# Personal service request categories and their facilitation with self-service technologies

A case study in the self-service retail industry

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify and categorize customer's personal service requests and to determine the extent to which these categories can be facilitated with self-service technologies (SST). Hence, this study bridges the gap between customer service and self-service. This is particularly relevant, as a knowledge gap has been identified between the research field of personal customer service and SST. Thus, concepts significant to both fields are reviewed and applied in the preliminary framework which guides the data collection and provides a structure for the findings and analysis. Considering it's exploratory nature, the research applies a qualitative approach. Following a single case study approach, this study utilizes a self-service retail store in Sweden and UK. In terms of data collection the study implements an abductive approach while taking an interpretivist stance in regard to the data analysis. Aiming at data triangulation, multiple sources of evidence were deployed in two different markets. In a first step, participant observations were carried out before employee shadowing. Thereafter, ten semi-structured employee interviews and twenty in-depth customer interviews were conducted and supported by photo-elicitation.

Finally, this research accomplished its objectives by categorizing customer's personal service requests and identifying the extent to which these can be facilitated with SSTs. While some of the personal service request categories confirm or reject existing knowledge, others newly emerged from the findings of this study. An unexpected finding of this research is that based on newly developed criteria each of the identified personal service request categories can be assigned a distinct level of advisory. Similar to this, criteria were also established to assess the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate each personal service request category. Another contribution of this study is the relationship between the level of advisory and the level of SST which has been identified based on the findings of this study.

**Keywords**

Self-service technologies, personal customer service, self-service retailer, self-service industry, retail industry, IKEA

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

# LIST OF TABLES

# LIST OF FIGURES

# 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the two main research fields of study, self-service technology and customer service. An overview of key studies that are directly relevant for the purpose of this research are given. In the following section the area in which further research is needed is presented, which leads to the purpose of this study. Building upon this, the research question as well as the objectives of this study are presented, followed by an argumentation of the potential value of this research in terms of practical and theoretical contribution. The final section of the introductory chapter gives an outline of the structure this thesis follows.

## 1.1 The impact and importance of self-service technologies

Today, technology impacts our daily lives. Almost all aspects of life have become increasingly digital and the vast majority of society depends on technology to simplify numerous tasks everyday (Bashir & Albarbarawi, 2011). Digitalization causes us to move closer towards network interconnection of everyday objects as virtually every aspect of life is captured and stored in some digital form (Ernst&Young, 2011). Moreover, the increasing usage of mobile devices allows customers to access information whenever and wherever they desire (Goworek, 2015). This occurs simultaneously with technological developments and evolving digitalization. In 2015 Google announced that mobile overtook desktop traffic in ten different countries (Inside AdWords, 2015). According to Forbes, 2016 will be the year in which mobile device usage completely dominates desktop usage (deMers, 2015).

Furthermore, technology and ongoing digitalization has already had a strong impact on the retail sector. One research conducted by Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree and Bitner (2000) showed that an increasing number of customers interact with technology instead of service employees to create service outcomes. Additionally, the study states that due to the rapidly advancing technology, its increasing role in everyday life, and the omnipresent mobile device usage, retailers have been investing increasing amounts to include self-service technologies (SSTs) in their store concepts (Meuter et al., 2000). In fact, in 2008, organizations in North America alone already spent $2.8 billion on SST, not to mention that this number is projected to increase by 15% annually over the next decade (The Economist, 2009). According to Li, Choi, Rabinovich and Crawford (2012) the impact of retailer's increased spending on SST has been especially noticeable in the retail industry.

Due to this development, SST attracted a lot of attention in self-service research and is particularly popular in the area of service marketing and management (Curran & Meuter, 2005; Bitner, Ostrom & Meuter, 2002). This is also due to the fact that SST has proven to offer efficient and effective service standards (Kelly, Lawlor & Mulvey, 2010). More specifically, Lee (2015) found that particularly for self-checkout services; the personal customer service is not necessarily relevant. Contrastingly, the study also showed for other SSTs like information kiosks that customer service could enhance the effectiveness and the positive impact of SST on the customer experience in store (Lee, 2015). Lee (2015) furthermore states that retailers tend to implement new technological applications (apps) hoping to achieve improved customer service, increase customer touch points, to provide information and to generate additional revenue (NCR, 2009).

## 1.2 The importance of personal customer service

There is a wide variety of research in the area of customer service in the retail industry (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Hui & Bateson, 1991; Fisk & Grove, 1997; Alhouti, Gillespie, Chang &

Davis, 2015; Goworek, 2015). In fact, many studies are concerned with the importance of service and specifically personal service. Despite the fact that retailers put increasingly focus on self-service technologies, recent studies stress that personal customer service still plays an important role and should not be underestimated (Sousa, 2006; Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Resnick, Foster & Woodall, 2014; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015; Lee, 2015; Pugh & Subramony, 2016). A survey of over 2100 customers contends that it is essential for physical retail stores to provide knowledgeable, helpful sales assistants that can answer questions or solve problems (Burke, 2002).

Due to the rapid technological developments stated above there have been major changes in the retail industry and the service landscape. Many retailers are extending their service offerings through various different channels (Goworek, 2015). However, Bäckström and Johansson (2006) argue that customers mention their experiences with service staff first before mentioning other in-store experiences. Retailers wanting to increase customers' in-store experience should therefore first make sure to meet customer's expectations in terms of customer service and in a further step build on it (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006). Furthermore, a recent study shows that there is a need to reexamine the situations in which customers like to interact with a member of staff (Alhouti et al., 2015). As for the high cost of sales staff and the competitive current landscape, the allocation of personal service has to be as efficient as possible (Alhouti et al., 2015).

## 1.3    Knowledge gap

Despite the fact that much research has examined the importance of either SST or personal customer service, some studies have also identified the need to combine those two fields (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Langer, Forman, Kekre & Sun, 2012; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015).

Bowers (2013) for example argues, that success is achieved when the technology of what is possible intersects with the expectations of what customers find desirable. Scherer, Wünderlich and von Wangenheim (2015) argue that technology based self-service channels may not always lead to desired results. They stated that "instead, firms must consider the unique value customers can derive from both self-service and personal service channels over time" (Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, p.179). Additionally Langer et al. (2012) identified that instead of realizing the advantages of both channels - personal and self-service, service providers increasingly push their customers towards the self-service channel. Kumar and Telang (2012) support this by stating that SST cannot simply substitute personal service. Moreover, Lee (2015) and Lee and Allaway (2002) state that the usage of SSTs is enhanced through personal customer service.

This confirms that current studies have already identified the need to implement both, personal service as well as self-service technologies. However, there is an existing knowledge gap in terms of how both channels - personal service and self-service - can be combined. Specifically, in which situations customers demand personal customer service, and in which they prefer self-service practices. Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros and Schlesinger (2009, p.34) also identified this research gap and state that there is knowledge needed about "What is the optimum blend of employee- and technology-based service systems […]".
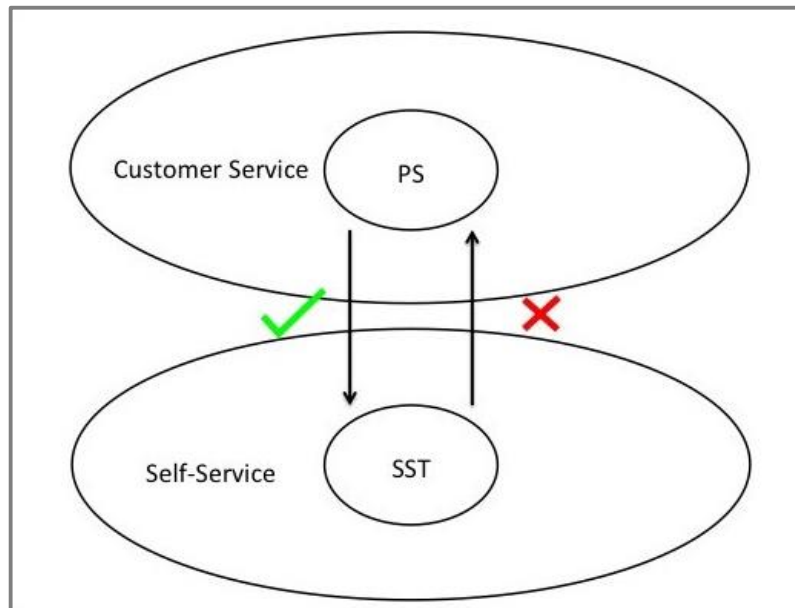
*Figure 1: Illustration of the knowledge gap*

