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# What helps or inspires busy moms while grocery shopping?

*In what ways can in-store marketing influence the  
target group of “busy moms” in order to improve their  
shopping experience at grocery stores?*

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# ABSTRACT

- Title:** What helps or inspires *busy moms* while grocery shopping?
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- Keywords:** time-sensitive, in-store marketing, consumer behavior, grocery shopping, retailing
- Thesis purpose:** The purpose of this master thesis is to understand how busy moms experience their grocery shopping trips and the in-store environment. In gaining this knowledge, we aim at being able to suggest ways to improve the grocery shopping experience of busy moms; and present insights that can help food retailers in targeting this consumer group in-store.
- Methodology:** We use an iterative approach, and work with photo elicitation interviews. We let our respondents capture their experiences in photographs, which then aid in recalling their memories in follow up interviews.
- Theoretical perspective:** We base our theoretical perspective on environmental psychology where we use the original M-R model, and include personal and situational variables suggested by Bäckström and Johansson (2006); where the latter variable includes the views by Turley and Milliman (2000). We combine the theoretical perspectives to understand the effects on consumer minds (viewed as a black-box) and relate it to resulting response of the grocery shopping experience.
- Empirical data:** The study comprised the views of 9 busy moms whom could visit 4 different grocery retailers. Further, we use literature from the fields of in-store marketing, atmospherics and consumer behavior.
- Conclusion:** From the views of our 9 respondents, we have identified some of busy mom's grocery shopping dilemmas and can suggest some improvements to stores to make future store visits more positive and satisfactory.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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*In this chapter, we present the subject we will be researching as well as provide a background to help form the research question and profile our target group. In addition, research gaps are identified and the goals of the study set.*

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Imagine you just got off work. It is 5 p.m. and you have run to collect your child from kindergarten. Your child is whining because she is tired and hungry. Unfortunately, it is your turn to take care of the grocery shopping and come up with a dinner for the evening, which should be both nutritious and something else than what you ate the previous day and the day before that. The food should be on the table in an hour. You start to feel the stress spreading through your body, and you suddenly realize you forgot your shopping list at work because you were running late, trying to complete already overdue work. You wish to yourself that the grocery trip will go as smoothly as possible, considering that both you and your child are feeling tired and will most likely encounter a crammed store with customers sharing the same stressful situation and all hoping that patience and temper will endure the shopping experience.

This is the everyday reality for many women today; who besides working full-time, try to maintain a family, live up to the expectations of being a good mother, and if possible set a aside a limited share of time for own leisure – this is the life of a *busy mom*. While recognizing that their male counter part may experience similar stressful elements, we have in this paper chosen to focus on understanding how busy moms experience the in-store grocery shopping environment. In exploring the grocery shopping experience of these consumers, it is our ambition to gain an understanding of what consumers feel creates particular emotions and/or physical sensations in the store. With in-store, we mean everything inside and outside the store relating to the physical store, which can be apprehended through the consumer's senses. The knowledge gained will allow us to suggest ways to improve the grocery shopping experience (i.e. to make it better and more satisfactory than before) of busy moms, and present food retailers with insights that help in targeting this consumer group in-store.

The above is the foundation for our research problem and choice of target group. In the upcoming parts of this introductory chapter, we present the reasoning underlying this choice.

## 1.1 In-Store Marketing

Because of today's fragmented media and more time-pressured consumers, in-store marketing<sup>1</sup> has become an increasingly important opportunity for retailers and manufacturers to reach a large and responsive consumer audience (Ljungberg, 2007; In-Store Marketing Institute, 2006; McGoldrick, 2002).

From the perspective of most retailers, creating influential atmospheres is an imperative marketing strategy (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Kotler coined the term "atmospherics" to describe the intentional control and manipulation of environmental cues (Hoffman and Turley, 2002).

*"Atmospherics is the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability."* (Kotler, 1973 cited in McGoldrick, 2002:459).

From a consumer's point of view, store atmosphere is the perception of quality of the surroundings, which can be expressed in sensory terms. Consumer perception of the retail environment is however, not seldom different to that defined by the retailer and varies from shopper to shopper (Tai and Fung, 1997). Bäckström and Johansson (2006:427-428) for example, found that *"when consumers' in-store experiences are in focus, there are considerable differences between retailers' and consumers' opinions on what constitutes pleasurable experiences and how these might be induced in store environments."* Thus, it is rational to investigate in-store marketing from a consumer perspective.

## 1.2 Busy Moms – a Group of Special Interest

Within the grocery industry, families with children constitute a group of major interest due to the extents and variety of products purchased. Families are essential since they are high spenders and regular shoppers (McGoldrick, 2002). Consequently knowing and understanding the attitudes and behavior of this group ought to be imperatively included in the grocery retailer's strategy.

The view that women are usually seen as the household chiefs and purchasing officers; part of her domestic duties as a wife and a mother are to keep the family healthy, warm, and well nourished, has for a long time been the view of most retailers and companies in the fast-moving consumer goods industry. However, what has not been so attentively observed is the actual growth in the spending power of women and how to distance marketing messages from the traditional clichés (Parkin, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> In-store marketing can be defined as *"the marketing dollars spent inside the store in the form of store design, merchandising, visual displays, or in-store promotions"* (American Marketing Association, 2007).

*“Advertisers consistently used the ‘food is love’ dictum to sanctify the connection between women and food, and to reinforce the idea that women should prepare food for their families (...)”* (Parkin, 2006:8). However gender roles, advertising styles, and eating patterns have changed over the course of the twentieth century; but what has not, is the fact that food industries are consistently ranked as one of the largest advertisers in mass circulation media (Parkin, 2006).

Marketers today, are faced with the challenge of marketing to distinct groups of women, each of whom carry their own ideas on parenting, peer influence, work and family balance, and consumer brands (Bailey and Ulman, 2005). Although many women work because they need to earn a living or to have extra money for themselves or their families, many also see it as a desirable and integral part of themselves (Bailey and Ulman, 2005).

Balance has become an important touch point for mothers. The search for balance includes simplifying one’s life, growing spiritually, and just feeling good. Balance in this previous sense can mean simplifying household areas in order to eliminate some of the time devoted to daily chores (Bailey, 2002). Her involvement in school, non-profit organizations, and athletic teams places her in a position to make buying decisions for just about anything involving family and/or household. In addition, personal needs are complemented with all the work related purchases, where they are buying computers, furniture, financial services, etc. The bottom-line is that moms are spending money, and they are doing it all day long in many different places for many different people (Bailey and Ulman, 2005).

### **1.3 Previous Research**

American authors such as Bailey and Ulman (2005), Parkin (2006), Kanner (2004), and Leeming and Tripp (1994) are very good at describing the potential the women’s segments (single, married, mothers, employed, etc.) hold; and successfully pitch it in, in books describing the growth and possibilities related to women segments and how they purchase and behave as consumers. In addition, several websites such as [marketresearch.com](http://marketresearch.com), [marketingtomoms.com](http://marketingtomoms.com), [bluesuitmoms.com](http://bluesuitmoms.com), [wahm.com](http://wahm.com), [hbwm.com](http://hbwm.com), among others present statistical info suggesting the potential comprising the mom segment, let alone women as a consumer group.

The website [marketingtomoms.com](http://marketingtomoms.com) holds a great example of the previous, aiming to influence marketers and entrepreneurs with short and impressive statements applicable to the American market such as:

- Mothers control 85% of household spending; yet 70% of them feel companies are not doing a good job speaking to them.
- 90% of mothers use the same products at home and the office
- 5 million moms own their own business
- 88% of mothers refer to themselves as the household CFO



Interestingly enough, most literature (e.g. Bailey, 2002; Bailey and Ulman, 2005; Barletta, 2005; Kanner, 2004; Leeming and Tripp, 1994; and Parkin, 2006) on the subject and on the target group of busy moms resembles the American market; and is often literature more of a sales-friendly popular marketing character, rather than that of an academic research character. When exploring the Swedish market, academic literature such as articles in journals or other publications on the consumer behavior of our target group is more difficult to come by. Some knowledge on the subject, we assume, is probably known to store managers and other researchers who analyze purchasing patterns shown on loyalty cards, crowding effects, measurements advertising campaigns, and alike.

On the other hand, academic literature within in-store marketing and how induced atmospheric-tailoring emphasizes the emotional experiences for shoppers has flourished in the field of environmental psychology (e.g. Turley and Milliman, 2000; Hoffman and Turley, 2002; Tai and Fung, 1997; Garlin and Owen, 2006; Babin and Attaway, 2000; Spangenberg et al, 2005; and Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000).

*“The accumulated studies of the retail environment pertaining to atmospherics can best be described as being both eclectic and diverse.” (Hoffman and Turley, 2002:34)*

However, Bäckström and Johansson (2006) argue that the same literature that has highlighted the importance for retailers to induce experiences often lacks both definitions of central concepts and empirical support. The gap in the literature on one hand reflects the distance between theory and practice, and on the other hand, on a more practical approach differing views and actual understanding of the needs of consumers between consumers themselves and grocery retailers.

The sales-friendly American literature suggests that marketers need to target moms through moms’ language which revolves around their core needs recognized in other literature (Leeming and Tripp, 1994; Bailey, 2002; Kanner, 2004; Bailey and Ulman, 2005; and Parkin, 2006) such as convenience, value, safety and quality, importance to image, nurturing, and attributing increasing importance to technology. Yet another important aspect of the mom market to bear in mind is the change in generations of moms who fall in the prime child bearing age, and attach the image of that generation to moms in general. For example baby boomer moms were defined by “Soccer mom”<sup>2</sup> image, which is eschewed by Gen X moms who are in their prime child bearing age. This literature further claims that this generation of moms and their inherent values is the most important group for marketers to pay attention to. The market in next ten years is going to be influenced by Gen Y moms necessitating change in the pitch of marketers (Market Research, 2007).

Leeming and Tripp (1994) emphasize that marketers should be attentive to the opportunities given when busy moms put their purchase decision into play; and then

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<sup>2</sup> “Soccer mom” can be defined as “mother occupied with children's leisure activities: a mother who devotes herself to her children's leisure activities, e.g. driving them to and from sports activities.” (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2007)

provide helpful and inspiring information. According to them, working women want what all other women want when choosing where to buy their groceries: quality produce; a clean, neat store; good variety/wide selection; good and low prices. However, working mothers are willing, to some extent, to sacrifice price-cutting measures for convenience. Although saving money is important to mothers, spending money on their families is top priority. Furthermore, Bailey (2002) argues that time for her family, time for herself, time to work, time for her spouse, and time for the house are just a few of the demands on a mother's time. Time is so precious that some mothers are willing to pay to gain a few seconds in their day.

Bailey and Ulman (2005) note, that it is a common mistake to confuse a mother's need for productivity with convenience or choice. Furthermore, young generation X moms and generation Y moms have experienced so much hype that they have become immune to standard brand messaging; they have an astute awareness that technology can create incredible images and they approach advertising claims with skepticism.

## 1.4 Targeting

The aim of target marketing is to reach intended customers as efficiently as feasible (Kotler et al, 1999). The grocery industry is conscious of their target market and which media to use to reach their customers. In-store marketing has however, not yet developed in terms of target marketing and little is known about how to target different customer groups as well as how these purchase fast-moving consumer goods (Moström, 2007). Consumers' responses to retail environments are not universal and it is thus important for retailers to take into account that different categories of consumers react differently when experiencing the same in-store stimuli. Subsequently, in-store marketing efforts ought to be cautiously planned with a particular consumer in mind (Turley and Milliman, 2000). The practice of targeting, which is an essential ingredient of nearly all companies' marketing efforts (Kotler et al, 1999), is thus also imperative within in-store marketing. Once the target customer segments have been defined, the store design can contribute in focusing store efforts upon customer needs (McGoldrick, 2002).

According to McGoldrick (2002), retailers face major marketing decisions about their target market and positioning, product assortment and services, price, promotion and place; customizing the retail mix to serve the target customers most effectively and profitably. He argues that:

*“market segmentation assists in the understanding and satisfaction of consumer need; it can also be a first step towards deciding upon the areas of the market in which to compete. A prerequisite for effective targeting is an understanding of the needs of viable market segments.”* McGoldrick (2002:167)

However, what has been regarded as a problem with target marketing has been the tendency of retailers pursuing the same targets; making differentiation on other

variables is then the only real way of differentiating a store (McGoldrick, 2002). According to Parkin (2006), modern advertising has changed dramatically since the early twentieth century, but when it comes to food, messages have remained consistent. Advertisers have historically promoted food in distinctly gendered terms, returning repeatedly to themes that associated shopping and cooking with women and different roles. Regardless of the actual work involved, women have been targeted with similar messages where shopping and cooking are acts of an expression of love towards their families.

Just as store images can vary on numerous different attributes, so too can shoppers' images and self-images. However, the manipulation of the retail marketing mix will not add up to effective positioning, unless it produces a coherent and favorable image within the minds of the stores' target customers (McGoldrick, 2002).

Possible solutions applicable to the American market, derived from non-scientific popular American sales-friendly literature, are offered proposing how to reach our intended target group of busy moms. Bailey and Ulman (2005) for example stress that the key to success in marketing to a new generation of mothers is to understand who they are and the things that influence them, also tapping into where they are going, keeping pace with their changing needs and wants so that they are not left wondering what your brand has done for them lately. It is critical for marketers to understand if their brand, product, or service is best suited for a mother because it helps her prosper as a woman or because it provides another opportunity to be a better mom. Your messaging and use of imagery must be precise in this regard or you will quickly be deemed irrelevant by thousands of women. Kanner (2004) adds that therefore, the trick is to deliver a message that cuts through clutter, convinces with charm and grace, and connects solidly with a fast-moving target.

## **1.5 Mothers as Individuals and Consumers**

The life of a working mother is based on time management; maintaining her part of household duties while fulfilling the demands of her job. The routine of a working mother comprises balancing her working schedule with her children's activities. However, that is not all, just as all parents do, working mothers also approach a second shift of work, when they arrive home each evening. Before the end of the day a long list of duties must be completed, including cooking dinner, preparing for the next day, doing laundry, correcting homework, reviewing schoolwork, and paying bills (Bailey, 2002).

The single most mentioned complication in the lives of working mothers is stress (Leeming and Tripp, 1994). Bailey and Ulman (2005) suggest that mothers will pay more for a product that saves them time; placing an elevated value on products and services that allow them to spend additional time with their families or maximize their efforts in balancing work and family. Many busy moms acknowledge a good day in terms of successfully accomplishing various tasks, whether this means

successfully getting to all errands or completing a long-standing project. Mothers are thus likely to appreciate companies and brands that help facilitate their need for productivity. Therefore, moms want retailers, service providers, and brands producers to appreciate and understand their time restraints and appreciate the time put into selection process.

Furthermore, Bailey and Ulman (2005) state that mothers are now more than ever the gatekeepers for family health; addressing their own natural aging process and concerns about their own physical well-being and that of their children. Targeting mothers on the basis of products that in their designations include natural ingredients and offer convenience are increasing in popularity with mothers. Thus making good use of promotional aspects so as to ensure moms choose the better alternatives for her family would seem as a good suggestion for grocery retailers.

In addition, Kanner (2004) indicates that convenience appears to be a key term, because regardless if a mother has one or eight children, all moms believe they are busy. The sense of always being on-duty combined with the desire to get it done and move on has given rise to 24-hour shopping, catalogs, and double-duty products.

In understanding the consumer experience of working mothers, one should also recognize the diversity in the market and acknowledge that not all moms think alike (Bailey, 2002). Marketers today are faced with the challenge of marketing to distinct groups of women, each of whom carry their own ideas on parenting, peer influence, work and family balance, and consumer brands (Bailey and Ulman, 2005).

## **1.6 Theoretical and Practical Relevance**

All in all, insights gained from exploring how the target group of busy moms experience the in-store grocery shopping environment, may provide both clear theoretical and practical contributions.

The vitality of targeting is well established in both business practice and literature (e.g. Kotler et al, 1999; McGoldrick, 2002; Solomon et al, 2006). Within retailing, in-store marketing is increasingly being recognized as an important marketing tool for differentiation (e.g. McGoldrick, 2002). We have however not found that the combination of targeting and in-store marketing have been thoroughly recognized in business literature and research-based articles. Thus, we also see a theoretical relevance for further studies within this area. Furthermore, there appears to be a gap in this field of academic literature pertaining to the target group of women.

However, the most obvious potential for contributions are practical in nature since knowledge about how to target in-store marketing efforts in a grocery retail setting is scarce (Moström, 2007) and at the same time growing in importance in today's market place (McGoldrick, 2002), characterized by a media clutter and time-pressured consumers (Ljungberg, 2007; In-Store Marketing Institute, 2006;

McGoldrick, 2002). Consequently, knowledge resulting from this study may be of interest to grocery retailers and store managers, food producers, as well as other marketers wanting to learn more about in-store marketing and targeting mothers.

## 1.7 Research Question

Almost every decision a woman makes is subject to a split-second analysis: How much time, effort, and energy must I put into this? Does it add stress to my life or bring me more of the good stuff I need? (Kanner, 2004) Time is the essence for busy mothers, therefore advertising should be kept brief and to the point (Leeming and Tripp, 1994). Performance and quality are two other influential factors playing an important role in a mother's decision to buy a product. Mothers are looking for time-saving solutions and convenience; busy moms do not want to have to reinvest their time searching for a replacement (Bailey and Ulman, 2005).

