, a store's line strategy should be changed or additional personnel should be employed (Ittig, 2002).

The following is proposed:

H₁₇: Customers who are waiting in a long single queue are highly cognisant of the number of check out operators that have been assigned to the queue.

Reducing perceptions of waiting time

Scholars (Jones & Peppiatt, 1996) agree that perceived waiting time is reduced when customers are occupied while waiting or when their attention is drawn to interesting things, for example a television programme or captivating displays. Customers who are in a hurry may however resent further distractions and should preferably be diverted to express check out lanes.

Uncertain waits always seem longer than finite waits. Customers are generally appreciative and more forgiving if they have some indication of how long they will have to wait. Similarly, unexplained waits seem longer than explained waits. Customers are generally more willing to wait if they know why, if they anticipate quality and value for their effort and if the system appears to

be sufficient (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Babin *et al.*, 1994). For example, a patient waiting for a specialist physician with a good reputation will be more tolerant compared to waiting for a routine procedure. Airline passengers are also more willing to wait before boarding because they know why they have to check in well in advance and have a clear time frame of boarding time and departure.

The design of waiting areas should not be generalised across all waiting contexts. Some adjustment may even be required during different times of the day or month. When group waits are inevitable, the spatial layout of a waiting or queuing area could incorporate furniture, displays and plants to limit interaction between waiting customers (Pruyn & Smidts, 1999).

The role of personnel in queue management should not be underestimated because customers agree that a smiling face and an apology at the end of a queue make waiting more bearable (Jones & Peppiatt, 1996). Sales personnel sometimes take too long to conclude a transaction and many even appear nonchalant, incompetent or simply do not share the same sense of urgency with every customer. Some organisations have therefore begun to set standards in terms of the time required to serve one customer (Jones & Peppiatt, 1996).

The following are proposed:

H₁₈: Customers who have been waiting in a queue longer than expected, will experience a change of mood if the personnel at the check out point seem competent.

H₁₉: Customers who have been waiting in a queue longer than expected, will experience a change of mood if the personnel at the check out point are friendly.

Implementing the latest technology

Technology can contribute to more effective service delivery in various ways (Kotler, 2002:202, 306). Retailers that are willing to invest in, and adopt better technologies such as bar coding scanners at check out points reap the benefits through a competitive advantage over nearby stores by speeding up the check out process significantly and simultaneously reducing error. Certain retailers, for example supermarkets that deal with fast-moving-consumer-goods (FMCG), operate at low margins and have no other option than to focus on operational efficiency to create and maintain competitive differentiation (Varadarajan *et al.*, 2010; Nijssen, 1999). When using the latest technologies, they can create a favourable impression amongst consumers while enjoying economies of scale and higher returns on investment. Stores in developing countries are however mostly slower to adopt new technologies than developed countries.

Moving away from bank cheques that need to be approved first towards electronic payment methods can also reduce waiting time in stores. In developing countries, electronic networks are often oversubscribed and fail to cope with the

demand. Electronic point-of-sale (POS) technologies not only enables fast cashiering and efficient customer check out, it effectively captures customer data and stores information for integration with the back-end technology to track customer purchases. More advanced hand held point-of-sale POS solutions that can scan customers' purchase while queuing, can make customers' check out experiences more enjoyable and convenient. Such highly accurate durable scanners and powerful payment devices are unfortunately not readily available across the world yet, but promises to improve cashier efficiency and to move customers through the check out point very fast and effectively. In the future, sales personnel may therefore be equipped with mobile handheld computers and would be able to move around the store to facilitate sales processes. That would significantly shorten queuing lines and reduce the stress on fixed POS stations (Pantano, 2010). In the future customers may even be able to browse through stores, select whatever they want as if they are "shoplifting" and literally "pay as they go" when carrying the merchandise through sensors that scan and allow payment in an instant (Varadarajan, *et al.*, 2010).