Figure 1 illustrates the research gap according to the knowledge derived from the literature. It depicts the two main research fields of customer service and self-service. Within the field of customer service is the area of personal service (PS), both will be reviewed in Chapter 3. Within the field of self-service is the relatively young area of self-service-technologies. The illustration shows that research has been done in both of the two extensive fields as well as in both of the two smaller areas. It also shows that research has been conducted combining knowledge from the field of personal service and SST. However, this knowledge only provides insights about the benefits of personal service for the usage of SST and how SST can be supported with personal service (Lee & Allaway, 2002; Lee, 2015). Therefore, the influences of personal service on SST, which have been researched and identified, are illustrated with a green check mark. However, as far as the researchers are concerned, no literature or knowledge exists the other way around, i.e. in regard to the influences of SST on personal service. Thus, the influence of SST on personal service is indicated through a red cross (figure 1).

## 1.4    Purpose of the study

Along with digitalization and technology, self-service technologies have a tremendous impact on retailers today, as discussed previously. However, various studies (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Sousa, 2006; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Resnick, Foster and Woodall, 2014; Lee, 2015; Pugh & Subramony, 2016) have identified that personal customer service is still important in order to create value for the customer. Furthermore, former studies have outlined that SST does not have the same benefits as personal customer service (Kumar & Telang, 2012) and thus cannot simply substitute personal customer service (Langer et al., 2012; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015). More specifically, previous research has argued that both channels should be combined, utilizing the benefits of both (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Langer et al., 2012; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015). In a study about SST Lee (2015) specifies for self-checkout services, that personal customer service is not necessarily relevant. However, for other SSTs (e.g. information kiosks) personal customer service can enhance the effectiveness and positive impact SST has on customer experience in store (Lee, 2015). This study will therefore not look at self-checkout areas, as personal customer service has already been found not to be relevant here. Furthermore, this study

focuses specifically on self-service encouraging retailers, as they usually have a high usage of SST and are in their nature rather SST- than personal service-oriented. This is unique in the sense that self-service practices typically contradict those related to personal service. Irrespectively, many researchers looked at the fixed points of SST, such as information kiosks or self-service checkouts (Lee, 2015). As this study focuses on customer's requests in regard to personal service, no fixed SSTs will be evaluated, but rather how SST can support the personal service encounter, or even replace it. SSTs could for example be used in terms of mobile devices, which are portable and can therefore facilitate the personal service encounter anywhere in the store.

As stated above, Scherer, Wünderlich and von Wangenheim (2015) underline the importance of understanding when and how SST creates valuable customer experiences. Furthermore, Verhoef et al. (2009) identified this research gap and state that there needs to be knowledge generated about what the optimum blend of employee-and technology-based service systems is. This knowledge needs to be generated in order to give retailers the opportunity to enhance customer's service experience in-store. In times where there is a proliferation of online shopping, it is important for retailers to be able to offer their customers a high quality service experience to generate traffic in-store.

As far as the researchers are concerned, no research looks at the requests for personal service in a self-service environment and how it could be enhanced through SST. Lee (2015) and Lee and Allaway (2002) state that personal customer service can aid SST. However, no research looks at the ways in which SST can support personal customer service. Consequently, this research aims to narrow this knowledge gap by identifying and categorizing customers' request in regard to personal customer service in-store. On top of that, the research at hand examines to what extent SSTs are able to facilitate the requests in which customers demand personal customer service. Figure 2 shows the positioning of this research in the research areas of customer service and self-service as both are of relevance for retailers today. As mentioned above, no research has focused on how SST can support personal service. This could be due to the fact that the knowledge that personal customer service should be combined with SST has only been created recently.
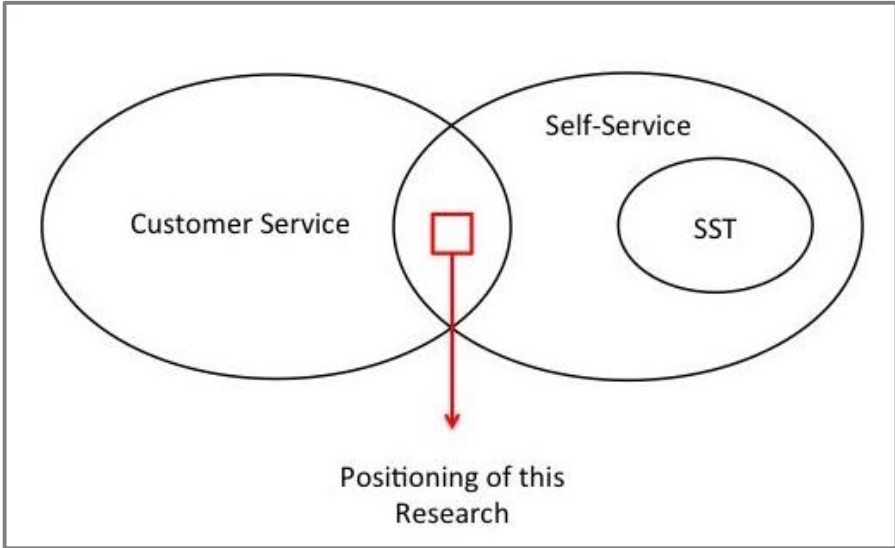


*Figure 2: Positioning of this research*

This study therefore aims at exploring the influences SSTs can have on personal service, and more specifically, how they can positively affect the service experience. In order to do so, this research focuses on identifying the customer requests in regard to personal service today, and how they can be categorized. As personal service requests differ widely throughout the industries, this study will focus on self-service retailers, as they are the ones implementing self-service technologies the most. Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) conducted a study at a self-service retailer in relation to customers requests for personal service. In their findings they state different categories of requests for customer service, which this research uses as a guideline. However, their study is slightly outdated and needs to be reevaluated according to today's customer preferences. This leads to the following first objective:

*1. Identifying and categorizing customer's personal service requests in self-service retail stores.*

In a second step, this research aims at identifying the level of SST, which can be used to facilitate each of the personal service request categories. Facilitating a personal service request could for example mean to support the request with a mobile device in a way that customers can access the knowledge they ask for quicker and more efficiently. If self-service retailers would have more insights regarding the extent to which personal service requests can be enhanced with SST, it would enable them to be more efficient with their planning of personal service resources and increase their service quality. This leads to the second objective:

*2. Analyzing the extent to which self-service retailers can utilize SSTs to facilitate personal customer service in-store.*

Based on these objectives the following research question arises:

*What are customer's personal service requests in self-service retail stores and to what extent can they be facilitated with self-service technologies?*

## 1.5 Intended contributions

The following research focuses on customer's requests in regard to personal customer service in self-service encouraging retail stores and to what extent these requests can be aligned with SSTs. It aims to make various practical and theoretical contributions to the areas of interest outlined below.

***Intended practical contribution***

This study aims to uncover customer's requests and demands in relation to personal customer service in store. More precisely, there is a white spot in the existing theory regarding the types of requests for which personal customer service is needed in a self-service encouraging retail setting and if SST can facilitate it. Therefore, this study intends to identify and categorize the requests for which customers demand personal service and will explore whether or not these categories can be realized or supported by SST. Thus, the research will enable self-service retailers to employ a more efficient balance between SST practices and personal customer service.

Moreover, insights regarding the extent to which SST can be utilized to enhance personal customer service in a self-service encouraging retail stores will create value for both customers and retailers. As this study intends to identify certain request categories in which this occurs, retailers will be able to reduce or even eliminate this frustration, which in a consecutive step will lead to an increased

customer experience. Furthermore, this will contribute by creating a more customer-needs-oriented service experience, which in the next step will create value for both customers and retailers. Considering the fact that the research of this study is conducted at a self-service retailer, the study will be of increased practical relevance for that industry.