Insight in the general understanding of the needs and wants of mothers seem to lack what actually triggers the resulting in-store behavior. The American sales-friendly literature fails to grasp the insight as to what captivates, inspires and/or upsets busy moms while at the store and how this relates to the in-store environment. Coupled with the growing importance of in-store marketing and establishment of busy moms as an important consumer for grocery retailers, this naturally arouses an interest into exploring this target group's view of their grocery shopping, in order to reach a deeper understanding of what characterizes their experiences of in-store environments at grocery stores.

Besides, this naturally poses several questions regarding the induced grocery shopping experience; can targeting such an interest group and tailoring in-store environments affect other consumer groups? Could several consumer groups still be targeted and influenced by one and the same customized package of in-store influencers? Are atmospheric settings' leverage effects perceived as either positively- or negatively-influencing one or more consumer groups? How does the current living situation of busy moms affect their grocery shopping experience? What do these consumers find interesting, informative, exciting and/or disturbing? What information provided in-store is useful? Which (food) solutions and deals are the most sought and appealing? Can knowledge on the former contribute to a better tailoring of the in-store marketing?

However, if all previous questioning might seem of interest and adequate to our current subject, we set out to primarily research the following:

***In what ways can in-store marketing influence the target group of "busy moms" in order to improve their shopping experience at grocery stores?***

## 1.8 Research Purpose

The purpose of this master thesis is to understand how *busy moms* experience their grocery shopping trips and the in-store environment. In gaining this knowledge, we aim at being able to suggest ways to improve the grocery shopping experience of busy moms; and present insights that can help food retailers in targeting this consumer group in-store.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

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*This chapter aims to give the reader an illustration of how the research was conducted. A summary of the research methods employed in this study, which aims to achieve the research purpose as discussed in the previous chapter, is therefore presented and argued for. To begin with, the philosophical orientations related to this research will be accounted for since it is our belief that our worldviews as researchers greatly influence the way this study was conducted and ultimately the findings. The approach, strategy and design will then be motivated and the chosen method will be presented and discussed. Finally, the validity, credibility, reliability, and generalizability of the study will be examined.*

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### 2.1 Philosophical Orientations

The foundational philosophical views underpinning this study concern the fundamental values and assumptions that the authors' interpretations rest upon. These influence the overall structure of the study and how the empirical base is formed and later on regarded.

#### 2.1.1 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

##### 2.1.1.1 Social Constructionism

The ontological position of this research activity rests on social constructionism, since we view reality as being socially constructed, i.e. that, social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In essence, we believe that "reality" is determined by people rather than by objective and external factors (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Thus our task as researchers is to focus on what people, individually and collectively, are thinking and feeling; relating then, this understanding to explain their behavior and possibly suggest insights to improve the current offering of grocery retailers. Exemplified in our study this means; how busy moms experience the purchasing moment and the strategies that they develop for managing these aspects. Due to the nature of our research aim, emphasis is not placed on the *explanation* of human behavior, but rather on the *understanding*, which results in an interpretivistic epistemological standpoint (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

##### 2.1.1.2 Positivism

An alternative to the stance above is the positivist point of view. Positivist and relativist positions assume that there is a reality which exists independently of the

observer, and hence the job of the researcher is merely to identify this pre-existent reality. However, by choosing a constructionist perspective we do not assume any pre-existing reality, rather different views of reality (Jacobsen, 2000); the aims of the researcher are then to understand how people invent structures to help them make sense of what is going on around them (Jacobsen, 2000; Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

Additionally, the positivist approach is not very fruitful for the purposes of this study since it is ineffective in understanding processes or significance that people attach to actions. Furthermore, the positivist approach does not generate theories; and because it focuses on what is, or what has been recently, it makes it hard for decision-makers (i.e. store managers) to infer in what changes and actions should take place in the future. A social constructionist approach strengthens the ability to understand people's meanings, to adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge, and to contribute to the evolution of new theories; although it may be very time consuming (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

Furthermore, we recognize that we, as researchers, can never be separated from the sense-making process. One further aspect to take into account is that interaction takes place in such a way that individuals are continually interpreting the symbolic meaning of their environment and acts on the basis of the imputed meaning (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Consequently, given our chosen approach, we will be providing an interpretation of others' interpretations. By being aware of this, we can distance ourselves to some extent from the particular context of our respondents. In sum, the overall methodological approach as well as the results of this research will originate from an ontological social constructionist perspective (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

## **2.2 Research Approach**

Ideally we would conduct this study without any pre-existing expectations and in this way allow ourselves to collect all relevant data, without constraining the type of data that could be gathered (Jacobsen, 2000). However, this is in our academic reality not entirely possible; besides, the given time frame set for this project does not allow extensive follow-ups nor the analysis of several other variables outside the main research question. In addition, as students of marketing with insights in retailing theories a totally distant position towards the study cannot be argued.

### **2.2.1 Inductive Elements**

As discussed previously, as researchers we are interested in the social actions and attitudes demonstrated by our target group. We set out to derive general inferences out of observations and appreciate inherent patterns rather than preconceived ideas. (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Several journal articles and books have commented and listed guidelines on how to effectively reach mothers and/or women with their marketing messages; the previous distinction of "and/or" is to be remarked on since



previous researchers usually comment on specific roles within the female gender. However, we choose to integrate the variables of working woman and mother into working mothers and let our target group describe their views on current in-store marketing methods targeted at them and how these affect her shopping experience. In this case, the actual observations are noted by our respondents in form of photographs and then conjointly analyzed by means of an interview and discussion on their registered observations. The inductive nature of the study implies identifying and discussing the empirical base and its implications for generating new concepts and theories (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

The research will progress by gathering rich data from which ideas will be induced; following the precepts of the social constructionist paradigm, we will approach the study its findings with an open-minded view. The previous will be even backed by engaging in conversation with our study participants using the photographs as anchoring documents.

### **2.2.2 Deductive Elements**

One of the underlying aims of this study is to reveal how our target group responds to physical stimuli in the in-store environment. In doing so, insights on how to optimize the store environment according to the attitudes and behavior of this consumer group can be gained. Thus when considering the approach to the research question and the nature of this study, there is an underlying assumption that atmospheric variables have an impact on shoppers. The research problem of this thesis originates partly from the theoretical framework of environmental psychology, and the M-R model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). In addition to situational variables, we choose to complement the study with the view on personal variables suggested by Bäckström and Johansson (2006). This choice is grounded on the customer in-store experience being influenced by the consumers themselves to some extent. The pre-disposition and characteristics of the “busy-mom” segment may in this way subconsciously limit and control the effects and reach of in-store marketing. In sum, the theoretical relationship to research is therefore rather deductive in nature since it implies that the research builds upon theories that already exist in the domain being researched (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

### **2.2.3 Iterative Approach**

Due to a departure of existing literature one may argue that this research is deductive in its character, without being incorrect; however, we even allege to the inductive approach when departing from reality. Just as deduction entails an element of induction, the inductive process is likely to entail a modicum of deduction (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Therefore upon the completion of this study, a compromise between an inductive and deductive approach towards the gathering and production of knowledge will be most likely reflected in our views.

Since we will inevitably be weaving back and forth between data and theory, the study's character will be primarily of an iterative approach. This repetitive interplay between collection and analysis of data is basically due to the analysis stage of the research only beginning shortly after some of the data has been collected; thereupon some implications are drawn and the following steps in the data collection process guided (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

## **2.3 Research Design**

An exploratory study is a suitable approach in our study, acknowledging that we are investigating a subject of which little is known (Deflem, 1998); it fits when clarifying terms, obtaining better insights and an understanding of a given area is of interest. In addition, explorative research is appropriate when preparing a basis for future research (Deflem, 1998; Merriam, 1994).

Focusing on the meaning of words in the collection and analysis of data, we adhere to a qualitative research approach (Bryman and Bell, 2003) since it is suitable considering that we are interested in gaining a better comprehension of busy moms' shopping experience and in turn behavior by means of interpretation and understanding. When studying what our target group perceives as interesting, informative, exciting and/or disturbing within stores; we are aiming to analyze their opinions and resulting behavior. Therefore, in undertaking the study, the most suitable approach is a qualitative research.

The study entails a detailed and intensive analysis of our target group; where we are concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the attitudes and experiences of busy moms while grocery shopping. In our study the object of interest is the experience of busy moms during their shopping trips, which means it is our ambition to explore and gain an understanding of what they feel creates particular emotions and/or physical sensations. In this revelatory approach the choice of an explorative study is suitable in the sense that we as researchers have an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

We have chosen to follow the main research traits of grounded theory. This choice is based on the possibility offered to capture the complexity of the context studied and it is ideal for an open-ended research strategy applied seeking to generate theory out of data in a field that has not been exhaustively researched. Furthermore, grounded theory derives from the data systematically collected and analyzed during the research process; where the process of data gathering and analysis are closely related (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Since we aim to build theory from our data, a close connection between conceptualization and data is to be held so as to ensure the correspondence between the generated concepts and categories with their indicators.

The research begins with the generalization of the research question and thereafter the relevant people and incidents are theoretically sampled enabling to later on collect the relevant data. Thereafter concepts and categories are generated by selectively coding the data generated from a discriminated sample into discrete portions. The 'discriminant sampling' implies a very focused and selective sample of individuals, locations and situations in order to refine the data produced, the created categories and the relationship between the two latter (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

## **2.4 Methods of Data Collection**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Based on previous discussions, it is now time to present qualitative methods we have used to fulfill our research purpose and discuss the implications of these choices. Primary data in this study will be gathered through the use of photo elicitation, a method often used in combination with other qualitative methods, in-depth interviews in this case. The foundational reason for this choice is that photo elicitation enlarges the possibilities of traditional empirical research since pictures evoke information, feelings, and memories difficult to obtain in words-alone interviews (Harper, 2002). Thus, the knowledge photo elicitation is expected to evoke during personal interviews, is suitable to this study since it is believed to contribute to answering in what ways in-store marketing and store environments can influence the grocery shopping experience for our given target group.

### **2.4.2 In-depth Interviews**

Within qualitative studies, interviews are the most commonly employed technique, a method also very suitable for the purposes of this research activity since it allows us to focus on the interviewee's point of view (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Noteworthy is that interviews do not necessarily have to be conducted on a one-to-one basis. There are two main types of interviews: focus groups and in-depth interviews. For the purposes of this study, the latter is preferred since we are interested in every respondent's opinions and want to avoid the risk of having our respondents being influenced by other respondents, which commonly occurs in focus groups. Still, focus groups could be considered as an alternative, since having a discussion between several respondents could be very interesting and provide useful insights through group synergies. However, this is not an option due to the lack of interview skills to moderate focus groups as well as the difficulties to arrange a suitable time and location where all the respondents can meet. Furthermore, we are interested in creating a dialogue with each respondent on all the topics covered, since we want to compare findings. Besides, we choose to meet our respondents individually because it makes it easier to create an atmosphere of confidentiality and sincerity, which makes the respondents relaxed and more likely to reveal themselves (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

In-depth interviews could be considered appropriate for this study since this method enables the researcher to explore deeply to reveal new dimensions of a problem and to ensure accurate accounts based on personal experiences (Easterby-Smith et al 2002). In this way, insights into what the interviewee see as relevant and important (Bryman and Bell, 2003), i.e. busy moms' perceptions of the grocery store environment can be highlighted. These benefits match the type of deep insights needed to understand issues concerning how mothers perceive the in-store environment since it helps us to grasp the meanings interviewees attach to these issues (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

It is however, not entirely certain that their behavior can be determined from these insights. In other words, the respondents' opinions are not necessarily identical to the actual in-store purchasing behavior. Using photo elicitation to evoke emotions, memories and opinions beyond what can be obtained in word alone interviews, is thus a superior predictor of consumer behavior in comparison to in-depth interviews. This method helps us understand how busy mothers can be better targeted by means of improving their shopping experience with help of in-store marketing and the tailoring of store environments.

### **2.4.3 Photo Elicitation**

Using photo elicitation in research has been rare although the method has been found to provide useful information which can be difficult to obtain from other research methods. Photo elicitation is a method based on simply inserting photographs into the research interviews. The pictures sharpen the respondents' memory and reduce the chances of misunderstandings during the interview (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibanez, 2004).

In our case, where the interviews will reflect over the respondents experience in-store, the use of this method will be very helpful seeing that people generally do not remember every detail of their shopping trip when they try to think back. Research done by Underhill (2000) proved this by asking customers leaving a store whether they had noticed different displays in the store when shopping. Shoppers remembered seeing signs of selected products even though there were no such signs in the store. By having the customers take pictures of interesting elements in the store they will remember the shopping trip considerably more thoroughly, and in that way ensure more reliable results.

There are several different ways to use photo elicitation. Five approaches mentioned in literature are the use of existing photographs, photographs taken by the researcher, photographs taken by the interviewee in the past, photographs taken by the interviewee upon request, and a combination of the former (Thelander, 2007). In our study we believe the most suitable approach is to have the interviewees take pictures upon request since the picture taking is functioning as a tool for the respondents to express their own in-store experience. Having the researchers taking the photographs

or using existing pictures would not contribute as much since the photographs would not be from the respondents' own shopping trip. There would have been the possibility of certain issues being ignored or not appearing in the interview which might come up when the respondents themselves are free to base the conversations on what they see in their own pictures.

Our photo elicitation approach was to equip the busy moms, about to start their grocery shopping trip, with a digital camera before entering the store. They also received written instructions telling them to take 15-20 pictures of things they found helpful, inspiring, fascinating, informative, annoying, disturbing, or interesting in any other way (see Appendix 1). Furthermore, we informed the respondents that:

*“This concerns “everything” inside and outside the store that can be associated with your grocery purchases in this particular store. With everything we mean everything you can touch, see, smell, and hear with your senses, that is, everything from A to Z”*  
(see Appendix 1).

With these directions, we made certain to include the variables presented in the theory chapter (such as exteriors, general interiors, and human variables), i.e. the respondents were not predisposed to exclude any of the highlighted variables in the theory chapter if these would be of importance to them. Besides, the deliberately open-ended instructions made it possible for our respondents to emphasize other areas of interest. The respondents then took pictures while doing their normal grocery shopping. After check out we met them again and told them to look over the pictures in the camera, and delete less important pictures in order to cut it down to 15 pictures.

The next step of our research process was to have an in-depth interview with the respondents. This interview took place at any location convenient for the respondent, being their office or home, at the university, in the kindergarten, or other. We wanted the interview to take place under conditions free of disturbance, but are aware that this might be difficult in some cases if the respondents did not have any other place to leave their children during the interview. We had at this point developed the pictures, and numbered them in order to easily identify the photographs talked about during the interview.

Following a semi-structured interview guide with a number of questions prepared in advance (see Appendix 2), we began the interview by asking the respondents to pick out 12 of the pictures which they felt represented their shopping experience. We further wanted them to tell us how these 12 photographs expressed their experiences, and why they picked these pictures and not the 3 remaining.

The next step was for the respondents to organize the 12 photographs into themes, describing them, and labeling them. We then wanted them to rank the themes in order of importance, and decide whether the theme represents something positive or negative. We did this in order to get a clearer picture of what factors the moms find the most important to them personally when they go shopping. These factors would be of the highest interest when mapping what the optimal grocery store should be like

in order to target the busy moms. Having gone through all the steps of the interview guide, an in-depth understanding of the respondents' in-store experience arose. By seeing arguments being mentioned by several of our respondents we aimed at finding the general experience among busy moms.

Conducting a photo elicitation interview we need to be aware that the challenges of this method go beyond those of a words-alone interview, both for the respondent and for the researcher. Both methods demand abilities to balance between the researchers' goal of their data collection and to retain a compassion for the respondents (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). The use of photo elicitation often demands more from the respondents concerning time than a general in-depth interview. The process consists of two stages, first taking the pictures, and later giving a thorough interview. This is time consuming for the researchers which affects the amount of respondents they have time to interview, as well as time consuming for the respondents which might affect the amount of respondents willing to take part in the study.

Giving the respondents clear instructions for their shopping trip, making sure they understand all the possibilities they have to take pictures in-store, without leading them on was another challenge. We carefully formulated instructions for the respondents which we believe meet this requirement. Furthermore, another challenge can be that the respondents do not feel comfortable taking pictures of i.e. other people or crowds. This can make them not take pictures of important aspects of their shopping trip. We are aiming at clearing up such issues in the last part of our interview guide. Also coding words and images may be a challenge in analyzing photo elicitation interviews (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). We will come back to how we will handle this in our research in section 2.4.8 Coding of Data.

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, the one we have found the most challenging for our research was finding people willing to take part in our study. As the description of our target group indicates they are busy people, something which does not ease the search process. We will in the following section go through the selection of respondents for our research.

#### **2.4.4 Selection of Respondents**

Finding persons with the respective characteristics of the consumer target group of this study, is imperative in the selection of respondents as it indisputably influences the trustworthiness of the results (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Trying to understand busy moms makes it essential to develop a common understanding of the term. Mothers have precious little energy and time to spare so any attempt at reaching them has to take into consideration that it is easier to insinuate our needs into a mom's existing routine than it is to ask her to change or even add a new routine to her agenda. Therefore when targeting mothers we should take into account that they often are most concerned with issues of convenience, value, family health and safety, child enrichment, and balance (Bailey, 2002). Highlighting the importance of participation

as a first step to generating future benefits and a future possibility of offering solutions, might be a pitch that lures and interests respondents to take part in the study.