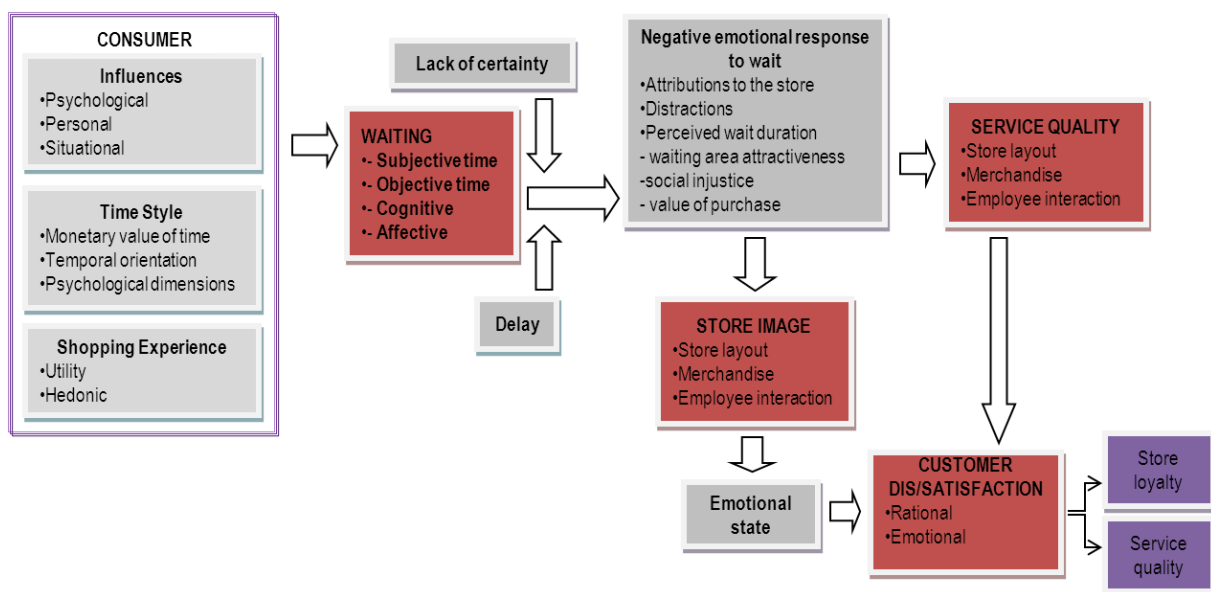


FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 integrates important concepts that were addressed in the fore going review in terms of a conceptual framework that could be implemented in future research.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several possibilities such as the propositions stated throughout the document could be pursued to explicate consumers' reactions to waiting and their subsequent behaviour in specific service contexts. Apart from a study by Anderson and Brodowsky (2001) no evidence could be found of investigations into consumers' behaviour and reaction to waiting in developing countries where contexts are probably more challenging compared to more developed countries.

The following investigations would expand existing literature and provide invaluable evidence to augment service delivery:

- The investigation of influences on consumer behaviour is often restricted to demographic variables such as age, income, education level and gender that provide a limited explication and understanding of consumers' behaviour. Investigations of the influence of specific psychological, personal and situational factors on consumers' responses to wait in various retail and service contexts, whether brick-and-mortar retail, e-retail or telephonic interaction with service providers would expand existing literature and provide opportunity to involve alternative theoretic frameworks. For example: Does personal factors such as the Circadian typology or being a type A or B character have a significant influence on spouses'/ partners' willingness to share shopping activities in

households? While it would not necessarily be possible to structure services in accordance with consumers' personal differences, e.g. circadian-, and type A or B personalities, these typologies would inter alia be useful to determine whether complainants and non-complainants could be profiled accordingly. Service providers might then have more success in handling consumers' discontent and grievances in order to retain their loyal support and to prevent feelings of injustice and associated negative behaviour

- The influence of waiting on dissatisfied consumers' perceptions of injustice could be used to improve service processes.
- The influence of various dimensions of the interior design of stores and waiting rooms could provide useful evidence of how the service environment could be shaped and adapted to limit tension and anxiety and to encourage informed, responsible consumer decisions that would culminate in terms of consumer satisfaction.

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