*Intended theoretical contribution*

Particularly for retailers emphasizing the implementation of technology in the store, it is important to scrutinize the role of personal customer service. As mentioned above, there is a risk of underestimating its importance. No research has taken the importance of personal customer service in combination with SST usage into account, where the SST usage does not only occur at fixed points in the store but could take place anywhere. Considering, that this study intends to contribute theoretical knowledge to the fields of customer service and self-service, the findings will be especially relevant for researchers of those two fields. In relation to the objectives stated above, this study aims at contributing categories for customers' requests for personal service and in a next step how these can be facilitated through SST. Furthermore, as this research aims to suggest a framework developed through a qualitative study with an abductive approach, the knowledge generated will create room for further testing, e.g. on a quantitative basis.

## 1.6    Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research done in the two areas of study outlines the knowledge gap and the purpose of this study. Additionally, it states the awaited theoretical as well as practical contributions this research intends to make. Chapter 2 describes the methods used for this study and shows the research design. Chapter 3 reviews the existing literature in the field, which in a next step leads to a preliminary framework. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the research as well as an analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the findings pointed out in chapter 4 in relation to the objectives and the research question formulated in chapter 1. The last chapter of the thesis (Chapter 6) presents the contributions in regard to existing literature, as well as the limitations and suggestions for further research this study provides.

# 2    Methodology

The following chapter outlines the strategy, sampling approach, data collection, data analysis, market differences, political and ethical dimension as well as weaknesses of the research applied in this study.

## 2.1    Research design

Given the purpose of the study, the research data required to be collected, and the nature of the research, a qualitative research design was chosen. The role of theory in relation to the research and the epistemological as well as ontological orientation further support the qualitative study design (Bryman & Bell, 2011). More specifically, the research at hand is based on arguments and in-depth understanding opposed to quantification and hypothesis testing and thus follows a qualitative research design rather than a quantitative one (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The research further implements an applied approach as the study aims to provide practical solutions based on existing theory while targeting to deliver results that offer theoretical value (Koch, 2016).

Due to the nature of the research and the existing theory which is being taken into account, this study emphasizes an abductive approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). More precisely, various existing theories and concepts (Baron, Harris & Davies 1996; Lee, 2015; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015), are formed into a preliminary framework, discussed in chapter 3.2. This guides the data collection while leaving room for new insights to be found and new theories to be developed, by establishing new personal service categories alongside exploring SSTs as means to facilitate personal service in self-service retail stores.

These are distinct characteristics of abductive reasoning, as abduction in qualitative data analysis is concerned with the identification of themes, codes and categories (Lipscomb, 2012). Abduction is utilized to describe and understand social life in terms of social actors, motives and accounts (Blaikie, 2010). Abduction takes place when researchers generate beliefs, based on insights, about the meaning or significance of their data on non-deductive and non-inductive grounds (Boutilier & Becher, 1995). Thus, an abductive approach does not only strengthen the development of findings, but may also describe the inferential form that supports many types of qualitative analysis (Lipscomb, 2012).

Furthermore, in his research, Ong (2012), states several aspects which according to Blaikie and Stacy (1984) are typical for an abductive method. Two of these aspects, which play a key role in this study - as the customer requests are classified into service categories - are: First, the identification of concepts and categories used in the discussion of the 'topic' - especially those that keep recurring in the data; second, the exploration of the meaning of these concepts and categories as they continue throughout the study (Blaikie & Stacy, 1984).

According to Ong (2012), an abductive approach enables researchers to pay close attention to the meanings and interpretations, as well as the motives and intentions that people use in their daily lives. This also incorporates interpretations people give to their actions, other people's actions and social situations. This is particularly relevant considering the design of the data collection which is concerned with identifying customer's personal service requests via four different methods namely: participant observations, shadowing, employee interviews and customer interviews. This ensures that the researched requests are being verified and that all intentions, actions, and situations regarding personal customer service in self-service encouraging retail stores are explored in a sufficient manner. In terms of epistemology, the research takes an interpretivist orientation as one purpose of the study is

to understand customer's requests in a personal service context in order to gather information about the specific situations in which they demand and expect personal service in-store. Naturally, this data is subject to interpretation. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), interpretivism is yet another characteristic of qualitative studies.

Opposed to that, the ontological orientation of the study is based mainly on a constructionist approach as the research findings present a specific version of the social reality rather than one that can be seen as definite (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This is caused by the fact that the researchers aim to gain insights by studying customers' opinions and experiences in regard to personal service in-store. Doing so automatically includes their mental activity and specific experience in the process of knowing reality, which according to David Elkind (2004), makes it constructivism.

## 2.2 Research strategy

Given the fact that the study concentrates specifically on personal customer service requests in a self-service environment, the research is quite unique in the sense that typically self-service practices contradict with personal service. Despite that and as outlined in chapter 1.4, previous research has successfully identified the importance of combining personal service with self-service practices and SSTs (Langer et al., 2012; Lee, 2015; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015).

Considering this and given the study's focus on self-service encouraging retailers, IKEA presents a natural fit in terms of research setting. In fact, the self-service approach is deeply anchored in IKEA's business model and concepts encouraging customers to take action themselves can be found in almost every aspect of the company's stores. Consequently, the self-service encouraging nature of IKEA offers the perfect environment for this research and is utilized as a single case study. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012), case studies are generally concerned with an in-depth view at 'one, or a small number of, organizations, events or individuals'. While single cases usually derive from a constructionist epistemology multiple cases typically derive from a more positivist epistemology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).

In light of the fact that no other self-service encouraging organization is included in the research's data collection, the study follows a single case epistemology. Despite that, the study does gather data from two different markets namely, IKEA Cardiff, United Kingdom (UK) and IKEA Malmö, Sweden. Nevertheless, the different markets do not constitute different cases as this study does not aim to explore the differences between both markets, which would indicate a multiple case study design (Yin, 2003),  hence, the research is to classified as a single case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

More precisely, Stake (2006) distinguishes between different kinds of case studies namely, instrumental and expressive. While the first one is concerned with looking at explicit cases to develop general principles, the latter investigates cases due to their unique features, which may or may not be generalizable. In light of this, the study at hand is an instrumental case, as it is concerned with the understanding of personal customer service demands as a broader topic that allows for carful generalizations based on the case (Stake, 2006).

Opposed to this, Yin (2003) classifies case studies in five different types. According to the expert, the study is categorized as a representative study which seeks to explore a case that exemplifies an everyday situation or form of organization (Yin, 2003). In fact, the research focuses on identifying the typical everyday requests customers have regarding personal customer service. Hence, this study

gathers information concerning the different personal service requests customers have on a daily basis, and utilizes the IKEA store as the setting for the case study. Considering that based on customer's service requests categorizations are made, this study utilizes characteristics of both, instrumental and representative case studies.

## 2.3    Sampling approach

Before the data collection process was initiated, a suitable sampling approach needed to be selected. This process is further described in the section below. Collecting data from a sample enables the researchers to make statements about the population from which the sample is drawn and places responsibility on the researchers to determine in which setting the findings are relevant (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). The sample was focused on IKEA customers and employees at the IKEA store in Cardiff and Malmö, as the present clientele was determined to be the most representative for the study (Samli, Kelly & Hunt, 1998).

The sampling design applied in this study is convenience sampling - a certain type of non-probability sampling (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009), this method is characterized by researchers publicizing their need for participants either by asking them to take part or by advertising through appropriate media and then collecting data from those who respond. In the study at hand, participants have been haphazardly but consciously selected and approached based on how willing they seemed to sacrifice time for an interview during their shopping experience. Thus as customers who seemed pre-occupied or in a hurry were neglected. Notably, not every subject of the population had the same probability of being selected for the study (Malhotra, 2010). The researchers did not only ensure that the sample is equally spread in terms of age, gender, occupation and different backgrounds, but in order to gain insights from a more diverse sample and thus to receive a broader picture, the researchers aimed to select participants with varying levels of mobile phone usage. This guaranteed that the findings are independent of participant's affinity towards technology and mobile device usage.