***Ideal candidate criteria***

- Family structure (e.g. husband, wife, and one or more children aged 3-10)
- Double income sources outside the household
- Parents are fulltime workers

We are looking for mothers who work full time and simultaneously manage the household and children, since this highlights mothers' role and qualities as multi-taskers, thereby qualifying them as busy. In addition, we consciously choose to approach the earlier mentioned group of mothers whom have their youngest child in the age range of 3-10. We choose to exclude mothers on maternity leave and even part-timers, since we do not regard them as entirely fulfilling the criteria comprising our target group. Furthermore, the choice of children in the age range of 3-10 is done consciously given the fact that older children enjoy an increased amount of independence which is inversely related to the work-load set on mothers looking after their offspring.

## **2.4.5 Finding our Respondents**

We have used two different strategies to choosing respondents. The first attempt was to approach potential participants from our defined target group at in before-hand chosen kindergartens in the geographical area of Lund, Sweden. When approaching these individuals a letter of presentation containing purpose, participation implications as well as contact information was provided in order to make a serious impression and encourage participation. Screening of participants then followed by means of interaction through an explanatory process of the study and some short questions to ensure that the respondents' profile was in accordance with the criteria set for our target group. Potential participants were sought at the following day-cares:

- Andungen, in the area of Vildanden, Lund (Close to ICA Kvantum and AGs Favör)
- International Pre-school, in the area of Tuna, Lund (Close to ICA Tuna)

The choice of these two day-care centers is based on location; they are not only geographically positioned close to residential locations and relatively close to enterprise areas but they are even in the proximities of larger grocery stores chosen in this study (see next section). When visiting the day-care centers, we approached mothers when picking up their children after work by introducing ourselves and the objectives of the study, and encouraged participation.

Aware of the difficulty in attaining respondents with the prior approach, given the almost obvious self-implying time constraints of busy moms, our secondary approach

was based on the research technique of ‘*snowballing*’. A constituting part of our interviewed base includes acquaintances to prior respondents and/or by means of referral. Snowballing as a research technique is often criticized as not leading to a representative response group. However, we see this downside of the method when used in quantitative studies as a factor not affecting our qualitative study negatively, since we seek respondents fulfilling certain criteria. We by no means, aim to generalize our results as applicable and representative of to a whole population (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

#### **2.4.6 Number of Respondents**

A commonly used approach to decide the number of interviews in qualitative studies is to assess when a point of saturation is reached, i.e. when new interviews are not likely to provide any relevant additional insights (Bryman and Bell, 2002). In this study however, we did not reach this point since our ninth and last interview also provided new information. Altogether, nine interviews were a reasonable number considering the time aspects related with the use of in-depth interviews and the length of this study. Moreover, our primary interest is to seek for quality in our undertaken interviews rather than fulfilling a certain quantity of interviews. Deeper insights gained from an individual respondent may outweigh superficial explanations offered by a number of respondents.

#### **2.4.7 Choice of Stores**

We have chosen to let our respondents choose among the following four different stores in the area of Lund:

- ICA Tuna
- ICA Kvantum (Mobilia)
- Willy:s
- AGs Favör

The choice of the four stores represent on one hand a variety of stores fulfilling the different consumer needs, such as major shopping trips, immediate gratification with minimal need for planning, and low expenditure. On the other hand, store choices include a variety of attributes sought by consumers, such as wide assortments, value for money, varying levels of service, convenient locations, and varying opening hours (McGoldrick, 2002).

In addition, the different stores are geographically located close to different residential areas giving us the possibility to cover a large area of the city and take into account the availability and options of other grocery stores in Lund; thus, not limiting ourselves or our respondents to just one store which might not be their frequented one.



Stores usually have policies regarding the use of cameras by individuals not comprising staff; therefore, store managers have been contacted previously and informed of the purposes of the study and asked for permission. On an agreement of no further distribution of the photographic material and a non economic interest on our behalf, permission was granted with further requests of informing when observations would take place as well as sharing the generated results with store managers upon the study's completion.

#### **2.4.8 Coding of Data**

*"Coding is the starting point for most forms of qualitative data analysis"* (Bryman and Bell, 2003:435). The problem with qualitative data is how to compress highly multifaceted and context-bound information into a format which tells a story in a way that is completely believable to the reader. It calls for both a clear explanation of how the analysis was done and conclusions reached, and an illustration of how the raw data was transformed into significant conclusions in order for the reader to be able to follow the same path, and draw their own independent conclusions (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

Bryman and Bell (2003:435) suggest that one starts *"coding as soon as possible"*. Throughout our photo elicitation interviews, which all lasted between 1-1.5 hours, we had two of the authors taking notes. Shortly after each interview occasion, we tried to write out the interviews as fully as possible trying to categorize the issues that came up during the interviews in order to facilitate the analysis. Having these categories or themes in mind has given us an increasingly deeper understanding as we went along, and in that way sharpened our understanding of the data we have collected, and the theory we have read. Overall, the empirical material analyzed in this study is comprised of information collected from a total of nine consumers.

After having conducted all the photo elicitation interviews we gathered all the information we had gotten out of it, and began searching for patterns (category coding: Knutsson, 1998). During this first crude sorting of the data, we read through the text several times and wrote down the patterns we found with two aims in mind. Firstly, we wanted to find themes that could be related to elements traditionally considered to be relevant of consumers' in-store experiences. Secondly, we searched for possible themes in the texts that could lie outside these aspects (abstractive coding: Knutsson, 1998), fulfilling our explorative approach with the ambition to identify as many as possible aspects involved in the formation of busy moms' grocery shopping experience.

Having attained an overview of the themes included in our empirical material, the texts were methodically analyzed and all elements relevant to the creation of our target group's in-store experiences were listed. By making use of both category- and abstractive-coding, we allow ourselves to make use of the iterative approach;

approaching coding deductively when making use of pre-established categories and inductively when recurring to the use of new categories (Knutsson, 1998).

We further tried to categorize these into different themes, starting by dividing the information into personal and situational variables, utilizing our theoretical framework as a base in categorizing the collected data. These two were divided into sub-groups of issues that concerned the external variables, the general interior, layout and design variables, point-of-purchase and design variables, human variables, and variables related to the time-sensitive consumer. Several issues were found under each of these groups, so we further divided them into smaller and narrower themes which we then started to analyze. We analyzed each theme through comparing former literature with the findings of our study, and looking at how the busy moms' in-store experience may be a result of their personal characteristics, such as being highly time-sensitive consumers. The end result was, ultimately, a list of all relevant aspects that the respondents had highlighted of their in-store grocery shopping experiences, which are presented and analyzed in the subsequent chapter.

We would like to emphasize that all the respondents' names have been replaced with fictitious names, in order to guarantee the anonymity promised upon contact.

## **2.4.9 Method Discussion: Assessing the quality of the study**

It is important to explain the research process and the choices made in order for the study to enable the reader to independently create an opinion of trustworthiness of the study (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). We have therefore in this section examined the thesis based on its validity, credibility, generalizability, and reliability.

### **2.4.9.1 Validity**

Validity concerns whether our research is measuring what claims to measure (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003), i.e. do we clearly gain access to the in-store experiences of busy moms through this research activity/the methods used. We have used a narrow set of criteria (see section 2.4.5) in the selection of respondents in order to make sure we gain access to consumers which we believe truly qualify as busy moms. This however, has also resulted in difficulties in finding willing respondents who met our criteria; mostly due to our request for a share of their already constrained time to perform the in-depth interview.

Interestingly enough, among the nine respondents that took part of the study, a majority have a higher academic degree and are fairly affluent. It can be therefore questioned, if the respondents are representative for the entire group of busy moms, since other mothers may regard themselves as busy, and views of working mothers with less education and economic resources are not reflected in the same manner in the study. However, as suggested by earlier research, the stereotypic time-sensitive consumer is on average an individual who is highly educated, who tends to be

employed full-time (e.g. Umesh et al, 1989; Byung-Do et al, 1997). Furthermore, the reader should be reminded at this time that we did not seek a respondent base which could be regarded as representative; rather respondents were chosen on an availability and convenience basis. In sum, we would like to make our readers aware of this background when assessing the findings.

Regarding the insights presented, it is important to note that data from interviews and documents are subject to our interpretation as researchers; we recognize then that as researchers, we can never be separated from the sense-making process. Thus, there is no guarantee that an interpretation reflects reality, a weakness associated with the interpretivistic and social constructionist approach (Bryman and Bell, 2003). However, Merriam (1994) argues that since the researcher, as the primary instrument for data collection is able to adapt to external input, this proves a high internal validity.

#### **2.4.9.2 Credibility**

It is common practice in qualitative studies to limit the amount of interviews to when a point of saturation is perceived, i.e. when further interviews are not likely to provide additional insights (Bryman and Bell, 2003). However, in this study, saturation was not reached given that our ninth and last interview provided new perspectives. Nevertheless, a deep analysis of our nine respondents' views complimented with a clear presentation of how data has been coded, is something we hope will outweigh not having reached saturation and thereby weakening credibility.

#### **2.4.9.3 Generalizability**

Generalizability, concerns if the concepts and constructs derived from the study are of relevance in other settings (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Given the lack of representativeness and lack of saturation discussed above it is therefore hard to argue for a generalizability of this study in its totality. However, some insights constituting the defined target group are supported by the theoretical framework and empirical base to other busy moms and other scenarios; being therefore able to argue a varying degree of generalizability in our chosen variables.

#### **2.4.9.4 Reliability**

In all research it is important to consider the transparency of how sense was made from the raw data, i.e. how reliable the research is (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). In qualitative studies, the researchers are often the main instrument of the data collection (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Consequently, our study is reliant on our ability as instruments of data collection to gather and interpret observations and statements of our respondents. Therefore, we as researchers must consider possible discrepancies between what is actually being stated and our perceived interpretations thereof; which are results of interview bias. Characteristics of the researchers which may influence our interpretations include elements such as personality, pre-understanding, age, and gender. Furthermore, our mere presence during the face-to-face interviews is likely to

influence the respondents' answers. However, the advantages of face-to-face interviews outweigh other methods since it allows us to capture facial expressions, posture, and body language, which are important when interpreting the respondents' answers and not possible to notice otherwise (Malhotra and Birks, 2003).

#### **2.4.9.5 Language Nuances**

The majority of the photo elicitation interviews were conducted in Swedish, whereas the material comprising our theoretical framework was gathered from sources printed in English. It may be difficult to capture language nuances from elements of interview conversations when carefully translating the collected data. We merely ask our readers to be aware of this fact.

## 3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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*In this chapter, we present the theoretical framework used in this study. We base our theoretical background with literature from the fields of environmental psychology, consumer behavior and retailing. In presenting our framework we distinguish stimuli as being comprised by situational and personal variables; the relationship between these two variables is the pillar for understanding the minds of busy moms.*

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The overall theoretical framework used in this study is divided into two parts; *personal* and *situational variables*. The former refers to how consumer characteristics might influence our target group's in-store experiences, whereas the latter is primarily concerned with aspects in the store environment that may influence consumer behavior (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006).

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is based on literature from environmental psychology, retail management, and consumer behavior. How these stems of literature are taken into consideration will be outlined below; however we will first review the main aspects of targeting.

#### 3.1.1 Targeting

Choosing a strategic position is a concept applicable to all types of stores, even grocery stores. Their appeal however tends to be wider, since grocery retailers will mainly seek to attract its food business customers within its surrounding area. Nevertheless, grocery stores do adjust their positioning of stores in different localities, varying prices, promotions, assortments, service(s) and some aspects of ambience. Furthermore, within stores, different zones and categories also target different shoppers (McGoldrick, 2002).

Even while ignoring such local differences, there still are positioning differences between the major grocery chains comprising offerings in levels of price and service. However, the strategy of multi-positioning (McGoldrick, 2002) and full market coverage (De Pelsmacker et al, 2004), involving different store types under one name targeting all customers with all the products they need; draws upon and reinforces the power of a main brand, whilst signaling different positions and purposes (McGoldrick, 2002).

Targeting the most attractive groups, requires, evaluating segments on the basis of: size and growth of segment, structure attractiveness of segment, objectives and

budgets of company, and stability of market segments. Current turnover, potential growth and profitability of the chosen segments will however, be the first conditions to be evaluated (De Pelsmacker, 2004).

Even though, we regard busy moms as an important target group, it is worth highlighting that grocery retailers are confronted with serving several consumer segments, which should also be taken into account when developing the in-store environment and selling proposition. Thus, this is a fact of weight when considering the implications of our empirical findings set into relation with other aspects.

### **3.1.2 Environmental Psychology Research Tradition**

Most of the studies within a retailing context concerning situational variables and their influence on consumers' in-store experiences are anchored in the environmental psychology research tradition (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006). Environmental psychologists have long recognized that the environment is capable of influencing a wide range of behaviors as well as providing a context in which these behaviors occur (Hoffman and Turley, 2002; Tai and Fung, 1997).

Large parts of the theoretical framework used in this study emanate from the field of environmental psychology (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006), "*the scientific study of the effects of atmosphere on human behavior*" (Tai and Fung, 1997:311), and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm also known as the M-R model after its creators Mehrabian and Russell (1974). Environmental studies on store atmospherics has its origins in the especially influential research of Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which is based on both emotional (pleasure, arousal, and dominance) and behavioral responses (approach - avoidance) to environments. This theoretical foundation is important to discuss since it greatly influences our view of how the store environment affects consumer behavior.

### **3.1.3 The Original Mehrabian-Russell Model – the S-O-R Paradigm**

The M-R framework is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm (Tai and Fung, 1997) (see Figure 3.1) and helps explaining the effects of the retail environment on consumer behavior (Hoffman and Turley, 2002). In short, the model illustrates that stimulus will affect an organism, and consequently, this will cause a response in the organism.

In the model, environmental stimuli (S) evoke emotional states in the person/organism (O) situated in the environment. Finally, the response (R) is the outcome of the elicited emotional state, i.e. how the person behaves. Simply expressed, the environment will influence a person's emotional state that acts as a transient variable, which in turn influence consumers' behavior (Tai and Fung, 1997). Hence, the perceived store atmosphere does not directly cause people to behave in

certain ways, i.e. behaviors are mediated by a person's internal responses to the place (Bitner, 1992). Consequently, store atmosphere can affect in-store shopping behavior such as time and money spent in the store, evaluation of store and merchandise, and future patronage (Tai and Fung, 1997).

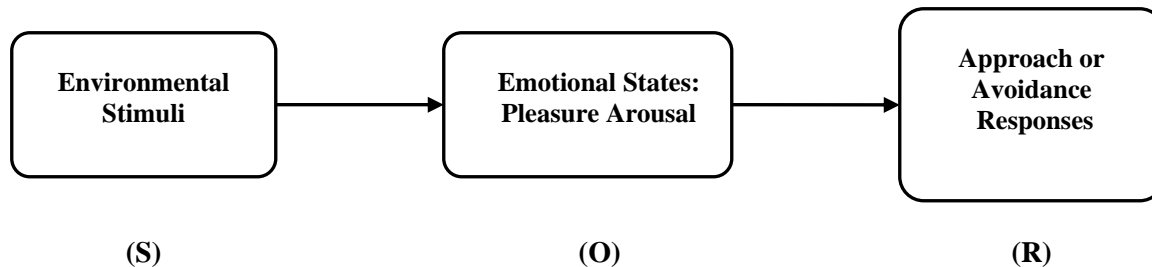


Figure 3.1: The Original Mehrabian-Russel Model (Tai and Fung, 1997:315)

The assumptions underlying the model are twofold. First, consumers' feelings ultimately determine what they choose to do and how they do it. Second, consumers react with different sets of emotions to various environments, which in turn, prompt them to approach or avoid the particular environment (Tai and Fung, 1997).

Within a retail environment, atmospheric elements such as external variables, general interiors, layout, and lighting and so forth, compose the set of stimuli. The organism component, which describes the recipients of the set stimuli, includes both customers and employees alike. The framework offers three basic emotional states that mediate approach-avoidance behaviors: pleasure/displeasure, arousal/non-arousal, and dominance/submissiveness (Hoffman and Turley, 2002). Out of these, pleasure and arousal, are the most significant mediators of intended shopping behaviors within the store (Tai and Fung, 1997).

The ultimate responses of consumers to the set of environmental stimuli are characterized as approach or avoidance behaviors (Hoffman and Turley, 2002). Approach behaviors include all positive behaviors that might be directed at a particular place, such as desire to stay, explore, and affiliate. On the contrary avoidance behaviors reflect the opposite. In a retail context, approach behaviors, including shopping enjoyment, returning, attraction and friendliness toward others, spending money, time spent browsing, and exploration of the store, are influenced by perceptions of the environment. Clearly, firms want to encourage approach behaviors and the ability of customers and employees to carry out their plans while at the same time discouraging avoidance behaviors (Bitner, 1992).

The retail store environment can influence both consumer and employee behavior. Ideally, therefore, retailers are wise to craft environments that support the needs of customers and employees simultaneously (Bitner, 1992), thus achieving a balance between two primary objectives. First, it is important to develop environments that appeal to consumer pleasure and arousal states while avoiding atmospheres creating

submissiveness. Second, facilitating the operational ease of the staff working in the store thereby ensuring efficiency is also imperative (Hoffman and Turley, 2002).

### **3.1.4 Alternative Viewpoints**

In reality, however, the process is not this straight-forward and the environmental psychology approach towards retail environments and is thus criticized accordingly (Tai and Fung, 1997).

Tai and Fung (1997) e.g. found that the model is not as simple as predicted by Mehrabian and Russell (see Figure 3.2). Instead, the environmental psychological components, i.e. S-O-R, may not only influence each other in a single one-way direction. The in-store environment is dynamic and it is clear that in-store environmental stimuli affect shoppers' behavior as well as their affective states. The three components are in fact affecting one another, rather than the single one-way influence of the components affecting one after the other.

Furthermore, environments may influence consumer behavior in numerous ways, not only through mood states (Greenland and McGoldrick, 2005). Bitner (1992) for instance states that consumers respond to dimensions of physical surroundings cognitively, emotionally, and physiologically, and those responses are what influence their behaviors in the environment, whereas emotional responses are mainly highlighted as mediator of behavior in the model above. Perceptions of the store environment lead to certain emotions, beliefs, and physiological sensations, which in turn influence behaviors. Behaviors are thus mediated by a person's internal responses (cognitive, emotional, and physiological) to the setting, which clearly are interdependent (i.e. supporting the findings of Tai and Fung (1997) illustrated above). For example, a person's beliefs about a place, a cognitive response, may well influence emotional response to the place and vice versa (Bitner, 1992).

In addition to the debate of how consumer behavior fundamentally is formed, it is also difficult to exactly measure the impact of a single stimulus since numerous stimuli are interacting in any environmental setting. Store atmosphere for example, project massive amounts of information to consumers with cues including display, color, lighting, layout and many more (Tai and Fung, 1997).



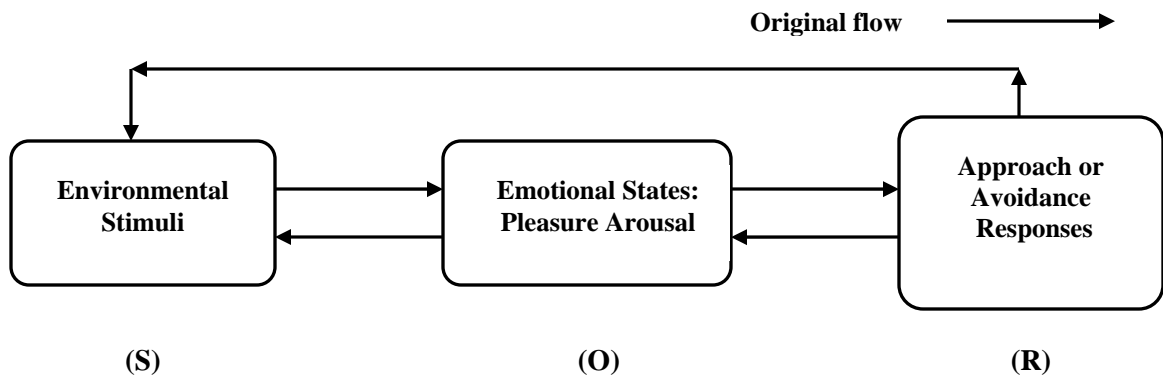


Figure 3.2: Mehrabian-Russel Model for Future Studies (Tai and Fung, 1997)

Additionally, instead of subscribing to learning as a result of internal thought processes, the behaviorist standpoint on learning rather rests on the assumption that learning occurs as a result of responses to external events. The consumer mind is approached as a *black box* (see Figure 3.3) and observable elements of behavior are highlighted. In short, observable aspects comprise the elements that go into the box, including stimuli or events perceived from the external world, and things that come out of the box, i.e. responses or reactions to these stimuli (Solomon et al, 2006).

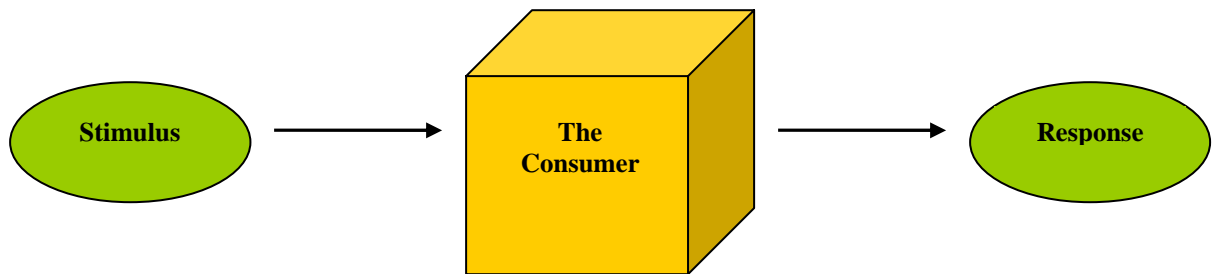


Figure 3.3 The Consumer as a *black box*: a behaviourist perspective on learning (Solomon et al, 2006:62)

According to Solomon et al (2006), consumers' experiences are formed by the accumulated feedback received through life. Similarly, consumer responses to marketing stimuli such as scents and brand names are based on learned connections they have formed over time. Future behavior may be influenced when people also learn that their actions may result in certain rewards or punishments; this feedback may thus influence the response in similar situations in the future. A consumer, who is complimented on a product choice, is e.g. likely to repeat the purchase of that same brand.

### 3.1.5 Arriving at a Theoretical Framework

In sum, after considering the views presented above (i.e. from Tai and Fung, 1997; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Bitner, 1992; Solomon et al, 2006; Hoffman and Turley, 2002; and Greenland and McGoldrick, 2005) we have developed our theoretical framework (see Figure 3.4), which will also be the basis our empirical analysis. We make use of a modified version of the traditional model of the consumer as a black box, where we consider the views presented above regarding the different states that condition the consumer's mind; and include the situational and personal variables as the stimuli affecting the consumer, showing also that in our view, these variables conditioning the consumer are inter-related.

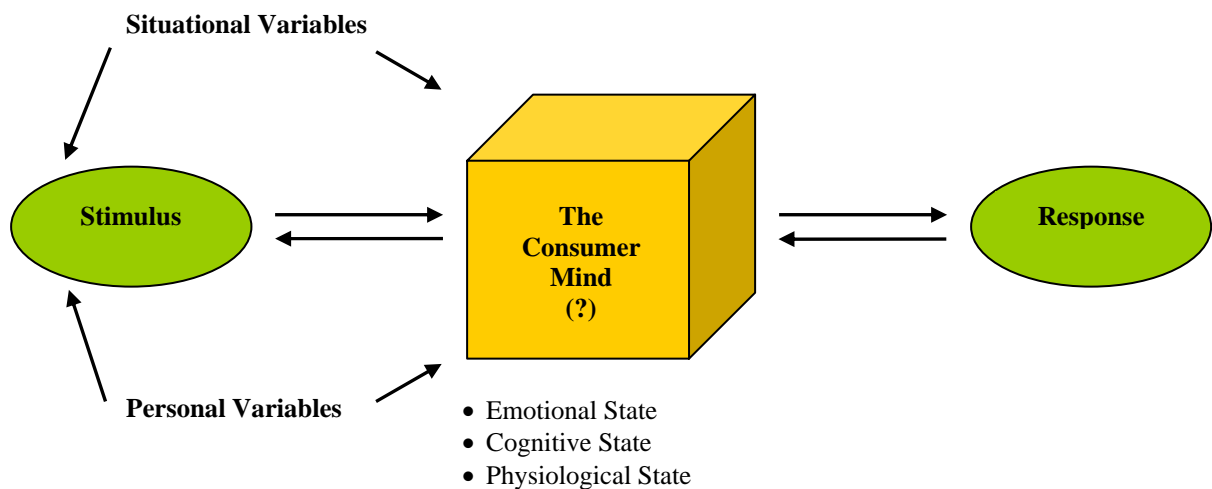


Figure 3.4: Our Theoretical Framework: derived from Solomon et al (2006); Mehrabian and Russell (1974); Tai and Fung (1997); and Bitner (1992).

## 3.2 Personal Variables

In addition to exploring situational variables, we have chosen to examine personal variables as suggested by Bäckström and Johansson (2006) since consumers in part attribute in-store experiences to personal factors they control themselves. In short, personal variables concern characteristics related to the consumer that may affect consumers, whereas situational variables include aspects in the store environment that might influence consumers (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006). This distinction is noteworthy since it emphasizes that there are factors in the store environment retailers can control as well as factors related to consumers out of retailer control. In addition, it also suggests that other than the physical environment may play a critical role in influencing consumers' in-store experiences (Jones, 1999).

According to Jones (1999), factors related to consumers, such as involvement, time, financial resources, task, and social, are even more important than factors controlled by retailers (e.g. store environment, selection, prices, and salespeople). In contrast, Bäckström and Johansson (2006) found that retailer factors were to a larger degree associated to consumers' descriptions of positive and negative experiences than were consumer factors. Regardless of which is most important; with the inclusion of personal variables, we are hence more likely to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the in-store behavior of our target group.

Bäckström and Johansson (2006) mention several personal factors that may influence consumers' in-store shopping experiences, including consumer motivations for particular shopping trips, value perceptions, age, gender, task and financial resources, type of involvement (also product involvement), and time pressure. In this study, we are primarily interested in understanding such personal variables attributable to busy moms. In order to understand which characteristics related to the consumer and shopping experience that might influence our target group's behavior, we need first to grasp in-depth the subject's experiences, sensory and sensitivity traits as well as general attitudes and behavior. We will first start by giving an overall description of time-sensitive consumers and how it can help explain behavior.

### **3.2.1 The Highly Time-Sensitive Consumer**

Consumers' attitudes to time regarding time-consuming activities such as grocery shopping have been found to significantly influence consumer's in-store experiences and in turn behavior (Chetthamrongchai and Davies, 2000). According to Park et al (1989), the amount of time available for shopping influences in-store decision making in two ways. Firstly, limited time restricts the extent consumers can process in-store information. Secondly, experienced time pressure increases the degree of arousal or stress.

Consumers that have limited time are usually inclined to attempt to minimize time spent shopping as well as to purchase products that are designed to save them time. This suggests organizing stores in certain manners to minimize time consuming activities. Such a deed may however, from a retailer's perspective also be problematical since the downside may include trading off amenities such as friendly personnel and numerous specialty items if the store is to provide quick service (Umesh et al, 1989).

According to Umesh et al (1989) time-sensitive shoppers appear to be distinguishable from those who are less time-sensitive by two factors: levels of education and employment. The stereotypic highly time-sensitive consumer is on average an individual who is highly educated and tends to be employed full-time. Byung-Do et al (1997) support the previous description and wish to add that these individuals usually have young children and higher opportunity costs in the sense that their shopping

days are not flexible, actually depicting them as routine shoppers whom visit stores frequently and will prefer to shop at the same store.

Furthermore, highly time-sensitive shoppers appear as more likely purchase convenience food, value efficient one-stop shopping at superstores or hypermarkets, and shopping at less busy times. In addition, these consumers are generally more inclined to purchase significantly larger quantities per trip than those whom are not pressured by time. However, this is not always the case, and often store visits are when in need of a few items, where then price is traded for convenience; implying that the advantage of quick service offered at convenience stores outweighs the stores' range of offerings and relatively higher pricing (Umesh et al, 1989).

On the choice of stores Umesh et al. (1989) argue that time-sensitive shoppers will primarily choose stores offering convenience of layout for fast shopping, easy shopping, lack of crowding in the store, availability of quick-check services, and extended opening hours.

### **3.2.1.1 Gender: Understanding the Psychology of Women**

We have chosen to start by taking a more general view of gender implications and behavioral traits in order have an overall and better understanding as to why some variables are more influential when targeting busy moms. Without gender insights we would not be able to have an understanding of our target consumer and what communication variables are more influential than others (Barletta, 2005).

Dennis and McCall (2005) argue that for women, shopping is a recreational activity in which they are more involved and through which they can express love for their families and their social network; generally showing an inclination to long-term brand relationships and an aim to reach the best possible solution.

On the other hand, Bakewell and Wayne-Mitchell (2006) suggest that male shoppers use a simplified decision-making style to reduce the complexity of the shopping task and the time doing it. Men see shopping as a mission and tend to go straight for what they want in a purposeful way; they place focus on the speed of the shopping process, which is usually achieved by sticking to familiar brands (also used by men as symbols of economic power), by visiting a familiar store and buying quickly, and/or by being indifferent to which store is selected (Dennis and McCall, 2005).

While Bakewell and Wayne-Mitchell (2006) seem to agree on men's tendency to promiscuity towards store choices, their data even supports a tendency in women to show loyalty towards the stores they are satisfied with. When taking into account senses and sensitivity, women are said to have a better peripheral vision and are more sensitive to more subtle levels of input (Barletta, 2005). In addition, females emphasizing cooperative interactions are more likely to establish and maintain interpersonal connections such as agreeing with or supporting the statements of others; highlighting contact and solidarity (Fisher and Grégoire, 2006). In contrast, men show

weaker levels of sensitivity to the opinions of peers (Bakewell and Wayne-Mitchell, 2006); and they are also more likely than females to make competitive choices that result in win–lose or lose–lose outcomes, relating to the world by striving for mastery and power (Fisher and Grégoire, 2006).

Even if more attentive to details, women regularly think holistically, in terms of whole contexts where interpersonal nuances are integrated into the bigger-picture, the more social consciousness resembled by women contrasts a more utilitarian attitude from men, but even if not stated their data gathered by Bakewell and Wayne-Mitchell (2006), seems to support the idea of describing women as multi-taskers while men are more inclined to fulfill one task before moving on to the next (Bakewell and Wayne-Mitchell, 2006).

### **3.2.2 Consumer Motivation and Task Fulfillment**

In a shopping context consumers have to decide how much time and energy they will spend on searching and processing information, and which particular information cues they will attend to. The motivation of the consumer to expend cognitive effort on an extensive information search determines the allocation of these cognitive resources (Vermeir and Van Kenhove, 2005).

Grocery shopping, representing a necessary and routine type of consumer behavior, can be characterized by multiple buying goals (Park et al, 1989), i.e. consumers may have numerous motivations of a single shopping trip (Jones, 1999). Furthermore, consumer reasons for particular shopping trips can be both utilitarian and hedonic<sup>3</sup> in nature. In contrast to hedonic shopping value, perceived utilitarian shopping value often is the outcome of conscious and efficient purchases of products. A shopping experience can elicit a positive mood from either type of shopping motivation by e.g. providing an enjoyable and fun shopping experience (i.e. *hedonic value*) and/or helping consumers successfully pursue intended shopping goals (i.e. *utilitarian value*) (Babin et al, 1994).

Bäckström and Johansson (2006) found that the perspective present on the shopping of groceries was more utilitarian in its nature. Work, time, and money were described as key shopping concepts rather than pleasure. They however, note that considerable efforts were being made from the grocery trade to induce pleasurable shopping experiences.

Vermeir and Van Kenhove, (2005) do not make use of the hedonic and utilitarian perspective; they use a framework including the variables of “need for closure” (NFC) and “perceived time pressure” (PTP). The researchers relate the former, to the underlying motivation behind the grocery shopping trip and analyze search goals and efforts, of price comparisons and promotional information. These researchers argue

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<sup>3</sup> Hedonic consumption can be defined as “*the pursuit of pleasure, or a lifestyle devoted to pleasure-seeking*” (Hopkinson and Pujari, 1999:273).

that the main idea behind NFC-theory is that negative feelings are induced when closure is threatened or undermined, and positive feelings are evoked when closure is attained or facilitated. Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005) on the PTP-theoretical variable argue that high- versus low-perceived time pressured consumers will engage in less promotional and price search; these varying according to differing levels of perceived time pressure experienced by each individual.

### **3.3 Situational Variables**

With their extensive literature review, Turley and Milliman (2000) present the most comprehensive examination of the empirical results of situational variables effect on shopping behavior to this date. Furthermore, they provide a logical and organized structure to the study of atmospheric variables believed to influence consumer behavior.

*“This classification allows managers to begin to identify and tailor appropriate atmospheric elements in order to communicate a desired image or environment to a particular shopper segment or target market and induce a desired result from shoppers.” (Turley and Milliman, 2000:194)*

Considering the above, we choose to make use of Turley and Milliman’s (2000) classification, thus dividing situational variables into the following main categories:

- External Variables
- General Interiors
- Layout and Design Variables
- Point of Purchase and Decoration Variables
- Human Variables

#### **3.3.1 External Variables**

External variables of the environment deserve specific attention because the exterior is the first set of cues visiting customers encounter. This portion of the retail environment is important since the rest of the atmosphere may not matter if these are poorly managed and do not live up to expected standards. The exteriors include aspects such as the storefront, entrances, display windows, building architecture, parking facilities, and the surrounding areas. Research pertaining to these aspects is however limited. These elements must be pleasing and induce approach behaviors for a retail store or service to be successful (Turley and Milliman, 2000). It is however important to note that an attractively designed store entrance does not “cause” consumers to enter, though, the probability of people entering is enhanced by a pleasant and welcoming environment (Hoffman and Turley, 2002).