Furthermore, IKEA customers were approached in the warehouse before they continue to the checkout area. This location was strategically chosen as it ensured that customer had passed through the entire store. This was especially important to guarantee that certain departments were not excluded, which might have resulted in the fact that some service requests, which customers are more common to raise in certain departments, were excluded.

## 2.4    Data collection

To start the data collection process and as outlined in the data collection scheme illustrated below, secondary data in the form of an IKEA Customer Satisfaction Survey (ICSS) was collected to identify customer's opinions relating to their in-store shopping experience. Thereby, the study mainly focused on the information concerning customer's opinions regarding the personal service. Additional secondary includes: information regarding the store size, for both IKEA stores, Cardiff and Malmö.

In the second step, data was gathered through participant observations, which allowed the researchers not only to familiarize themselves with the store layout and the market specific characteristics, but also provided valuable insights into customer's general behavior and actions while shopping in the specific market. Thereafter, to uncover customer's personal service requests first hand, IKEA employees were shadowed while working on the shop floor. Thereafter, semi-structured interviews with IKEA

employees were conducted to gain further insights into customer's personal service requests from an employee perspective. Additionally, these interviews shed light onto the extent to which SSTs such as mobile devices can be utilized by employees and customers to facilitate and enhance personal customer service. To illustrate as authentically as possible how this technology could be utilized, photo elicitation on a tablet was used during these interviews (see Appendix A).

In the last step of the data collection process, customer interviews were conducted in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of the everyday requests that lead customers to engage in personal service. Once again photo elicitation on a tablet helped to exemplify how SSTs could be utilized to facilitate personal service, and thus allowed the gathering of valuable insights regarding the extent to which customers think SSTs are able to enhance their personal service experience in-store.
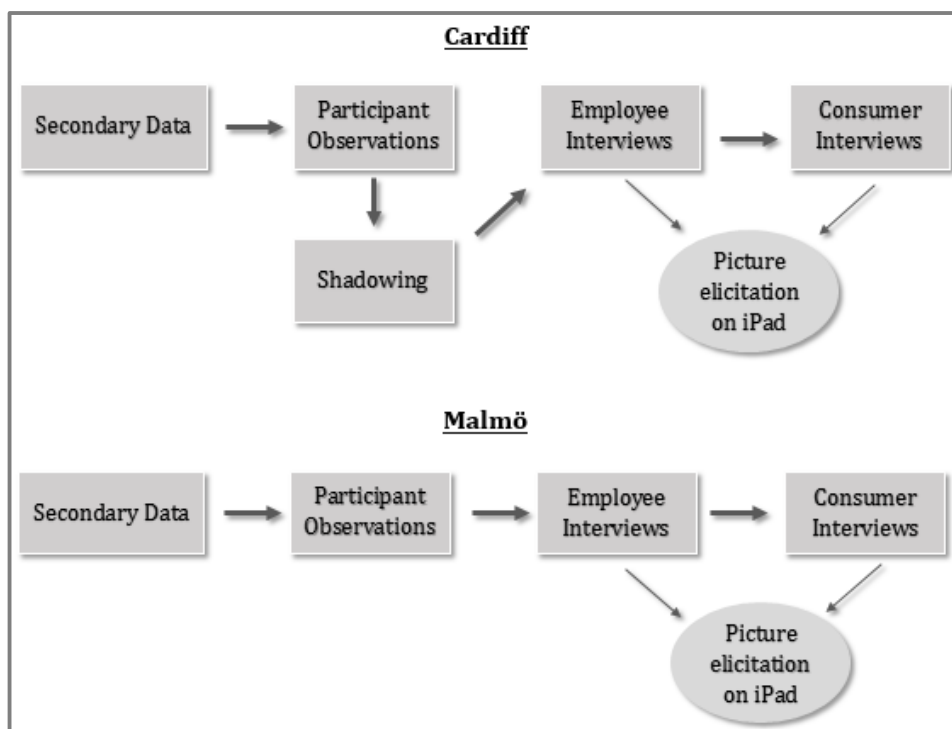


*Figure 3: Data collection scheme. The data collection scheme summarizes the different data sources and the research process of the study.*

Referring to the different qualitative data collection methods outlined in figure 3, Baxter and Jack (2008) and Yin (1994) explain that multiple sources of evidence enhance the data validity, credibility, reliability, and thus the general quality of a research. Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2011) validate the research approach by stating that a case study is a good research design to combine several qualitative methods, such as ethnography and qualitative interviewing. Yin (2003), advances that it is important for case studies to gather primary data to be able understand the diversity of dimensions and perspectives, allowing researchers to experience a phenomenon in its actual context.

To further increase the validity, credibility and reliability as well as the overall quality of the research (Yin, 1994), this study gathered and compared data from two different markets. More precisely, the research process started at the IKEA store in Cardiff, UK before data in the store in Malmö, Sweden was gathered as well. As can be seen in the data collection scheme above, the collection process was almost identical in both markets, with the only difference being that in Malmö no shadowing has been

implemented. The reasons for this are discussed within the description of the individual methods (chapter 2.4.3).

### 2.4.1 Secondary data

In general, secondary data is data has been gathered by researchers who have not been involved in the initial collection and which most likely has been collected for a different original purpose (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Sources of secondary data can include company or government reports, advertisement, articles and books as well as archival data and are frequently used to compliment primary data sources (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In the field of business and management research, secondary data is most often utilized as part of a case study or survey research strategy (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

In this study, secondary data has been collected in various forms: first, the ICSS was used to acquire a first impression in regard to customer's opinions concerning the personal service in-store. The validity and reliability of this data is quite high as a total of more than 1.500 customers in Cardiff and more than 1.000 customers in Malmö participated in the survey. More importantly, the ICSS draws its insights from the normal IKEA clientele and thus encompasses a wide and diverse sample range. In fact, the sample is well spread in terms of criteria such as age, frequency of store visits, living situation and reason for shopping. Additionally, information regarding the store size was gathered for both IKEA stores. This information is relevant to the study as it set the scene for the research and allowed to compare and contrast the two markets. Given the fact that this data was attained directly from IKEA, the researchers have been somewhat dependent on the company in trustbusting the reliability of the information.

As previously outlined, the data collection is exclusively based on qualitative methods. This is due to the fact that according to Bryman & Bell (2011), quantitative methods are less reliable in collecting data which is concerned with uncovering customers' demands, opinions, and expectations. Hence, to accomplish the research objectives and to identify customer's personal service requests in a reliable fashion, several data collection methods have been implemented. As depicted in figure 3, these include *participant observations*, *employee shadowing*, *customer interviews* as well as *employee interviews*.

### 2.4.2 Participant observations

In order to identify and categorize customers personal service requests in self-service retail stores, and thus help gather information regarding the study's first research objective, customers were observed while shopping at the IKEA Cardiff store, and later the IKEA store in Malmö. Given the fact that many observations have the issue of researchers being a disturbing factor in the social setting that is being observed (Bryman & Bell 2011), an observer-as-participant approach was utilized to prevent the natural behavior patterns at the ethnographic site from being disturbed (Adler & Adler, 1994) and to "minimize the effect of the researcher on the researched" (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003, p.217).

During the participant observations, the researchers followed the IKEA typical customer walkway through the entire store, aiming to blend in with the rest of the customers at the store by pretending to shop themselves. In order to be able to observe some situations and actions by other customers in a more detailed manner, several stops were made along the way through the store. Doing so, the researchers were careful to signal interest in several different products and avoided to take obvious notes, using smartphones to write down important observations. This was the least obvious method

considering that several customers used their smart phones in the store. In general the IKEA store setting and the wide variety of IKEA customers visiting the store allowed the researchers to be perceived as regular customers. Consequently, these observations have been covered, whilst deploying a naturalistic stance as the research was conducted in the natural IKEA store setting and customers were not aware that they were observed (Bryman & Bell 2011).