### 3.3.2 General Interiors

In contrast to the exterior variables discussed above, there are numerous studies on interior variables and customers' perceptions of these variables. Positive perceptions of the general interior have been found to increase the time consumers spend in the store, approach behaviors, and ultimately sales (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

From a consumer perspective, the general interiors, i.e. its atmosphere, of a particular environment can be expressed in terms of sensory channels through which shoppers apprehend the atmosphere (Tai and Fung, 1997). According to Underhill (2000), nearly all unplanned purchases are an outcome of touching, tasting, smelling, hearing thing in the store, i.e. through appealing to consumer's senses. We therefore choose to present McGoldrick's (2002) four focal dimensions of atmosphere applicable in a retailing context:

- Visual (sight)
- Aural (sound)
- Olfactory (smell)
- Tactile (touch)

#### 3.3.2.1 Visual Components

##### **Color**

Visual components such as colors and brightness have been found to influence customers' in-store behavior. Color for instance may influence merchandise image, and the ability to attract consumers towards retail displays (McGoldrick, 2002; Areni et al, 1999). Different stores and product categories however, call for different components. Creating a positive mood of excitement in a toy department of the store can be realized through the use of bright primary colors, whereas it is wiser to display neutral colors in a women's clothing section in order to avoid a mismatch with the store's colorful merchandise. Besides, it is important to take into consideration that even though some effects of colors last on a long-term basis, fashions in colors do change frequently (McGoldrick, 2002).

In general, warm colors appear suitable for situations associated with unplanned purchases, whereas cool colors work better under the circumstances of a "*difficult and prolonged buying decisions*" (McGoldrick, 2002:461), during which warm colors may make shopping unpleasant. Thus, in stores or departments with product offers leading to difficult buying decisions, cool colors will make the customer more likely to buy, than the use of warm tense colors. Warmer colors may in this situation elicit feelings of stress and unpleasantness in which the likelihood of customers leaving without completing the purchase increases (McGoldrick, 2002).

##### **Lighting**

Retailers commonly use spotlights in attempting to attract attention to particular products, but the findings of the impact of this has upon sales are assorted (Hitt, 1996;

McGoldrick, 2002). Areni and Kim (1994) found that brighter lighting made customers examine and handle more merchandise and its effect was most prominent for products placed at the eye-level of customers. Time spent in the store and sales however, were not influenced. They concluded that in store environments, consumers are less likely to engage in visually oriented activities (e.g. checking prices, reading labels, etc.) when in-store lighting levels are lower.

Furthermore, lighting can set the mood, tone of voice, and pace of shopping. The latter is for example slower when the lights are low. Reversely, brightly lit store environments are louder, communication exchanges are more frequent, and the overall atmosphere is viewed as more informal, exciting, and joyful (Hoffman and Turley, 2002).

### **3.3.2.2 Aural components: Background Music**

Of all general interior variables, music is the most commonly studied. Numerous studies, including investigations considering elements such as volume, tempo and the familiarity of the music, have been conducted to determine the effect music has upon consumer behavior (Turley and Milliman, 2000). In their extensive literature review, Turley and Milliman (2000) conclude that:

*“(...) music played in a store can have significant impact on a variety of behaviors including sales, arousal, perceptions of and actual time spent in the environment, in-store traffic flow, and the perception of visual stimuli in the retail store.” (Turley and Milliman, 2000:195)*

Music can influence customers' willingness to buy (Baker et al, 1992). Consumers e.g., are more favorable disposed towards products if they are in a good mood, which in turn may be the result of the music played in the store (Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000). Individuals stay longer in the store when exposed to unfamiliar music (ibid), and shorter time when the music played is not liked (Garlin and Owen, 2006). Moreover, liking has a positive effect upon sales (ibid). It is also important to note that retail music can influence behavior even when consumers are not consciously aware of it (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Studying the effect of background music on customers' behavior in a grocery store setting, Milliman (1982) concluded that the pace of traffic flow is decreased by slow tempo music, contrary to fast music or silence. Slow music was also found to achieve the highest sales. According to Garlin and Owen (2006), reduced tempo or lower volume makes the customers stay longer in the store than when the tempo or volume is high. The more time customers spend in the store, the more money they spend (e.g. Donovan et al, 1994), which in turn indicates that slow music, low volume, likable and unfamiliar music is best in order to achieve higher sales.



### **3.3.2.3 Olfactory Components: Scents**

According to McGoldrick (2002:463), “*little is known about the ways in which aromas influence mood and behavior*” and systematic research concerning ambient odors is still at an early stage. In their review of the olfactory empirical evidence relevant to a retailing context, Bone and Ellen (1999) conclude that the absence of methodical research pertaining to retailing makes predicting specific odor effects (i.e., particular moods, thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors) tricky. There are, however, several reported uses of ambient scents in retail stores (McGoldrick, 2002) and empirical evidence, illustrate that consumers think they have spent less time in a store than they truly have when exposed to scents with positive connotations (Spangenberg et al, 1996). Moreover, consumers’ overall perception of a store’s merchandise and environment are also positively affected (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006).

In the literature, three dimensions of odors are deemed to be significant: its congruity with the object of study, its presence (or absence), and its pleasantness (Bone and Ellen, 1999). Congruency between scents and merchandise as well as with the target group’s expectations of the store have been found to be important (McGoldrick, 2002; Spangenberg et al, 2005). Hence, ambient odors may positively influence consumers when the smell matches the purchase decision, such as the smell of fresh coffee in a store where coffee-related products are sold. Incongruity may however occur if a smell, associated with a certain merchandise category, is present while the consumer is making a decision about another product class. In a grocery store for instance, the use of ambient odors may be risky since consumers make decisions about multiple sorts of products in a short period of time (Mitchell et al, 1995). On the other hand, the aroma of freshly baked bread or the lack of a bad smell from fish and meat counters are likely to induce a more pleasant shopping experience (Hitt, 1996). Aroma of baking bread e.g., communicates the image of freshly produced groceries albeit the greater part is pre-packaged (McGoldrick, 2002). In order to be successful, olfactory elements should be pleasant and in congruence with other components of the environment into which they are diffused (Spangenberg et al, 2005).

### **3.3.2.4 Tactile Components**

Underhill (2000:58) states: “*If shoppers can’t reach out and feel certain goods, they just won’t buy*”. Touching merchandise reassure the customers of the quality and texture of a product, i.e. it helps customers evaluate whether products meet their expectations, moving customers closer towards possessing the goods (McGoldrick, 2002).

There are numerous tactile components in the store environment, out of which most are comparatively obvious, but thorough research is still to be done in this field (McGoldrick, 2002). Different impressions may be generated from e.g. flooring (Hoffman and Turley, 2002). Carpets or cushion tiles may increase the walking comfort, while harder surfaces like wood or marble may create a feeling of luxury or style. Customers also touch shopping trolleys, baskets et cetera and all these elements

convey impressions of the store (McGoldrick, 2002). Thus, impressions of tactile components may affect the customers' view of the general interior.

### 3.3.3 Layout and Design Variables

Research has found layout and design to have significant impact on customers' shopping behavior. Placement of merchandise, grouping of merchandise and placement of equipment are some of the factors in which retailers need to consider carefully. Much can be done to manipulate traffic flow in order to "pull" the customers through as much of the store as possible, increasing merchandise exposure, which in turn influences the customers' expenditure in-store (Davies and Rands, 1992).

The store layout, which is often referred to as a part of the store design, is about the arrangement of the store environment. According to Pylc (1926:328) the layout of the retail sales place serves four main functions. Three of these are still relevant. He first claims that the layout of the retail sales place may "*provide suitable space for display, demonstration, and examination*". Different merchandise requires different display. Different stores require different layout. And different customer groups require different spaces (Newman and Foxall, 2003). Retailers need to adopt their store to the merchandise and customers that they interact with.

There are four main types of store layouts. These are called grid, free-flow, boutique, and guided shopper flows (McGoldrick, 2002; Vrechopoulos et al, 2004).<sup>4</sup> The grid layout is most commonly used by supermarkets and grocery stores, in which we will focus on in this paper. This layout encourage circulation within all parts of the store, optimizing merchandise exposure through having "*long rows of parallel fixtures, with straight aisles and little or no opportunity to pass between aisles, other than going to the end of the aisle*" (McGoldrick, 2002:468).

The layout's second function is according to Pylc (1926:329) that it may "*suggest the quality of merchandise and services offered.*" The design of the store layout influences the image of a store which again may influence customers' price acceptability (Grewal and Baker, 1994; Pylc, 1926).

*"If the firm wishes, for example, to create a bargain atmosphere, bargain tables and squares may be placed in the main aisles. (...) If, on the other hand, the strategy calls for an atmosphere of quality, conservatism, and redefined dignity, the main aisles are laid out wide and kept free from obstruction of any kind. (...) It is obvious that in order to create the impression desired, a close coordination between the layout, the merchandise, and the equipment is essential."* (Pylc, 1926:329)

The third and last function of the layout is to "*aid in securing publicity for the business*" (Pylc, 1926:330) By this Pylc means that by having a unique or convenient

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<sup>4</sup> The latter two has been joined together to one by some (e.g. Vrechopoulos et al, 2004).

layout of a store the customers start talking and the store may receive publicity through word-of-mouth or even in publications.

When planning its layout there are three general guides a retailer may use; the principles of circulation, coordination, and convenience (Pylc, 1926; Aghazadeh, 2005). We will now apply these three principles to our case of the grocery store.

### 3.3.2.2 Principle of Circulation

The principle of circulation encourages traffic flow through the different sections of a store (Pylc, 1926; Aghazadeh, 2005). Placing high-demand items at systematic intervals in main gondola areas can be done in order to “pull” the customers through the aisles. Key products are ideally placed on both sides of the aisle, creating a *bounce pattern* (see Figure 3.5). The customers will then be moving from side to side, seeing a significant amount of the store’s merchandise (Hitt, 1996; Burt, 2007). Complimentary and high-impulse items should be placed between the key-products in order to promote more sales (McGoldrick, 2002). These kinds of product increase the probability that the customers buy products they had forgotten they needed (Aghazadeh, 2005).

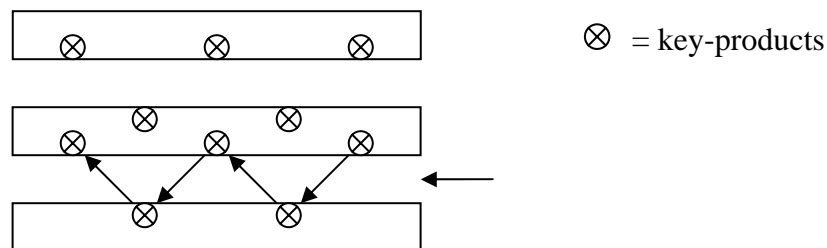


Figure 3.5: Placement of key-products (adapted from Burt, 2007)

Research has further found that when shoppers turn one way with their shopping cart, they tend to look the other way. Knowing the direction of the store-traffic retailers can make sure to place profitable high-draw, high-impulse items on the side the customer will be looking (Hitt, 1996).

Service items, like restrooms, should be placed in a strategic place in order to expose merchandise on the customers’ way to get there. Also check outs should be placed at a location which promotes circulation (Aghazadeh, 2005).

### 3.3.3.2 Principle of Coordination

The principle of coordination has to do with promoting sales and creating goodwill among the customers through the arrangement of merchandise. Having the aisles in a structured manner, wide enough to avoid bottlenecks, and placing helpful displays at

prominent locations, the store may achieve good will among the customers (Pylc, 1926; Aghazadeh, 2005).

Colorful merchandise like fruit and vegetables creates a positive first impression of a store. This is a good idea despite that it would be more logical to have items like fruit at the end of the store seeing that they are sensitive to pressure from other heavier goods being placed on top of them in the basket (McGoldrick, 2002; Burt, 2007). Retailers should further place a selection of high-demand items in an early part of the store in order to “*quickly overcome buyer inertia and inhibitions that the customer may have about spending money*” (McGoldrick, 2002:471). As soon as the customers have something in the basket they relax more, and might be more open for seeing other merchandise.

The opposite of creating goodwill is done when the customers experience that the store environment impede their shopping trip, i.e. through bottlenecks or through confusion. It is therefore important that the width of the aisles is considered thoroughly. Too wide aisles may result in customers not noticing the surrounding displays, while too narrow aisles may cause congestion leading to annoyance and having negative effect upon sales (McGoldrick, 2002). Aylott and Mitchell (1998) found that eighty-three percent found crowding to cause stress when shopping. Preventing areas causing bottlenecks is thus crucial to create goodwill among the customers. Sections where this needs to be taken into consideration is especially areas where people have to spend more time to pick the items, such as the fruit and vegetable section, or the bread section (Davies and Rands, 1992).

The most favorable shelf position has been found to be 130-135 cm off the floor (Hitt, 1996). Research has found this position to be significantly more important than the number of facings a product has. More facings at a less favorable position in the shelf gives lower sales numbers than fewer facings at the ideal shelf position (Drèze et al, 1994). In order to make customers want to try out new products store managers should place them at the ideal shelf position giving them maximal exposure (Aghazadeh, 2005).

Items at the end of the gondolas should be high-impulse products as merchandise placed there sell more (Burt, 2007). Large amount of merchandise stacked up there has a psychological effect on customers. They assume the items are on special offer. Aghazadeh (2005) thus claims that placing products on end caps stimulates sales. Also dump bins are efficiently creating an impression of bargains. These are also effective seeing that the items are easy to pick up (McGoldrick, 2002).

### **3.3.3.3 Principle of Convenience**

The principle of convenience is about arranging the merchandise in a way convenient to both customers and personnel. What the customers find convenient may vary between different customer groups, so in order to find the best arrangement store managers need to know their target group (Pylc, 1926; Aghazadeh, 2005).

Time is a valuable asset in today's society. We want everything to be fast and effective. It is important for retailers today to have this in mind in order to succeed. Research has found that about sixty percent of store visits are "quick-trips" (Strauss, 2005). This is something in which clearly should influence the way a store is set up. Marks & Spencer is an example of a company that saw the positive effect of taking this fact into consideration. Through targeting lunch customers by moving lunch items together and closer to entrances, the stores increased sales of such items by thirty percent (McGoldrick, 2002). Several researchers claim that retailers offering an easier and less time consuming shopping experience, through i.e. having express checkout during busy lunch hours or locating related products near each other, may increase customer satisfaction which again might increase customer loyalty (Strauss, 2005; Bäckström and Johansson, 2006; Vazquez and Bruce, 2002).

### **3.3.4 Point-of-Purchase**

*"Since the introduction of the self-service concept in retailing, the application of point-of-purchase (POP) sales promotion aids has increased greatly among retailers"* (McKinnon et al, 1981:49). Point-of-purchase variables include point-of-purchase displays, signs, and recipe cards (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

According to Chevalier (1975) a significant percentage of total sales in a supermarket come from displays. Point-of-purchase displays are usually set up at the end of an aisle, and the products there are often price reduced. Customers tend to believe these are special bargains and often buy something from the display even if they had no intention of buying the item when they entered the store (Chevalier, 1975).

A prominent display has been found to have significant influence on sales in several studies examining the effect of product display (e.g. Chevalier, 1975; Wilkinson et al, 1982; Woodside and Waddle, 1975). Woodside and Waddle (1975) found that unit sales increased with 142 percent when a POP sign was added. They further found that when a price reduction was added to the sign 184 percent more units were sold compared to sign with normal price. Chevalier (1975) found an average increase in unit sales of 572 percent when using displays including price reductions. He emphasized that there was a big variation in the percentage between different product categories in the experiment.

A study conducted by Kelly, McKinnon and Robinson in 1979 supported the findings of Woodside and Waddle (1975) in that signing increases unit sales for products at lowered as well as regular price (McKinnon et al, 1981). However, McKinnon et al (1981) found that benefit signs results in more significant sales increase than price-only signs at both sale and regular price. They found that adding a price sign to a product sold at regular price did not increase sales, while a benefit sign would.

Patton (1981) further found that the amount of information in the sign may have an influence on sales. He reported that when consumers can choose between products of equivalent quality, they are most likely to choose the brands providing the most information. Patton claims that the phenomenon exists to some extent also when the consumers have to choose between products of unequal quality (Patton, 1981). Areni et al (1999) emphasize that special POP displays under certain circumstances may increase sales of regularly shelved competing brands, and maybe even decrease sales of the featured brand. According to Chevalier (1975) products in a growing phase of their life cycle do not have as good effect from displays as products in the mature phase.

Of all the short-term strategies Wilkinson et al (1982) explored, special displays either within aisle or at end-of-aisle turned out to be the most effective. Product and price displays in supermarkets were found to have a much better effect on unit sales than e.g. newspaper advertising.

In relation to POP variables present at grocery settings, it is also relevant to highlight the common presence and use of in-store sampling and TV screens. There is however, not much theory and pertinent information regarding these two elements, thus limiting our possibility to draw conclusions upon empirical findings related to these aspects. Academic literature on TV screens is not yet developed since it is a rather new phenomenon in grocery stores (Turley and Milliman, 2000) and relatively little is known about the impact of in-store sampling on the purchase decision as well as on the overall grocery shopping experience (Moström, 2007).

### **3.3.5 Human Variables**

The human variables of a retail store can be divided into two sub categories; the influence the store personnel have on the customers' in-store experience, and the influence other customers may have (Turley and Milliman, 2000; Bäckström and Johansson, 2006). We will be focusing on the former. Customers influence on other customers is often apparent in crowding situations (Turley and Milliman, 2000). We however, view crowding as primarily being an affect of a bad layout and not because of the interaction with other customers. Because of this, we choose to emphasize crowding in the layout section.

The store personnel's appearance can be used to communicate a store's ideals and attributes to the customers (Solomon, 1985). Customers' perception of the service level at a store will always depend on the staff. The salesperson's mood, appearance and credibility are important in order for good service encounters to occur. Good service encounters are crucial to achieve customer satisfaction (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006), which again influences the store's sales performance (Sulek et al, 1995). According to Burke (2002) the level of service is often what customers are the least satisfied with at retail stores today.