Utilizing this method was particularly beneficial as it affords rich insights into the customer's everyday life (Moisander, Rokka & Valtonen, 2010). This is essential to understand as this study is concerned with identifying customer's everyday service requests, rather than special service demands which may occur only in specific situations. Finally, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), three distinctive advantages arise when combining participant observations with interviews, first, the credibility of the analysis is enhanced by the in-depth understanding of the site, secondly, it allows for a comparison with the empirical data, and thirdly, the data interpretation during the analysis becomes more profound and acute as the interviews obtain meanings from the observations (Dexter, 1970).

### 2.4.3 Shadowing

Shadowing is commonly defined as "a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time" (McDonald, 2005, p.456) to investigate behaviors and perspectives and to capture what people actually do (Quinlan, 2008). In this case five IKEA salespersons where shadowed for one and a half hours each in order to identify customer's personal service requests first hand and explore the service encounters itself in more detail. During the shadowing, the researchers followed the employees wherever they went during the work. In order to create a more natural setting, and to reduce the effect of the researcher on the researched (Elliot & Jankel-Elliot, 2003), one researcher shadowed one distinct IKEA employee.

Moreover, this method was exclusively utilized at the IKEA store in Cardiff. This is due to the fact that the primary objective of this method was to explore similarities and differences between personal service requests outlined by customers and employees during the interviews, and the personal service requests which were gathered based on this method. Considering that the data collected during the interviews was validated through the employee shadowing, and taking into account that no new insights, were identified via this method, researchers abstained from performing this method in the IKEA store in Malmö. Apart from that, the fact that both researchers did not speak Swedish, would have made it very difficult to sufficiently implement shadowing in any IKEA store in Sweden.

Even though shadowing does not have to be part of an ethnographic study, as it could be utilized exclusively as well, it is quite similar to participant observation that ethnographic studies typically engage in (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, shadowing differentiates itself from the previously outlined participant observation through the method's focus on activities of one distinct individual. It is guided by these activities and decisions as they occur, rather than being directed by a research question which relates to a group of setting (Quinlan, 2008). Moreover, the type of insides that it produces further distinguish this method as it produces a rich, dense and comprehensive data set. This provides a detailed first hand and multidimensional picture of the approach, actions, and demands of the person being studied (McDonald, 2005). Additionally, data collected through shadowing is more detailed than data gathered through many other approaches (McDonald, 2005).

Shadowing, as a data collection method is especially suitable for the purpose of this study, as it allowed the researchers to gather data from someone else's point of view (McDonald, 2005). More

specifically, shadowing IKEA salespersons in-store enabled the researchers to uncover the situations in which customer's approach the employees and request personal service. This first hand experience also allowed the researches to perceive this process through the eyes of the customer. This is particularly important as it increases the validation and reliability of the insights, due to the fact that it adds another data source and enables the researchers to view the behavior directly, rather than relying on the individual account gathered during the employee and customer interviews. In fact, Weick (1974) elaborates that shadowing has the ability to capture the brief, fragmented, varied, verbal and interrupted nature of organizational life.

### 2.4.4 Interviews

Another data collection method employed in this study are interviews, adding yet another source of information and thus further advancing the credibility, reliability and validity as well as the overall quality of the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 1994). Referring to Bryman & Bell (2011) interviews - the most commonly implemented qualitative research method - provide in-depth insights into participant's opinions and viewpoints, while offering flexibility to the researchers. Furthermore, Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989), elaborate that interviewing is one of the most significant methods to acquire a rich understanding of customer's opinions, values and beliefs, and is frequently utilized to gather detailed information about the topic under study. Concerning the fact that the interviews have been conducted by two researchers, Bryman & Bell (2011) view this as an advantage, explaining that the presence of more than one interviewers can help interviewees to conceive the setting as more casual and less formal, thus allowing them to react in a sincerer and open way. On top of that, in case studies, interviews are one of the most central information sources (Yin, 1994).

In light of this, the study at hand uses two different types of interviews. On the one hand, six semi-structured interviews with IKEA employees and ten in-depth customer interviews were conducted in the IKEA store in Cardiff, UK. On the other hand, five semi-structured employee interviews and ten in-depth interviews with IKEA customers were conducted in the IKEA store in Malmö, Sweden as table 1 depicts below.

*Table 1: Overview of conducted interviews*

| Overview of conducted interviews | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # | Name | Gender | Age range | Mobile affinity | Occupation | # of visits (last 12 months) |
| **IKEA Cardiff** | | | | | | |
| 1 | Kathryn | F | 26-35 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 2 | Pete | M | 36-45 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 3 | Terry | M | 56-65 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 4 | Joanne | F | 26-35 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 5 | James | M | 26-35 | - | Mobile Co-worker app Coordinator | - |
| 6 | Houman | M | 26-35 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 7 | Jo, Holly, Ben | F, F, M | 46-55, 18-25, 26-35 | Medium, High, High | Nutritionist, photographer, Student | 20 |
| 8 | Annette, Emma | F, F | 26-35, 36-45 | Medium, High | Nurse, Carer | 2,1 |
| 9 | Connor, Jamie | M, F | 18-25, 18- | High, High | Student, Student | 10-12 |

| | | | | | | 25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Jacqui | F | 56-65 | High | University Lecturer | 5-6 |
| 11 | Ann | F | 45-55 | High | Teacher | 10 |
| 12 | Sinead, Mark | F, M | 26-35, 26-35 | Medium, High | Student, Steal Worker | 12 |
| 13 | Vu | M | 26-35 | High | Works at beauty salon | 10 |
| 14 | John | M | 56-65 | High | Operations Director | 4 |
| 15 | Tom, Liam | M, F | 26-35, 26-35 | High, Low | Software tester, Banking | 2 |
| 16 | Anthony, Kalley | M, F | 26-35, 26-35 | High, High | Electrician, Cashier | 4, 5-6 |
| **IKEA Malmö** | | | | | | |
| 1 | Alma | F | 18-25 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 2 | My | F | 18-25 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 3 | Björn | M | 26-35 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 4 | Johan | M | 18-25 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 5 | Claudia | F | 26-35 | - | IKEA Employee | - |
| 6 | Jenny, Henrik | F, M | 26-35 | High, High | Manager, Teacher | 6 |
| 7 | Daniel, Natalia | M, F | 36-45, 26-35 | High, High | Programmer, Student | 5 |
| 8 | Lars, Marie | M, F | 56-65, 46-55 | Low, Medium | Retired, Nurse | 30 |
| 9 | Katerina | F | 36-45 | High | Project Manager | 25 |
| 10 | Denis, Lotta | M, F | 46-55, 36-45 | Medium, Medium | Advertising, Coach | 6 |
| 11 | Erik | M | 46-55 | Medium | Priest | 2-3 |
| 12 | Julie, Frederik | F,M | 18-25, 18-25 | High, High | Student, Developer | 2 |
| 13 | Jasmin | F | 26-35 | High | Phone Technician | 20 |
| 14 | Elin, Adrian | F, M | 26-35, 18-25 | High, High | Cashier, Teacher | 7-8 |
| 15 | Veronika | F | 26-35 | High | Self-employed | 3 |

*Semi-structured employee interviews*

The semi-structured interviews used a set of predefined questions that served as an interview guide (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This was in contrast to the unstructured in-depth interviews, outlined later in this chapter, where the researchers do not utilize a set of predetermined questions but rather intend to explore a general area of interest.

Prior to the employee interviews, each employee was shadowed to uncover customer's personal service requests first hand. During the interviews, the researchers then asked questions regarding the observed actions and the previously mentioned customer requests from an employee angle, rather than a customer perspective. Besides providing valuable insights regarding customers' personal customer service requirements, the employee interviews shed light onto the second research objective - the extent to which retailers can utilize SSTs to facilitate personal service in store. This provided essential information concerning whether and to what extent specific SSTs would support and aid employees in delivering enhanced personal service to the customer. During these interviews, researchers remained

reflexive to ensure that all areas of meaning that were important to the participants have been elaborated upon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, the reflexive innate to ethnography (Konzinets, 2002) creates a more conversational atmosphere, allowing respondents to answer more naturally (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

### *In-depth customer interviews*

The customer interviews were conducted in a unique structure. The first part of each interview employed an unstructured approach and followed the *Critical Incident Technique* (CIT) while a set of predefined questions served as an interview guide during the second part of the interview. More precisely, each interview started off by asking participants to tell a story about their general shopping experience at IKEA, their general reason for coming to the store, and the overall service they received during their shopping experience.