*“Employee affective delivery influences customers’ time spent in store, which, in turn, influences customer behavioral intentions”* (Tsai and Huang, 2002). What customers perceive as good service can be having knowledgeable, helpful and courteous salespeople (Burke, 2002). Small things like smiling, greeting and establishing eye contact may also give the customers a positive feeling about the store (Winsted, 1997). Also the number of employees influence arousal in the store environment, which in turn is found to have an effect on customers’ willingness to buy (e.g. Donovan et al, 1994; Baker et al, 1992).

Increased customer satisfaction is found when salespeople provide more service than the customer expects (Menon and Dubé, 2000). *“Providing customers with logical explanations for service failures and compensating them in some way can mitigate dissatisfaction”* (Bitner, 1990:79). Dissatisfying events may even be turned into positive memories when such situations occur (ibid)

### **3.3.6 The Impact of Situational Variables**

Most retail environments are complex and information rich, and are comprised of a large number of atmospheric variables (Hoffman and Turley, 2002). Store atmospheres can be very complex and may comprise stimuli, which consumers can perceive individually or in their entirety. Consumers often react to minor changes in the atmosphere even when they are not consciously aware of that particular element (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Adding to the complexity, it is important to note that marketers do not always have control of all the elements in the in-store environment that can impact consumers’ shopping behavior. For example, the interaction or even the presence of other customers may impact an individual’s satisfaction and purchasing behavior (Hoffman and Turley, 2002).

The retail store environment exerts influence upon a wide variety of consumer evaluations and behaviors at several different levels, including overall design, atmosphere, layout arrangement, displays, and space allocation. Decisions about the in-store environment are likely to influence both the in-store purchasing behavior as well as consumers’ long-term patronage decisions (McGoldrick, 2002). Furthermore, it is important to note that consumer response is determined by the interaction of the store environment and the characteristics of the individual. Consequently, an atmosphere that evokes a certain response at a given point in time may elicit an entirely different response among other consumers (Turley and Milliman, 2000). It is also imperative to recognize that consumers perceive environments holistically rather than in terms of each individual element (McGoldrick, 2002). Furthermore, store variables in particular, are evaluated in light of consumers’ expected standard for a given attribute (Moye and Kincade, 2002). Additionally, the importance of the atmosphere depends on the nature of the consumption experience (Bitner, 1992).

## 4 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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*In this chapter we present the different categories resulting from our abstractive and categorical coding of the empirical data. The identified general patterns are analyzed in relation to our theoretical framework.*

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The empirical analysis departs from our theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter. As such we have divided the analysis of our empirical findings into two main categories of *personal* and *situational variables*. This distinction is, however, as Bäckström and Johansson (2006) note, sometimes complicated because some themes relate to both personal and situational variables. Though, in our attempt to single out aspects that may influence the in-store experiences of our target group and gain insights on how to induce a more pleasant shopping experience, such a separation still serves its purpose. The structure will thus make it easier to comprehend what attributes are of weight to personal respectively situational factors in the store environment; distinguishing aspects in the store environment that may influence consumer behavior from those factors pertaining to consumer characteristics that might influence our target group's in-store experiences. In addition, following the same main structure used in the theory chapter makes it easier for the reader to better comprehend the empirical analysis.

### 4.1 Personal variables

Variables	Consumer Statement
<b>Time-sensitive Shopper:</b>	
• Customer motivation and Task Fulfillment	<i>“A successful shopping trip is one that is as quick and as grief-free as possible (...) and if you have limited time, you want to have as much as possible at one place.”</i>
• Opening Hours	<i>“I love the long opening-hours. This is one of the most positive things with the store. (...) You don't have to over think every shopping trip because you can always get more.”</i>
• Convenience and time-saving products	<i>“It is fun to see more and more products you can quickly mix together to a meal; they are not completely prepared and do therefore not give you a bad conscious. You still have to prepare meat and rice...this is really positive; you gain time and get inspiration in your cooking.”</i>
<b>Use of Advertising, Print Media, and Coupons</b>	<i>“It is just too much to keep track of”</i>

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<b>One-stop Shopping</b>	<i>“Everything is gathered under one roof; that’s why I shop there.”</i>
<b>Entertainment for Children</b>	<i>“I become happy when my kids are cheerful, which they are when they are entertained, can push buttons, point towards pictures of animals and that sort of things.”</i>
<b>Gaining Goodwill</b>	<i>“Offering bananas free of charge is really great. It’s brilliant to hand out a little snack. The children both get something to eat and to do.”</i>
<b>Specialty Products</b>	<i>“I know that it can be really difficult to find certain products if you have children with allergies; this is really positive.”</i>
<b>New Consumption Trends</b>	<i>“During the last few years we have increasingly looked much more at the impact of products on the environment</i>

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Table 4.1: Example of personal variables that influence busy moms’ in-store grocery experience

### 4.1.1 Time-sensitive shopper

When analyzing the time-sensitive shoppers Chetthamrongchai and Davies (2000) commented on how the time constraint is reflected on the consumer’s behavior while carrying out activities and taking in experiences. Umesh et al (1989) argued that time sensitive consumers are usually inclined to minimize the time spent shopping. Both these statements are reflected on our respondent’s views in a number of different expressions in connection with other elements.

#### 4.1.1.1 Customer Motivation and Task Fulfillment

In order to be able to suggest ways food retailers can better target their in-store marketing efforts to busy moms, it is vital to understand their foundational views of the grocery shopping experience in terms of customer motivation and task fulfillment. Though shopping trips can be both utilitarian and hedonic (Babin et al, 1994), consumers appear to refer to their grocery shopping as mainly utilitarian according to Bäckström and Johansson’s (2006) findings. These findings are consistent with the views presented by our respondents, highlighting that shopping value resulted from successfully accomplishing purchase intentions.

Expressions illustrating this can be interpreted from a statement from our respondent Sofia: *“A successful shopping trip is one that is as quick and as grief-free as possible (...) and if you have limited time, you want to have as much as possible at one place.”* Yet another generic view is also expressed by Martina: *“Everything that makes my shopping trip easier is positive!”*

On the other hand, views on more defined elements can be interpreted from our respondent Anna; whom argues that she experiences a lack of time, and that she would rather spend her time doing other things than grocery shopping. Therefore, she wants grocery shopping to be something that can be done as smoothly as possible so that she can prioritize other things with her available time. Her following statement is a way for her to ease the stress created in relation to the time-constraint and grocery-shopping: *“We avoid going shopping when it could be crowded.”*

Besides asserting a utilitarian value to purchasing experiences, busy moms can be described in the views of Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005) and supported by the above citations, as having both a high perceived time pressure (PTP) and a high need for closure (NFC). Busy mothers' shopping goals seem to be threatened when stores are crowded, causing them to become more stressed and at the same time frustrated by the fact that closure in the sense Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005) refer to is not facilitated. Although not constituting the primary goal with their grocery shopping, respondents also articulated their appreciation of efforts made to create a more pleasurable shopping experience by for example making the store look nicer (see section 4.2.2). Thus, grocery retailer should not neglect hedonic aspects of the shopping experience. Regarding the PTP, the respondents' views support the fact that high levels of time pressure result in our target group being not too price oriented; price consciousness and double source incomes allow these consumers to avoid from engaging in too many price comparisons and deal seeking. Nevertheless, when price consciousness is expressed as a variable sought, consumers resolve to visit low-price stores. However, complimentary views on this matter are presented in section 4.1.1.4.

#### **4.1.1.2 Opening Hours**

Long opening hours is something respondents appreciate greatly; evoking positive feelings in the sense those longer opening hours improve the chances of fulfilling the goals of the shopping trip while having high levels of NFC and PTP in the perspective of Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005). One respondent said: *“I love the long opening-hours. This is one of the most positive things with the store. You don't have to over think every shopping trip because you can always get more.”* Opening hours, an element reflected in some of the respondents' choice of when to shop, seems to be an important and appreciated element by several other respondents who allegedly choose to generally visit stores when store flow is relatively quick. This is something our respondents have learnt from earlier shopping experiences, indicating patterns of which are the less congested store intervals. Our respondent Lisa stated the following on this matter: *“We have left the store in certain occasions because it was too crowded. Now, we have learned when you're not supposed to go.”*

#### **4.1.1.3 Convenience and Time-Saving Products**

The time sensitivity of busy moms is reflected in a desire for convenience and more time-saving food products. When analyzing this inclination to choose convenience

products argued by Umesh et al (1989), Therese's view reflect the general observation of our respondents' experiences:

*"It is fun to see more and more products you can quickly mix together to a meal; they are not completely prepared and do therefore not give you a bad conscious. You still have to prepare meat and rice...this is really positive; you gain time and get inspiration in your cooking."*

Though, the respondents stress the importance of reducing cooking time, they take pride in cooking meals themselves. They merely wish to receive partial assistance in the sense that some products are prepared in advance, thus still leaving them with part of the work undone and allowing them to add a personal flavor.

Our respondent Sofia e.g. says she likes cooking for her family, but because she does not have the time to cook everything from scratch, she often limits herself to heat ready-made products which are frozen, like i.e. fish fingers, and meatballs. Even if not totally pleased she admits to having often to subscribe to reheating frozen produce due to convenience and time constraint. She, however, enjoys cooking tasty and nutritious food, giving her meals the motherly touch. She therefore finds it helpful and positive when stores offer products such as marinated meat *"It gives me the opportunity to compose and cook the meal how I want it; it allows me to cook a nice meal without spending too much time on it."*

Further statements on this topic include a desire to see more time-saving solutions of the actual shopping trip, especially at larger stores; the absence of such solutions is a source of irritation and affects the entire in-store experience in a negative way. Therese positively commented on this matter regarding a store she usually visits; *"They also have a self-scanner to use while shopping; it lets you pack your stuff at once and then practically walk out the store without queuing."*

In including yet another element of analysis on how busy moms experience and express their time restraints we see a trend reflecting the views of Park et al (1989) whom argue that time availability influences in-store decision making in two ways; firstly, limited time restricts the extent consumers can process in-store information, and secondly, the experienced time pressure increases the degree of arousal or stress. The latter is clearly consistent with our findings, illustrating how busy moms frequently experience a high degree of stress while grocery shopping due to lack of time. Furthermore, the respondents mention that societal and media pressures contribute to their high stress levels. One respondent expressed: *"you are not only supposed to work fulltime and take care of your children; you should even fix and do everything else as well."* She argues that this puts great pressure on mothers to live up to certain standards in order to be a "truly" good mother.

#### **4.1.1.4 Use of Advertising, Print Media, and Coupons**

Park's et al (1989) assertion that consumers with little time available are restricted to the extent they can process in-store information come into play when respondents mentioned aspects related to the advertising forms used by stores both to lure and induce purchases of certain products by means of coupons, printed ads, etc. Not only do the respondents not have time to pay attention to messages of this kind, they do also not appreciate further things to keep track of. Coupons, coins for shopping carts, loyalty cards, refund receipts from the recycling station, and the like, all constitute elements our respondents are too busy to remember. Therefore, they are negatively disposed towards these sorts of things, which sometimes even result in real frustration. Simply put: *"it is just too much to keep track of*, as one respondent expressed.

However, when respondents were asked on their views on loyalty cards, varying degrees of use and attitudes were resembled. One of the respondents admitted having cards belonging to two different stores but never using either of them. Another respondent commented on having none since she does not perceive attaining enough value of having such a card. A third respondent on the other hand, stated that she finds her member card very useful; especially when drawing it by the electronic tellers which provide her with coupons as well as recipes.

The above accounts reflect our earlier statement of busy moms group as utilitarian in the views of Babin et al (1994) and as perceiving a high time pressure resulting in them wanting to avoid complications as stated by Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005). In addition, an interesting insight is the fact that whether consciously or unconsciously several of our respondents admit to writing their shopping lists according to store layouts; a trait which can be seen as a desire to minimize the time and energy spent in finding the needed/wanted items at the store.

### **4.1.2 One-Stop Shopping**

Umesh et al (1989) argue that highly time-sensitive shoppers appear as more likely purchase convenience food, value efficient one-stop shopping at superstores or hypermarkets, and shopping at less busy times. Further, the same authors argue that these consumers are generally more inclined to purchase significantly larger quantities per trip than those whom are not pressured by time. Byung-Do et al (1997) depict them as routine shoppers whom visit stores frequently and will prefer to shop at the same store. Both sources seem to support that price is traded for convenience; implying that the advantage of quick service offered at convenience stores outweighs the stores' range of offerings and relatively higher pricing.

#### **4.1.2.1 Assortment and One-Store Shopping**

A wide selection was something nearly all respondents expressed as an important factor in determining their choice of store. *"Everything is gathered under one roof*;

*that's why I shop there,"* one respondent stated. Another busy mom had the same view; *"For a busy person it is good with as much as possible under one roof."*

Several of the moms think it is good that the store offers non-food products. One of them explains that she likes being able to buy stuff she does not necessarily plan, but is in need of – *"I would for example not go to Ikea to only buy one pot or pan."* She thinks that including additional product categories other than groceries, adds value to the service offer and makes the shopping trip much more enjoyable. Besides, this busy mom thinks all stores targeting women should include a section with colorful articles such as hair bands, clips, and socks. It makes it more fun according to her, *"I like to buy this kind of stuff and it does not take up much space."*

#### **4.1.2.2 Trading Price for Convenience?**

Regarding the views of Byung-Do et al (1997) and Umesh et al (1989) on time-sensitive consumers as frequent shoppers whom are willing to trade price for convenience, it is difficult to comment on a trend since respondents' views have included arguments that both support and argue against the researchers statements. Sarah admits being a rather price sensitive consumer, who seeks low prices while shopping. On the other hand we have Lina and Caroline whom argue to have a general perception of how much items cost and admit to in certain product categories such as *"fruits and veggies"* to *"shop blindly"*. By shopping blindly they mean that no real effort is put into checking prices; this is partly done by them because such products are perceived as *"must-have products"* rather than optional products. The latter is an example of what Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005) meant when referring to perceived time pressure as a factor influencing on whether consumers engage in active search and comparison of product prices.

#### **4.1.3 Entertainment for kids**

*"It is really difficult to shop with a crying child...he is hungry, gets tired, and says so many things all the time"* – states one respondent, whom often gives an ice-cream or raisins to her son in order to avoid him becoming a major fuss during the shopping trip. Another busy mom agrees that standing in line with two children is difficult; while you place one of them in the shopping cart the other one runs-off. She comments on how a certain grocery retailer located in the city center of Lund offers children a free banana. Yet another respondent often offers her child an apple even if not allowed. These moms reason that by giving children something to entertain them with, gives them a chance to more efficiently pick products in the mean time. Further, they agree on that a fruit can be seen as a source of energy, which helps children endure the shopping experience.

Generally, respondents are positive to the options available today regarding shopping carts; they point out the enjoyment for kids to be able to take part in the shopping trip by pushing their own shopping cart, since it keeps them entertained for a longer

period of time before getting bored. As a result, the respondents can better take care of their grocery shopping as intended. Furthermore, several of the respondents choose to highlight the importance for them of children taking part of and experience everyday activities as way of learning. However, what all busy moms seems to agree on is the fact that it is irritating to wait in queues and especially when they have to imagine of ways to entertain their children in the meanwhile.

The opinions about the vending machines containing candy and small toys as well as the car/airplane rides for children at the stores are in great contrast to one another; the respondents either strongly likes or dislikes these elements. Sarah for instance finds them truly disturbing since they are a major source the nagging experience between child and mom. *“You just get so sick and tired of it.”* The message she wants to convey is that these types of venues lure kids not parents, creating a friction moment between the parent and the child. On the other hand Sofia and Anna show an opposite attitude towards that of Sarah; Sofia experiences the entertainment venues as something positive, which she eventually uses as a reward tool when compensating her children’s good behavior. Anna reinforces this latter view with the following statement: *“I think it works really well as a reward for behaving well and helping mom buy groceries.”*

Sarah finds elements aiming at making the store environment more child-friendly, such as large pictures of animals i.e. cows nearby the dairy section as very positive. In addition, she appreciates complementary elements such as sound buttons, that when pushed on play animal-sounds. *“I become happy when my kids are cheerful, which they are when they are entertained, can push buttons, point towards pictures of animal and that sort of things.”* Anna, who visits a different store, refers to the presence of real-sized artificial décor-animals as something very positive and pleasant for the store environment. Such elements delight her when they cause her daughter to point towards them and quoting her daughter she says: *“Look mommy, a cow!”* She argues it is a positive component in helping mothers with an educational perspective; using these elements as a way for parents to explain their children about products and their origins. E.g. milk and cow relationship. Anna argues further the use of such items having other uses to her; she explains that in the case of fish tanks close-by fish sections; *“You just tell your daughter to sit and watch the fish, and she does that, instead of being bored while I’m shopping.”*

To sum up this section, we conclude by reviewing the most relevant highlights; shopping carts are a helpful tool but some design and practical issues have been raised such as the difficulty encountered when shopping with two children, and the cart as an element of control which (some, not all carts) could be equipped with a design and other features for entertaining children. Regarding the store environment, a wish to make stores more child-friendly is expressed, suggesting learning opportunities for children and a happier experience for both children and parents.

#### 4.1.4 Specialty Products and New Consumption Trends

Specialty products and new consumption trends are really not an area which is directly related to the theoretical framework but two that can however, be linked to our target group's choice of store and on our quest to understand what busy moms find helpful and inspiring among other things.