The approach of asking participants to tell a story about their specific shopping experience is a method that is commonly applied in service research (Bitner, Booms & Mohr, 1994; Hoffman, Kelly & Chung, 2003; Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006) and that has been proven to be fruitful. Referring to Sounders (2009), this part of the interviews has been typical for unstructured and in-depth interviews as participants talked freely about their behavior, actions intentions and beliefs in regard to their shopping experience and more importantly in relation to their personal service requests. During this part of the interviews, a few non-directive questions were "designed as triggers that stimulate the interviewee[s] into talking about a particular broad area" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.117). More importantly, asking interviewees to tell a story about their shopping experience, goes hand in hand with the CIT, which has been implemented to trigger the information flow (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).

CIT was first proposed by Flanagan (1954) to investigate incidents that respondents described when telling a story about a shopping situation in which either salesperson assistance or self-service was used to make a purchase. For Flanagan (1954), the CIT resembles a set of procedures for gathering observations of human behavior in a way to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing psychological principles. 'Incidents' refer to observations of human activity which are complete in itself and allow predictions to be made about the person performing this act (Flanagan, 1954). The distinction 'critical' thereby accounts for those incidents that occur in situations where the intent of the action seems clear to the observer, and where the consequences are fairly definite, leaving little doubt regarding its effect (Flanagan, 1954).

In fact, according to Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990), the critical incident technique is particularly useful when seeking an in-depth understanding and describing or explaining a phenomenon. Additionally, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) state that the technique is used by qualitative studies to great effect, especially when used in cooperation with in-depth interviews, as respondents can be asked to track back to specific instances to explain their actions and motives in regard to these actions. However, CIT faces criticism in regard to using 'recall' and the tendency of participants to use hindsight in rationalizing the past (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Considering the fact that in this study researchers interviewed customers during their shopping in the store right after they experienced the service incidents, reduces the relevance of criticism significantly. In fact, interviewees did not have to track back to their actions and motives and thus were unlikely to use hindsight. In cases where interviewees talked about past experiences the time that past since the

incident they described from the past was carefully considered and all incidents that occurred over six month ago were excluded.

The second part of the interviews followed a semi-structured approach, once again utilizing an interview guide. This enabled the researchers to gather a more in-depth understanding of customers' willingness to utilize SSTs to facilitate personal service and their opinions concerning such a service (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In this phase the researchers remained reflexive again to establish a conversational atmosphere and give interviewees the chance to talk about all areas of meaning that were important to them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Finally, participants were approached in a strategic location in the beginning of the warehouse before they continued towards the checkout area. This location was chosen as it ensured that interviewees had passed through all departments in the store, and thus are familiar with the entire shopping experience. This was important to guarantee that certain types of service requests which are more likely to occur in certain departments, have not been excluded. With this being said, the restaurant area and the checkout area were left out by design, as they have been determined not to be relevant to the research.

*Photo elicitation via tablets*

Towards the end of each interview, photo elicitation, using an adopted image of the IKEA application (app) that contained a "click for personal service" button, was shown to participants on a tablet (see appendix A). It was used to illustrate how SST in form of a mobile technology could be utilized to request personal service as authentically as possible. Thus the "click for personal service" scenario was used during the interviews to exemplify how SST could possibly be utilized to facilitate personal service as this concept is complex and can easily be misunderstood. In order to ensure that the responses concerning the 'click for personal service' were not dependent on the type of mobile device, interviewees were given an option to either click for personal service on their own devices (smartphone or tablet) or to click on a fixed tablet in the store. Not only did this demonstrate how SST could be utilized by customers to request personal service, but it enabled the researchers to obtain a broader understanding of customer's and employee's opinions, feelings, and expectations. It also permitted them to further explore the extent to which they both would use this technology and analyze whether it enhances joint value.

Rose (2012) states that the use of elicitation, especially when including pictures, is a valuable method to gain insights, specifically when implemented during interviews. Harper further explains "images evoke deeper elements of the human consciousness than words do" (2002, P.1). According to Harper (2002), this may be the reason why the photo elicitation interview is not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information

## 2.5    Comparing the two markets

Due to the fact that the data collection for this research has been carried out in two different markets, the IKEA store in Cardiff, UK and the IKEA store in Malmö, Sweden, differences which might potentially influence the findings of the study are outlined below. First, a distinct difference between the two markets is that the UK market in general seems to be more advanced than Swedish market, which is more traditional. This is obvious as many of the concepts IKEA is testing are being implemented in the UK. Currently, IKEA is testing two different concepts in its store in Cardiff to see whether or not they add value to the customer and if they should be implement at other stores as well.

The first concept IKEA is testing in the Cardiff store is the mobile co-worker app. This app runs on tablets which employees can carry with them in the store and use to access information while helping customers. Besides functions like reminder, size converter and other none apple specific apps that add valuable information to the employees, the main benefit of the app in combination with the tablet is its convenience for both, employees and customers. Employees who carry a tablet with them can access information independent of their location anywhere in the store and therefore do not have to ask their customers to come back with them to their stationary computer to find the needed information but instead can access the information at the point of the request.

Although the mobile co-worker app is not exactly a self-service technology, it is the most feasible implemented tool that can be used as an example to understand how self-service technology can be utilized to facilitate personal service. Moreover, the research showed that during personal service encounters employees sometimes hand over the tablet to the customer, or customers guide the interaction by asking the employees to do something on the tablet to show them the product in a different color for example. Hence, although the mobile co-worker app is not a SST by definition, it does provide similar characteristics. Considering this, the study utilized the app as a starting point for the research as it is provides SST characteristics which are assumed to facilitate personal service. In light of the growing mobile device usage, discussed in chapter 1.1, the fact that employees use mobile devices to facilitate the personal service encounters further increases the relevancy of this example.

The second concept that is currently being tested in the IKEA store in Cardiff is the 'room for living area'. This concept distinguishes itself from the traditional living room department, as can be seen in the Malmö store for example, through the significantly increased amount of build in showrooms in the department and the fact that these showrooms have a ceiling. While this seems like a minor detail, the observations showed that it makes the room sets more realistic and cozy as customers were laying down on couches and sat in armchairs to take a break from their shopping. This is something that has not been observed in the store in Malmö. Moreover, the room for living department includes several projectors which are used to demonstration the product range and the functionality of specific products to the customer by projecting it on different walls between the showrooms (See appendix B). Despite that, the most relevant difference for the purpose of the research is clearly the increase of showrooms in the room for living department as it influences the accessibility of personal service in a major way.

*"Employees **can't see around the corner** so they are unable to find customers who look for help."*
*(Ann (45-55), Customer IKEA Cardiff)*

Not only do the walls and corners make it difficult for employees to oversee the entire department to find customers who are looking for assistance, but it also makes it significantly harder for customers to find salespersons. In fact, during the data collection in Cardiff, the ICSS for autumn 2015 revealed that the biggest source of dissatisfaction for customers who visited the store has been the accessibility of IKEA employees. While it is not the most frequently stated source of dissatisfaction, the research identified that staff accessibility is also major concern at the IKEA store in Malmö.

Based on this knowledge, the 'click for personal service' idea has been developed as an example of how SST could be utilized to facilitate personal service. More precisely, this idea was used in both markets to exemplify the SST concept during the customer and employee interviews. This has been necessary due to the fact that the concept of how SST could be utilized to facilitate personal service can be abstract and confusing if not clarified based on an example. Consequently, customers as well as employees were asked for their opinion regarding a 'click for personal service' button, which would

be included in the IKEA app and allow customers to request personal service. As explained in the methodology (Chapter 2.4.4.), picture elicitation via a tablet was deployed to guarantee that customers fully grasped the concept and to illustrate it as authentically a possible.