A few respondents stressed the importance of certain products related to the needs their children such as allergy friendly products and tissues for small children. According to their statements, these products have a major impact on their choice of store since they cannot find them in most stores. One respondent e.g. appreciates the lactose-free options offered at stores very much, especially since one of her children is lactose-intolerant. She acknowledges that this is a growing characteristic among the Swedish society and that her choice of store is reflected on whether a grocery store carries lactose-free products or not. She argues the importance of her need of clear and visible packaging information concerning friendly products for people with allergies. Another respondent on the availability and offering of specialty products for people with allergies makes the following statement: *“I know that it can be really difficult to find certain products if you have children with allergies; this is really positive.”*

Some of the respondents highlighted the on-going debate about globalization and environmental issues; they feel that products should not be transported across the world unless it is absolutely necessary. They would like to see more fair trade products and local grown produce: *“During the last few years we have increasingly looked much more at the impact of products on the environment...I miss having Swedish apples, it feels strange that stores do not have them specially since we have really good apples.”* Another trend reflected by our busy moms is that of health issues regarding food products, which are of importance to them and their families. Overall, the respondents therefore express a desire to see more elements in grocery stores reflecting these trends.

## 4.2 Situational Variables

	Positive Experiences	Negative Experiences
<b>External Variables</b>	<i>“You immediately see the offers they have from the parking lot (...) If it weren't for these signs, the walls would be quite dull.”</i>	<i>“I don't understand why they don't have a bicycle rack outside the store. (...) It can get really annoying when you have to move other bikes to get yours out.”</i>
<b>General Interiors</b>	<i>“Having flowers at the beginning of the store creates a good atmosphere and a good first impression.”</i>	<i>“It's irritating that it's often really messy. It's not dirty, but always messy.”</i>

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<b>Layout</b>	<i>“The spaciousness is major reason why I go there. It almost always feels like there are few people in the store.”</i>	<i>“They constantly move things around. This makes me irritated. They just refurnish entirely,”</i>
<b>Point of Purchase: Signs</b>	<i>“I love the big signs. I love it because it is so simple. (...) I don’t look at labels of things. I just look for the signs.”</i>	<i>“I can avoid buying a product if there is no price tag unless it is something like toilet paper that I really need. I only buy it if I really must have it.”</i>
<b>Customer Service</b>	<i>“It’s easy to find store personnel at store X. They are really helpful.”</i>	<i>“You have to be really lucky to find someone to ask for help.”</i>

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Table 4.2: Example of situational variables that influence busy moms’ in-store grocery experience

#### 4.2.1 External Variables

Turley and Milliman (2000) suggest that the exterior deserve extra attention since it constitutes consumers’ first impressions of the store. Furthermore, they state that this portion of the store should be pleasing and induce approach behaviors. In agreement with these assertions, several respondents highlighted external variables such as the parking lot and the area near the entrance because these elements comprise their first impressions of the store. Even though the respondents’ impressions of the exteriors appear to have little impact on purchase and patronage decisions, these perceptions seem to affect the overall perception of the shopping atmosphere.

Several respondents complained about the absence of an inviting and appealing entrance area. One respondent’s first impression that *“it looks tedious when you enter the store”* seems to influence her overall perception of the store since it gives a bad first impression, which in turn gives her a bad feeling that lasts until the end of the shopping trip.

The respondents appear to value a spacious, tidy, tranquil, and pleasant-looking entrance area, reflecting upon e.g. one negative impression of this section of the store environment: *“It’s really crowded; it’s a traffic jam, a physical bottle neck before you have even entered the store.”* Furthermore, sufficient parking space for bicycles and cars as well as a spacious entrance area, was something the respondents pay significance to. *“Parking should be easy, and also bringing the shopping cart from the store and to the car should be easy.”* Furthermore, the contrary could evoke frustration; *“I don’t understand why they don’t have a bicycle rack outside the store. (...) It can get really annoying when you have to move other bikes to get yours out. (...) And the solution is simple.”*



Noteworthy though, is that several of our respondents did not reflect upon this section of the store as being part of their shopping trip experience, connecting their first impressions with the interiors of the store. Thus, the target group of busy moms does in part not seem to be fully conscious about how exteriors influence their attitudes and behavior. The majority though, who reflected upon issues concerning the exteriors, accounted for negative experiences, i.e. the environment did not meet the respondents' expected levels of standard.

Overall, the results support the importance of a satisfactory and pleasing exterior store environment in accordance with what Turley and Milliman (2000) write since it influences the holistic perception of the store environment of our target group, although we must acknowledge that the research pertaining to this part of the store atmosphere is scant.

## **4.2.2 General Interiors**

### **4.2.2.1 Inducing a More Pleasant Atmosphere**

Turley and Milliman (2000) allege the importance of crafting a pleasant store atmosphere since positive perceptions of the general interior have been found to increase the time consumers spend in the store, approach behaviors, and ultimately sales. In support of the importance of the general interiors, nearly all respondents mentioned the creation of a more pleasant-looking shopping atmosphere when expressing their opinions about what would induce a more positive shopping experience. Consequently, grocery retailers are wise to put efforts into forming a decorative pleasing atmosphere.

The grocery store environment is generally viewed as rather sterile with a few exceptions appealing to the respondents' senses (e.g. fresh bread and fruits and vegetables). Visual appeals appear to have the strongest impact, although several respondents point out that they have noticed smells from products such as baked bread.

Overall, the respondents would like to see a store that elicits feelings of freshness and cleanliness. Making the store look more colorful is also viewed strongly positive and a section for flowers is an example of how this is positively received. *"It's nice with a flower section because it makes the store look a little nicer"*, one respondent said, while another one commented: *"Having flowers at the beginning of the store creates a good atmosphere and a good first impression."* Thus, flowers are a good way to give the perception of a pleasant shopping atmosphere.

Certain parts of the general interiors such as the sections for breads and fruits and vegetables make a stronger impression on the respondents' opinions about the store interiors. Caroline for example says: *"It looks really fresh with home made bread. It*

*looks better. (...) It catches the attention of all the senses. It smells really well.*” Feelings of freshness and cleanliness appear to have a major impact on the respondents’ overall perceptions of the store atmosphere. Similarly, the opposite impression, i.e. messiness, negatively influences consumer perceptions. Lina’s opinion about her store reflects this specifically: *“It’s irritating that it’s often really messy. It’s not dirty, but always messy.”* In addition, the absence of freshness negatively affects respondents’ opinions about the general interiors. Therese’s statement about the importance of freshness in the fruits and vegetable section was one amongst several similar ones: *“You get that instant bad impression when bad fruit is not removed.”*

Our respondents demonstrated that there are additional ways to enhance a shopping atmosphere. Anna was really fond of her store having an aquarium with fish as well as two large plastic cows on top of the meat counter (see Appendix 3a). Plastic cow figures and other sorts of decorations constitute simple measures in contributing to creating a pleasant atmosphere. These elements can evoke positive impressions of a more cozy, charming, and amusing atmosphere in contrast to the normally sterile and deliberately seriously planned grocery environment. Moreover, these implementations do not have to be especially advanced to have a notable impact on consumer evaluations. Even simple decorations and displays, contribute to inducing the overall perceptions of the store environment.

#### **4.2.2.2 Absence of Comments about General Interior Variables**

Noteworthy though, is that our respondents did not truly emphasize the specific general interior variables presented in the theory chapter such as lighting, music, temperature, and scents, with the lone exception of the use of colors, which appeared to be of great importance to the overall perception of the store atmosphere. Turley and Milliman’s (2000) explanation that consumers are not always aware of a particular element in the store atmosphere seems rational considering for example what one respondent said: *“Sometimes I miss not having background music in the store. (...) Actually, I don’t really know if they play music or not.”* However, regardless of their awareness, consumers can react to delicate changes of these stimuli (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Furthermore, consumers are said to assess the store environment in terms of their pre-disposed expectations (Moye and Kincade, 2002), suggesting that it would be likely that the respondents would express their opinions about any of these elements if they deviated notably from their expectations. Thus, we can only conclude that our respondents are not consciously aware of any of these elements having a major impact on their in-store grocery shopping experience, not excluding possible unconscious effects.

#### **4.2.3 Layout and Design Variables**

In the theory chapter we presented the principle of coordination which concerns creating goodwill among the customers through the arrangement of merchandise. In

resemblance with Pyle (1926) and Aghazadeh (2005) we found bottlenecks and crowding to do the opposite of creating goodwill. Our respondents have expressed frustration over one particular store because of its bottleneck immediately following the store entrance. The entrance area of this particular store is narrow, and even the bread section where customers need to stop in order to choose bread, is so narrow that people coming up behind them need to stop and wait. *“This irritates me immensely (...) it just gets so annoying when you can’t pass by,”* one busy mom expresses.

This is not the only store where our respondents have talked about the width of the walkways. Lina talks about the problem with tight alleys in the store. In some parts of the store there is simply not enough room. *“You can’t pass other customers if you are walking with a trolley and a kid. And sometimes you need to back out.”* The mom emphasizes that having a child walking next to you and the shopping cart they need more space. They even claim that they could leave the store in frustration, without shopping, if a store with narrow walkways is too crowded.

Anna, who has visited another store, claims that she goes to that particular store because of its spaciousness. *“It almost always feels like there are few people in the store.”* She does not need to worry about bringing her child along to the store, and appreciates the possibility to move around more freely.

People unpacking merchandise at busy hours does not improve the ability to navigate around a store. The respondents complain about not being able to pass the piles of goods standing around to be unpacked, and having to walk around a long aisle or big part of the store to get to the other side of it. *“This is a horrifying example,”* Anna says and points at a picture of a cart full of merchandise. *“It’s impossible to get by with your trolley.”* She finds this truly irritating, and claims that she decided not to buy cheese that day, just because she could not get to the other side of it without having to walk around the whole aisle. Had there been someone standing there unloading the cart she, in company with some of the other moms, would have found the situation to be slightly better. *“They shouldn’t place several carts full of merchandise around the store unless they are going to unpack the products straight away.”*

#### **4.2.3.1 Check-Out, Standing in Line, Queuing Systems**

Having managed to get through the whole store, the part that the moms perceive to be maybe the worst part of the shopping trip is still left; the check out line. *“Nine out of ten times you have to stand in line,”* one respondent complains. *“The queuing system is lousy. All the checkouts are not even open.”* Another respondent further tells us that *“it is especially sensitive to wait in line with children.”* Having to explain tired and bored children why they have to wait in line can sometimes be difficult. The children might run off, and having the candy section near the checkouts does not make it any easier to have the children under control. We will come back to the candy issue later in the analysis.

In addition, the frustration is strengthened due to the respondents' time-constraints. The busy moms think the long lines are unacceptable, but emphasize that they know that is the way retailers do it in general all over Sweden. They claim there is no alternative here, so you just have to accept that this is the way it is. Some of them do suggest changes like i.e. having speed checkouts for customers with few items. *"At least during busy hours, like Friday afternoon,"* Lina proposes. *"You can handle having four or five people in front of you, but not a queue half way into the store when you are just buying a bottle of shampoo."*

#### **4.2.3.2 Candy Section: A Parent's Nightmare**

There are several aspects related to the store layout that have been thoroughly talked about during the photo elicitation interviews even if there is not much theory related to it to be found. Location and shelf space of certain products is one example. Several of the moms talked about the location of the assorted candy section, and also products attracting children, like e.g. children's shampoo with cartoon characters on them. The majority of the moms mentioned that the pick-yourself candy often is located at an eyelevel targeting children. *"I think it is ruthless, unethical. Children can just open boxes up and start eating,"* one mom explains. *"And even worse is that there is always lots of candy on the floor,"* which she numerous times has found her daughter eating from. *"It can be really dangerous for young kids to eat big pieces of candy."*

*"It is really frustrating for families with children having to stand in line with candy everywhere around them,"* one busy mom complains. But she emphasizes that the store she went to for this shopping trip is fairly discrete with their candy. This store has located their candy far away from the checkouts. *"I find that really sympathetic."*

#### **4.2.3.3 Relocation of Merchandise – a Source of Irritation**

In the theory chapter we presented Pyle's (1926) principle of convenience which is about arranging the merchandise in a convenient way. Convenience is a key word for busy moms today. With a busy schedule and maybe even a nagging child or two brought along, busy moms desire a convenient trip, so they can get out of the store with everything they need as quickly as possible. We have found that the principle of convenience is of high relevance for retailers targeting busy moms. Stores having informative signs under the ceiling indicating what to find in each aisle make the shopping trip easier for busy moms, especially when the store is unfamiliar to them.

Something the busy moms find extremely inconvenient is the relocation of products. When a busy mom does not find what she is looking for at its regular spot, they might just leave without buying it because they believe they are sold out. One busy mom experiencing this once realized at a later occasion that the product was moved to a different spot, and probably had not been sold out. They find this very frustrating. *"They constantly move things around. This makes me irritated. They just refigure it entirely,"* another mom shopping at the same store expressed. Considering the time sensitivity of busy moms, running back and forth looking for merchandise, clearly

causes frustration and irritation. The relocation of the store also creates unexpected additional difficulties for those of the moms writing their shopping list according to the structure of the store. This is something several of the moms do in order to effectively get in and out of the store as quickly as possible. By moving merchandise around the retailer spoils the carefully planned trip of the busy mom, and in doing so, creating dissatisfaction.

## **4.2.4 Point-of-Purchase**

### **4.2.4.1 Large Simple Price Signs**

In chapter 3.3.4 we mentioned that Woodside and Waddle (1974), Patton et al (1981) and McKinnon et al (1981) all found that POP signs could have a positive effect upon sales. Our study has revealed a positive attitude towards POP signs among busy moms. *“I love the big signs. I love it because it is so simple. (...) I don’t look at labels of things. I just look for the signs.”* The respondents further claim that they do not like too many messages when shopping. Large simple price signs attract their attention. But in conformity with the findings of Areni et al (1999), the busy moms do not necessarily buy the product advertised on the sign. *“You make a quick stop because of it, but maybe don’t purchase that exact product. You might pick up something close to it.”*

### **4.2.4.2 Visible Labeling**

Visible price tags are also important to the busy moms. *“I can avoid buying a product if there is no price tag unless it is something like toilet paper that I really need. I only buy it if I really must have it.”* Further several of the busy moms emphasize the importance of labeling. They want products like meat, fruit and other agricultural items to be labeled with country of origin, and the meat to be labeled with what kind of animal it comes from. The overall attitude is a preference for Swedish products, both because they want to support Swedish agriculture and believe the quality in Sweden is higher, as well as thinking of the environment and the pollution from transportation of products from other parts of the world.

### **4.2.4.3 Inspiration: Sampling and Recipes In-Store**

Busy moms are positive to inspiration like sampling and recipes in-store. They sometimes think coming up with dinner suggestions can be difficult, and often end up with the dinners they usually cook. Having outgoing and friendly staff sampling easy dinner suggestions is appreciated among most of the moms. In general they are positive to both sampling and recipes, but somewhat more positive to the former than the latter alone.

At certain stores, loyalty-cardholders can swipe their cards at the entrance to get print outs of dinner suggestions. Some of the moms are very fond of this. *“Sometimes*

*when you go to the store, you don't know what you want and you're in a hurry. This machine gives you some pieces of advice and you can then enter the store and quickly purchase those things you need.*" Some of them do mention that the recipes can sometimes be too fancy and time consuming for an everyday dinner, something in which retailers should consider if targeting busy moms. The moms would also like to see more recipes hanging by the related products.

#### **4.2.4.4 TV Screens**

TV screens in-store is not something the busy moms appreciate too much. *"I find this really intrusive. (...) I don't need this when I enter a store. It doesn't help my choices on what to buy. It's just irritating."* They do realize it attracts their attention, but only find it annoying to be disturbed when trying to do their shopping, and claims they might even get a negative attitude towards the product. *"I'd rather see real people demonstrating the products."*

The busy moms have another opinion about the TV screens at the checkouts. They see a potential in the screens creating an entertaining experience while standing in line. This could shorten down the customers' perceived time in line. But currently the TV screens are only showing *"the same advertisements over and over,"* which they find really boring. One suggestion is to *"mix advertising with entertainment, gossip and news."*

### **4.2.5 Human variables**

#### **4.2.5.1 Views on customer service**

We have found that the appearance of the store personnel and the level of the service they offer, are of high importance to the busy moms. The presence of staff in the store is wished for since this makes it possible for the respondents to ask about where to find products and thereby saves them time. Saving time is as previously mentioned valuable to busy moms. They would rather spend their time doing something else than grocery shopping. In conformity with the theory presented in chapter 3.3.5, we have found the busy moms' impression of the service level at a store to rest upon the personnel's appearance. This clearly supports Bäckström and Johansson's (2006) claim that good service encounters are crucial to achieve customer satisfaction and Burke's (2002) statement that the level of service is often what customers are the least satisfied with at retail stores today.

One major source of irritation is inattentive personnel not noticing they should open another checkout or stop chatting with their colleagues in order to help the customers waiting. Emphasizing that some of the staff is friendly, Martina experiences the service encounter with personnel as truly poor. *"There is a lack of customer service."* She for example, remembers one occasion when she was waiting for her turn at the deli counter and the store was really crowded. One lone employee was trying her best

working extremely hard to serve all customers herself, looking completely stressed. A few meters away from her were a group of about five other employees resting and chatting joyfully, not caring the slightest about helping their colleague or the customers for that matter. *“It was just absurd to see something like that,”* Martina told us. *“The people working there do not understand what a customer is. That’s the mentality.”*

Lack of staff is another source of irritation. The time-sensitive moms express frustration over not finding personnel to ask about where to find particular products or whether they have more in stock than what is on the shelves. Also lack of personnel in the fruit and vegetable area has a negative influence on the moms. *“You get an instant bad impression when bad fruit is not removed.”*

The respondents seem to have an overall impression of the service level as being low in Sweden in general, but do not think it is acceptable that it is like that. *“I don’t think it’s that much of an effort to improve the service and treatment of customers. I would without a doubt choose a store with better customer service if there was one.”* Some of the moms have found stores offering what they perceive as good service, and find shopping at these stores to certainly be a better experience than those offering poor service.

In order to offer a higher level of service the busy moms would appreciate everything that would make their shopping trip more convenient, being for example bagging, carrying the bags out to the car and having more staff present. The staff further needs to understand that they are there for the customer, and be more friendly and helpful. *“When you ask where to find something the staff just points over in the other end – they don’t walk with you there. Small things like that are important. The staff should be available for you as a customer.”*

## 5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

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*In this final chapter, we present the conclusions drawn of this study. The findings derived from the empirical analysis are discussed around the research purpose. We begin with a presentation of our main conclusion. Thereafter suggestions for improvements are made and their implications are discussed. Finally we assert suggestions for further research.*

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The objective of this thesis has been to understand how busy moms experience their grocery shopping trips and the in-store environment; in order to suggest ways to induce a more satisfactory purchasing experience. Accordingly, the gained knowledge has offered us insights and we can now, to some extent, argue possible improvements which may have different implications.

### 5.1 Main Conclusion

Clearly, there are ways to improve the in-store grocery shopping experience of busy moms. Our respondents' experiences have provided us with some apparent insights on elements busy moms find helpful, informative, inspiring, and frustrating. Furthermore, these consumer statements have made it possible to find general patterns in terms of things in the in-store grocery environment this particular consumer group experiences as positive and negative. Relating the patterns highlighted throughout the empirical analysis to the combination of personal variables and situational variables as stimuli influencing the consumer and causing a response, has offered insights enabling us to clearly argue that there are several ways to improve their in-store experience. These potential means of creating a better and more satisfactory grocery shopping experience for our target group are presented in the subsequent section, in which implications are also discussed.

### 5.2 Discussion of improvements

The identified areas for improvement can from our perspective be classified as improvements of an easier or more demanding character taking into account the need of time or investments required. However, even if aware that different stores have different selling propositions in the relationship of service and price, we reflect and consider that these improvements not only are beneficial for the busy mom segment.



## 5.2.1 Customer Service

On issues concerning customer service, we have found great potential for improvements, out of which many are also easy to implement. Busy moms experience the level of customer service as rather poor regardless of store and profile. Our findings indicate two main types of enhancements concerning customer service:

- Aspects related to service encounters with personnel
- Non-people related service elements present in-store

We have found the former to be the most important as well as the least tricky to put into practice. More service minded personnel could make a vast difference regarding how the customer service is perceived. Our respondents viewed the service as being almost entirely dependent on the lone attitude of the employee. We therefore suggest grocery retailers to systematically train their personnel in providing customer service. Introducing a *customer first* policy, where store personnel are to put the customers' wants and needs first (given customer demands are reasonable) would convey a much better service impression. On a more detailed level this e.g. means that personnel should let go of what they were doing when customers ask where certain products are located, and thereafter walk the customer to the shelf. Further, the retailers should avoid unpacking merchandise during busy hours, as well as leaving carts full of merchandise out in the store when no one is unpacking them. Store personnel need to understand why they are at work; they are there to help serve customers. Opening up more checkouts when the lines are long is also important in order to show a more customer oriented profile. Another idea can be to have employees bagging merchandise at busy times like Friday afternoons. This will disburden the stress associated with having to quickly bag all merchandise before the next customer's items are being scanned.

Improving the customer service by means of offering non-people related service elements comprise a good way to create goodwill among busy moms. In the check-out area for instance, the inclusion of a speed check-out limiting the amount of products being bought could be applied on hours when store traffic and queuing are more intense. This could help minimizing the frustration of people buying a few products compared to those filling their shopping cart, while both having to stand in the same queue. A small offer, which clearly creates goodwill among parents, is to provide children a fruit free of charge. Moreover, it can be stated that service elements showing that the store has thought of children are likely to be positively received by busy moms.

In sum, the busy moms did not experience that any of the major chains stand out in the sense that they provide much better customer service. Thus, there is also a possibility to excel in this area for some time before the competition has caught on.

## **5.2.2 Inducing a More Pleasant Atmosphere: Colors and Décor**

Busy moms' shopping habits reflect a more utilitarian approach, which is supported by the respondents' views and their statements reflecting high perceived time pressure and high need for fulfilling intended shopping tasks. Even though busy moms pursue grocery shopping in a primarily utilitarian nature, some hedonic value is derived from their store visits, and we have found that several potential improvements of a more hedonic character can be interpreted as valuable and positive. This is certainly true when it comes to the general in-store atmosphere; the busy moms stressed a desire for a generally more pleasant atmosphere rather than highlighting specific elements (e.g. music, lighting, and scents) ascribed by retail atmospherics literature to influence consumer response.

A visual appeal through the use of more colors and in-store décor can contribute to an enhanced shopping experience by creating a nicer atmosphere. Possible complimentary visual aid can be done in form of big pictures depicting elements related to the different store sections. An example of this could be including a fish tank close to sea-food and fish sections, or large and appealing pictures of shiny fruits and vegetables delimiting such a section. The inclusion of other visual elements such as real-size décor animals present in relation to related sections strengthens the link and association of products to natural environments; and not reflecting as much the effects of globalization and mass-production. Even the use of audio, in form of farm sounds or the twitter of birds, could create an association to a more natural and less stressful environment.

The aforementioned suggestions comprise and take hedonic shopping value into account; our standpoint is that the suggestions mentioned can lead to towards a more hedonic shopping behavior, where a pleasant shopping environment rather evokes a positive attitude than contributing to the already high levels of stress experienced by busy moms. Furthermore, some of these measures can be relatively simple to execute. Even small measures, which do not require lots of resources, such as adding colors on the walls or placing a few decorations, can trigger notable appreciation. In addition, we regard these enhancements as not only likely to be valued by busy moms.

## **5.2.3 Child-friendliness**

We acknowledge that families with children constitute an essential customer group for grocery retailers in terms of expenditure; coupled with the insight of busy moms sometimes finding it frustrating and difficult to shop groceries with their children, we view it as important for grocery retailers to create a more child-friendly atmosphere. In doing so, goodwill and a more satisfactory shopping experience can be gained.

In this quest to make stores more child-friendly, entertaining children arise as a key factor. Having small shopping carts for children to steer themselves is a great way to let the children part take in the grocery shopping and to keep them entertained. For

the younger children, equipping a smaller number of shopping carts with a few toys (such as a steering-wheel and colored buttons) would most likely ease the mother's task in keeping and entertaining the child sitting in the cart. We assume that fastening an entertaining element to the shopping cart helps moms in several ways; firstly they do not have to bring with themselves a toy to the store which can be dropped in the process, secondly it keeps mothers from getting distracted from the shopping goals while trying to find ways to keep children under control.

Moreover, in-store efforts showing that the store considers the presence of children or facilitates the shopping with children are likely to be appreciated by the consumer group studied. This could for instance mean offering children the possibility, to treat themselves to eating a fruit sponsored by the store, to enjoy car/airplane venues, to be entertained with educational components, interact with diverse media (sound buttons, décor, etc.), or just interacting with staff approaching children and parents in a friendly manner by e.g. greeting the child. Furthermore, creating a more child-friendly atmosphere also constitutes an area in which improvements can be relatively easy to implement.

#### **5.2.4 Inspiration while Shopping**

Customer needs of busy moms can sometimes be difficult to fulfill, a view which is clearly illustrated when discussing elements they find inspiring in-store. Even though our target group seems to perceive it as helpful at times they may not always have time to look for inspiration while shopping. Hence, they want e.g. cooking inspiration although time constraints truly limit the degree to which they can take in such things while grocery shopping. However, busy moms; appreciate stores providing various sources of inspiration, which are available to them whenever they are more receptive.

Having someone demonstrating and sampling easy dinner alternatives, helps moms in being inspired/finding a quick solution which can easily be put together when they get home. Our target group does not want complicated recipes or sampled meals; while at the same time, they do not find sampling of bread to be the most exciting product to taste when shopping. Instead, they would like to taste new and exciting products. Moreover, they pay particular attention to get useful ideas for the preparation of everyday meals since this is an area where inspiration is needed the most. A suggestion is having dinner sampling at afternoon hours, both to give moms some extra energy, as well as providing them with inspirational dinner ideas before they head home after a long day's work.

#### **5.2.5 Layout Changes**

We have found that busy moms under certain circumstances call for changes concerning the store layout. Respondents have expressed that they experience aisles and store sections as rather narrow and causing bottle-necks, which hinder them from

easily moving around in the store. Physical bottle necks, tight aisles, or other objects impeding their ability to move around freely, can cause crowding problems and constitute major sources of frustration resulting in negative impacts on the efficient accomplishment of intended shopping goals. This obliges in some cases consumers to back-track, and find an alternative way to get the desired product such as stationing the cart and walking back and forth instead.

In relation to the above, experiences pointed out frustration being created when stationed carts, and/or product pallets waiting to be unpacked are encountered in narrow aisles. In changing work practices, as in example, how the stocking and pallet handling activities are carried out during store opening hours; the created frustration of experiencing a difficulty in reaching a product could be avoided. However, even if we can pinpoint this situation, it is from our position difficult to make suggestions, given that optimal layout is perceived differently by different individuals (i.e. store managers and customers). In addition, we must acknowledge that changes in layout often require extensive resources, if at all possible considering that the physical dimensions of stores not always being so permissive. Besides, these suggestions, originating from a consumer perspective, may already have been taken into account by store managers, who for a number of reasons might view these changes as not as relevant as others. However, if possible, we do recommend store managers to try minimize these layout problems and to increase the physical spaciousness or at least the feeling of spaciousness of narrow aisles and bottle-neck sections of the store.

### **5.3 Implications**

There are a few essential implications, which are relevant to the overall picture of our findings, we would like to assert.

For stores as a brand, the above suggestions can lead to a more positive association of consumers to a certain store brand name leveraging goodwill and brand image. On a store level, we can relate the above suggestions as way of providing more value to the store's frequent visitors in the form of a more pleasant shopping environment and pleasurable shopping experience. Hopefully, a more pleasing environment have a positive impact on the consumers' emotional state, reducing e.g. the perceived stress and time constraints, and result in an initial shift from a more utilitarian to a more hedonic shopping approach and behavior. It is however difficult to argue that improving the store environment will automatically result in higher sales or on a competitive advantage towards competitors, due to the fact that even if we have gained deeper insights on in-store influences on our target group, we cannot "exactly" predict how the perceived stimuli will affect their response. The insights gained are a result of the expressed views on the perceived stimuli as a combination of situational and personal variables, which are not constants. However, we do suggest based on our empirical foundations that a more enjoyable shopping environment results in consumers staying and being more receptive in the visited stores; this could eventually lead to more approach behaviors and an increase in sales.

Further, it is imperative to recognize that consumers perceive environments holistically rather than in terms of each individual element (McGoldrick, 2002), meaning that our suggestions for enhancement cannot be singled out amongst many other aspects influencing busy moms. Thus, we cannot assert how a single action can potentially contribute to a more satisfactory and pleasurable shopping experience, since it is hard to determine the actual impact of one particular effort. One noteworthy aspect in relation to this is that our results indicate that it is difficult to distinguish between factors retailers can control and those out of their control, i.e. situational and personal variables. The general patterns of busy moms' responses to the in-store environment are clearly a combination of the two since e.g. their time-sensitivity influences the degree of receptiveness and how they perceive certain situational elements. Similarly, considering the explorative character of this study, it must be mentioned that we have merely identified aspects for grocery retailers to consider when tailoring store environments. Hence, exactly to what extent these insights affect our target group and/or other consumer segments, as well as store personnel, is not asserted in this paper and constitutes a potential theme for further research (see section 5.3). Moreover, the direct impact of these suggested improvements, on for example sales cannot be argued from the analysis performed in our study; though we note that empirical evidence (see Turley and Milliman, 2000) indicates that favorable impressions of the store environment also can influence sales positively, since it makes consumers stay longer in the store, which in turn makes them buy more.

We have also found that some aspects highlighted in research articles were not mentioned as contributing to the in-store experience of busy moms. From this we could conclude that these elements do not affect our target group noteworthy. This, however, we can not state for sure since consumers also admit to possibly being influenced by stimuli, which they are not fully aware of (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Yet another aspect to recognize is that consumers apprehend the in-store environment in light of their expectations (Moye and Kincade, 2002). Our respondents experience their grocery shopping in certain ways, due to their expected level of standards for the given stores and their attributes. The latter, may perhaps not come as a surprise, but could be critical to the empirical results of this study. We chose to highlight negative as well as positive consumer accounts, as a way to present both everyday and out of the ordinary impressions. However, most of our respondents have only experienced grocery shopping in Swedish supermarkets, meaning that the standard in these stores represent their expectations. Acknowledging that e.g. in-store decorations look about the same in most stores may mean that the respondents do not take any particular notice of this element, although this could constitute a chance for a retailer to differentiate from its competition.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that many of these suggestions are also likely to positively influence other grocery shoppers, thus making it possible for grocery retailers to make use of these insights without negatively affecting in-store efforts aimed at other consumer segments. This is important since grocery retailers have a wide customer

base to serve, therefore not allowing them to discriminate on customers too extensively. Naturally, given the background of this study, we can not argue to which extent our findings are applicable to other customers, since we have focused on the grocery experiences of busy moms, and also limiting the findings to grocery trade. However, busy moms are clearly among the most demanding customers for the grocery store due to their personal situation, i.e. in meeting their needs grocery retailers are also likely to meet several of the requirements from other customers.

Last but not least, the added value of all in-store variables should be considered and put into relation with aspects relating to the grocery shopping experience. Perhaps the most important factor to note is that of location, which is often considered the single most important element of retail marketing (McGoldrick, 2002). Several respondents were evidently dissatisfied with the store they usually visit, recognizing that they still choose to do their grocery shopping because it has the best location for them. Hence, even though all the presented suggestions would induce a better shopping experience, busy moms may not trade off location for convenience or a more satisfying experience.

## 5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Given the explorative nature of our study we have set out to research a customer group which has not previously been researched thoroughly, and can therefore set bearings for future investigation on this customer target group. We would encourage a quantifiable study by means of a representative sampled survey, in order to verify the validity and verity of our findings and suggestions. Further, given the growing focus on the equality of tasks performed, and share of responsibility between men and women it would be of interest to study if there is any discerning pattern between the shopping experiences and behavior of *busy moms* and *busy dads* while grocery shopping. Additionally a continued in-depth study within our topic could be carried out as a complement, by choosing to highlight and analyze a few variables such as if shopping experiences or degree of perception to in-store stimuli differ when visiting stores with one or two children and/or if there is any substantial difference between the behavior and experiences of the two-parent and the single-parent family structure. Besides, it would be interesting to see whether our findings would differ from that of part-time or non-working mothers and less affluent moms without higher education.

Furthermore, some of the areas expressed in the experiences of our respondents are not yet researched thoroughly. We have e.g. found that external variables, sampling, and TV screens influence the respondents, though relatively little research is available. In the absence of developed theories pertaining to these fields of interest, we found it difficult to draw any conclusions about their impact on consumer behavior. We found customer service to be the area with greatest potential for improvement. A future study, examining the customer service encounter in grocery settings in detail, could thus be called for.

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## APPENDIX 1: IN-STORE INSTRUCTIONS

During your normal grocery shopping trip, you are supposed to take 15-20 pictures of things you find helpful, inspiring, fascinating, informative, annoying, disturbing, or interesting in any other way.

This concerns everything inside and outside the store that can be associated with your grocery purchases in this particular store. With “*everything*”, we mean everything you can touch, see, smell, and hear with your senses, that is, everything from A to Z.

We would like to point out that there is nothing that is considered as *right* or *wrong* concerning the pictures you take. Just let your experiences guide you and take pictures of whatever you want to.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you encounter any problems with the equipment. We will then, of course, come and help you.

We will meet you again on “the other side” once you are finished. Thank you so much once again for taking part in this study. Your participation is truly appreciated!

## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Collection of background information: name, age, number of children, children's age/s, profession, work hours p/week, double income household.

1. Do you usually shop in that store? How often?
2. Choose 12 photographs that represent your impressions
  - a) Describe the photographs chosen and not chosen
3. Sort the 12 photographs into themes
  - a) Describe the themes
  - b) Label the themes
4. Rank the themes in order of importance
  - a) Establish if it is a positive or negative theme
5. Pick out the most representative photograph for your impressions
  - a) Describe the photographs and your impressions
6. Pick out the photograph that represents the opposite to the most representative photograph
  - a) Describe the difference
7. Are there any other impressions not represented in the photographs?
  - a) Describe them
  - b) Why is it not represented in the photographs?
8. How do you experience this study?
  - a) The instructions
  - b) The camera
  - c) The interview
9. Is there anything that you would like to add, impressions, thoughts etc. that we have not talked about so far?

## APPENDIX 3: PICTURE



Picture A: Two large plastic décor cows on top of the meat counter.