In comparison to the Cardiff store, the IKEA store in Malmö is quite traditional. Although the store does offer several self-service technologies which enable the customer to find products themselves or design their living space themselves e.g. Kitchen or Wardrobe, the research showed that employees do not use mobile technology to facilitate personal service. During the participant observations in Malmo, several incidence were witnessed where employees were helping customers and then had to ask them to follow them back to an information kiosk or stationary pc so they could provide them with the required information. Furthermore, the Malmö store provides a traditional living room department instead of a room for living. In this department products are presented in an open area instead of in showrooms which generally makes the entire department easier to oversee and causes customers to find salesperson more efficiently.

Another substantial difference between the two markets is the understanding customers have of the IKEA concept. Customers in the Cardiff store often do not understand the IKEA concept and the fact that to a large extent it is based on self-service.

*“A lot of customers come in the store, get on the lift (to enter the store) and go right back because **they don't understand the IKEA system**.” (Terry (56-65), Employee IKEA Cardiff)*

Moreover, the observations as well as the employee shadowing showed that customers in Cardiff demand more personal service. This maybe do to the fact that the UK market is very service-oriented in general.

*“**Customers are used to personal service offerings from many other stores in the UK** so when they come to IKEA they kind of expect the same.” (James (26-35), Employee, IKEA Cardiff)*

Opposed to that, customers in Sweden are very familiar with the IKEA concept as they grow up with familiarizing with the company and thus know exactly what they can and cannot expect from it.

*“**We are brought up in Sweden and we are brought up with IKEA**, if you go to other countries you probably get another view on what IKEA is or should be.”(Denis (46-55), Customer IKEA Malmö)*

Additionally, the interviews outlined that unlike in Cardiff, customers in Malmö, and in Sweden in general often derive value from taking action themselves and only rely on employees if needed.

*“This concept is perfect for me (talking about the self-service concept). I can do it in my own time and can approach someone in case I need help. This is the Scandinavian way of doing it. **We Scandinavians usually don't like personal interactions**.” (Julie (18-25), Customer IKEA Malmö)*

Furthermore, there is a considerable difference in the size of both stores, as well as their opening dates. IKEA Cardiff on the one hand has store size of 280.000 square foot which is equal to just over 26.000 square meter and the store exists since November 2003. On the other hand, the IKEA store in Malmö opened in 1977 and was completely refurbished in 2009 while being almost twice as big as the Cardiff store with a total store size of 44.000 square meter. In view of the fact that IKEA exists 26 years longer in Malmö than in Cardiff, and bearing in mind that Swedes grow up with the IKEA concept, it

can be argued that this contributes to the fact that customers in Malmö are more familiar with the IKEA concept than customers in Cardiff.

Finally, the two markets do not only increase the reliability, validity and overall quality of the research, by adding yet another source of information (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 1994), but the differences between the markets enable a comparison of the findings. Naturally, this enhances the overall research quality as it allows the researchers to identify whether findings or insights are market specific or if they are relatively independent of the market and its specific characteristics.

## 2.6 Data analysis

This part outlines how the practical analysis was proceeded, and how themes and patterns emerged from the collected data. Considering the "artistic", "intuitive" and "creative" character of this process (Patton, 1980), and thus the difficulty to describe it, qualitative research usually devotes remarkably little energy to describing these procedures. Before the data analysis process could be initiated, all interviews and observations were transcribed. Thereafter, the data was analyzed according to the seven analytical operations introduced by Susan Spiggle (1994). "These operations include categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration, and refutation" (Spiggle, 1994, p.493). These operations have helped the researchers to organize the data, extract meanings, arrive at conclusions, and generate or confirm conceptual schemes and theories, which describe the data (Spiggle, 1994).

After the empirical data was described, researchers began with the coding process which Spiggle (1994) refers to as *categorizing,* or the process in which researches classify and label units of data. For the coding process, the empirical data was split into two sets with one researcher coding set one and the other coding the second set before exchanging them. During this categorization and in accordance with Spiggle's (1994) understanding of the process, the transcribed data was identified and labeled. This labeling process was undertaken utilizing MAXQDA, a professional software that helps to organize and categorize qualitative research data. More precisely, based on either the phenomenon to which the data belongs, according to what the data is an example of, or founded on the data it represents (Spiggle, 1994), codes were established. These were than applied to label the data which was previously uploaded to MAXQDA. The benefit of this is that MAXQDA drastically simplified the identification of themes and categories, as the program illustrates each data bit that has been previously tagged with a code when clicking on the respective code. In this way, all information that has been tagged with the same code emerges in a new window, making it easy to see all relevant information regardless of how many different sources it is spread upon. Additionally, the program allows to tag the same information with several codes, which then enables researchers to recognize the relationship different codes and categories have, as referred to later in this chapter.

While some of the labels used to categorize the data emerged from the information in the data itself, others were influenced by the theory comprised in the preliminary framework (chapter 3.2.). For example, the study by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) guided the labeling of quotes relating to customer's different types of personal service requests and lead to the identification of the following service request categories (codes); *location*, *product information* and *procedures*. However, the researchers were careful not to let the existing theory impose any boundaries that would restrict this study from identifying new categories and themes. In light of this, further service request categories (codings) that emerged included 'direction', 'customization', 'opinion', 'advisory', and 'extra services'. After both data sets were coded individually by both researchers using MAXQDA, all codes

were copied into one MAXQDA file where numerous codes were merged, as both researchers labeled the same data in a an almost identical fashion.

In the next step, differences and similarities between the codes and the quotes within a specific code were discussed among the researchers. While *comparison* is encouraged throughout the analysis process and occurs somewhat implicitly and unsystematically during the data exploration (Spiggle, 1994), the *comparison* carried out at this point has been quiet systematic and methodologic as the coding has been done by two researchers individually. The fact that all empirical data was viewed independently through the eyes of two researchers and common labels were merged into rich categorized based on their congruence, further validates the data analysis and enhances the reliability of the overall analysis (Yin, 2014).

Subsequently, existing codes were re-evaluated while categories were reorganized iteratively and grouped in more general conceptual categories, allowing for the final categories to be determined. Spiggle (1994) describes this process as *abstraction. Abstraction* includes incorporating more concrete categories into fewer more general ones while recognizing specific data units as empirical indicator of a more general construct (Spiggle, 1994). Following this logic, themes and patterns started to emerge and finally more than 60 categories were established in a conceptually meaningful way, each containing and organizing numerous quotes from respondents. Based on the preliminary framework, researchers then assigned these categories to five general 'category sets', namely: 'retailer', 'customer', 'service requests', 'co-creation' and 'reactions to personal service facilitation via SST'. According to Spiggle (1994), a useful method to enhance the conceptual meaning of constructs and to identify the interrelations between different categories is *dimensionalization,* which involves exploring properties and attributes along conceptual dimensions. In order to ensure that all possible relationships between the different categories have been taken into consideration and to stimulate the development of concepts, MAXQDA was utilized once again. This enabled the researchers to specify and explore the relations each code has with all other codes as has been previously outlined and as can be seen in the example in appendix C. After carefully evaluating each interrelation, all relevant relations between the categories (codes) were noted down in this study. Constantly reviewing these relationships, the researchers turned to the theory in order to embed themes, patterns, and categories. This *integration* enabled the researchers to advance the analysis beyond the mere identification of themes (Spiggle, 1994), and empowered them to discuss to what extent the empirical findings verify, discredit or build upon existing literature.

Finally, the different themes which are presented in the findings & analysis (chapter 4) and which are structured according to the preliminary framework are illustrated based on interviewee's quotes. These quotes are utilized to summarize the themes in the most accurate way, not vice versa. Some quotes are intentionally presented twice to show the different interpretations which may arise from them and their importance to more than one theme.

## 2.7    Reflection on ethical and political dimensions

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) it is crucial to reflect on ethical and political factors that influence the research. Hence, ten ethical dimension and four political dimensions, as established by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) are reflected upon.

In research, ethics focuses severely on securing participant's interest and guaranteeing precision while reflection on potential bias in the research outcome (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In

light of this, Bryman & Bell (2007), outlined in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012), established ten ethical principles which the researchers considered and honored, namely, no harm to participants, respecting the dignity of participants, ensuring fully informed consent of participants, protecting the privacy of research subjects, ensuring data confidentiality, protecting the anonymity of individuals or organizations, avoiding deception about nature or aims of research, declaration of funding sources and conflicts of interest, honesty and transparency about research and finally, avoidance of false or misleading reporting of research findings. Besides the fact that the organization is not anonymous due to the official nature of the cooperation, the full awareness of these ethical principles and their adherence and protection is guaranteed.

In terms of *political access* (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012), it is important to state that this research was conducted in cooperation with IKEA and gaining access to employees and customers as well as conducting research in the organization's premises has been approved before the start of the research. Thus to coordinate the research, receive an overview of the stores and to obtain the necessary 'visitor badges', the researchers were in contact with the store managers from Cardiff and Malmö.

Another ethical dimension that has to be considered are the participant observations which have been conducted at IKEA without customers' knowing that they have been observed. In terms of ethical arguments outlined by Bryman & Bell (2011), the observer-as-participant approach has taken a situational stance. As mentioned before, the researchers had no choice but to disguise the observations to prevent the natural behavior patterns of IKEA's customers from being disturbed. Due to the fact that the researchers have not violated anyone's privacy and stuck to the collection of anonymous data only, the purpose of the study justifies these actions. In contrast to customers who did not know that they were being observed during the participant observations, employees were asked for their permission before they were shadowed. Nevertheless, customers who received salespersons assistance from one of shadowed employees were again unaware that they were observed. Once again, the researchers had no choice but to disguise the observations to guarantee that the natural behavior patterns were not disturbed. The researchers were cautious to protected employee's and customer's privacy and solely collected anonymous data. Hence, the researchers are confident that the purpose of the study justifies their actions once more.

Regarding the in-depth customer and semi-structured employee interviews, the participant's data and rights have been obeyed as the interviews have been treated confidential and interviewees remained anonymous, as only their first name has been stated. Moreover, interviewees, always had the right to withdraw from the interviews in general or to skip a question whenever they did not feel comfortable answering it. Additionally, the purpose of the research has been explained to participants before asking them for their consent and any form of interview documentation depended on their approval. To compensate participants for their effort meal vouchers were offered to them in Cardiff, while those responsible at IKEA Malmö decided that participant's desire to enhance the shopping experience in store should provide enough motivation. Even though, the interviews took place in the IKEA store setting, the researchers were aware of the fact that the interviews might present an unnatural and unfamiliar situation for the participants. Consequently, by maintaining the interviewee's 'comfort zone', researchers aimed to avoid unpleasant feelings. If participants reacted surprised, embarrassed or were uncomfortable, these situations were handled respectfully and the interview setting was adjusted accordingly. This Sensitivity and the compliance to the aforementioned ethical principles allowed for an increase in trust between researchers and interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Reflecting on political dimensions, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) identified four political dimensions that impact the research focus and the process of the study namely, the experience of the researcher, subject of study, corporate stakeholders as well as academic stakeholders. In view of the experience of the researcher, the researchers have been well aware of the fact that personal backgrounds affect what has been seen and acted as a sensitizer as well as a filter (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). However, two researchers worked on this study, each with a different set of experiences, which consequently led to a more diverse interpretation of the study and its findings. Moreover, the researchers were careful not to let their own experience affect the research.

Concerning the subject of the research, the researchers have been aware of the fact that they were likely influenced by fads and fashions which have been popular within the research field (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In this case, popular topics that may have influenced the researchers have been trends such as self-service technologies, digitalization, increase of mobile device usage and maintaining of personal service. These are macro trends which can be seen in almost every industry and are not specific to the purpose of this research and therefore are inevitable.

Bearing the study's cooperation with IKEA in mind, which acts as a corporate stakeholder, the researchers are aware that they depend on the organization to provide reliable and truthful insights and data. Considering the fact that the researchers signed a confidentiality agreement prohibiting them from publishing sensitive data, the researchers were careful to follow the direction in which the findings guided them and ensured that the organization did not intervene or pressure this study. Additionally, the project has been relevant and beneficial to IKEA, the invested resources were minimal, the project is not politically sensitive and the individuals, as well as their institution, have a good reputation, which is important when working with an organization (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Finally, the academic stakeholder in this case has been the Lund University and the Thesis Supervisor in specific, who despite broad feedback has not influenced the research in a certain direction.

## 2.8     Reflection on potential weaknesses

In the following, potential weaknesses of the research are scrutinized based on the overall trustworthiness of the study which examines qualitative researches in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To start, external validity cannot fully be guaranteed, as this would include validating and replacing the insights in a similar case to ensure that the findings can be generalized (Yin, 1994). Notwithstanding, the research has been carried out according to Yin (1994) who advises to utilize multiple data sources to increase the validity and reliability in case study research. The researchers followed this recommendation and ensured *data triangulation* (Bryman & Bell, 2011) to a certain extent by utilizing *secondary data*, *participant observations, shadowing, semi-structured employee interviews* and *in-depth customer interviews* to gather the knowledge needed to fill the information gaps. Thus, the validity, reliability and overall credibility of this research was enhanced (Yin, 1994). In combination with the literature discussed in the literature review, the multiple method approach gave researchers an in-depth and broad understanding of the topic and established a credible relation between research and theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Despite the fact that new interviews were conducted until *data saturation* was reached and additional data collected provided few, if any new insights (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009), the credibility of the research might have been weakened by the relatively small sample size and the drawbacks of the convenience sampling.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) convenience samples are prone to bias and influences that are beyond the researcher's control, as the participants are simply selected in the sample based on the ease of obtaining them.

Moreover, the majority of the in-depth customer interviews were conducted with multiple participants which could have lead them to influence each other or caused them to hold back certain information. However the researchers cautiously decided not to exclude any interviewees, as this would have disrupted the natural setting of the interviews due to the fact that the majority of customers who shop at IKEA do not come alone. Additionally, interviewing multiple participants at IKEA is unique in the sense that the majority of customers coming to the store accompanied still share the same personal service incidents. On top of that, Bryman & Bell (2011) view the presence of multiple interviewers as an advantage, stating that it can help interviewees to conceive the setting as more casual and less formal, thus allowing them to react in a sincerer and open way. Therefore, it can be argued that the presence of more than one interviewee has the same effect as participants are also able to add to what someone else has said before.

On a different subject, transferability scrutinizes the extent to which the research can be generalized (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As mentioned before, transferability presents a weakness as generalizations made based on a single case study, in two IKEA markets, often proof to be flawed (Yin, 1994) and therefore have been avoided if possible. However, due to the fact that this study only focuses on self-service retailers, IKEA presented a valid example which allows the research findings to give interesting insights for further researchers as well as practitioners.

In terms of dependability, this study is assessed to be quite dependable, as it has not only been 'audited' on a regular basis by the University Supervisor, but also by the corporate stakeholder, IKEA. Considering this and the fact that a confidentiality agreement was signed before the research to guarantee IKEA access to all data that was gathered during the research process ensures a high dependability according to Bryman & Bell's (2011) understanding of the term. Furthermore, confirmability aims to ensure the objectivity of the researcher towards the subject and while "complete objectivity is impossible in business research", it is concerned with guaranteeing the researchers good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.398). As previously outlined, the researchers have been aware of this issue and did everything to ensure and maintain objectivity.

Another weakness that may arise from the data collection process is the critical incident technique as interviewees were asked to recall the incidents in which they requested personal service rather than directly observing them. However as the in-depth interviews in which the CIT has been used took place in the store and customers were being asked about the experience they had during the ongoing store visit therefore their memory should have been reliable enough to ensure valid data. Furthermore, Lipscomb (2012) argues that there might be a natural weakness which goes along with applying an abductive approach. He states that the mixture of deductive experiment and inductive testing might be regarded as inappropriate by some scientists (Lipscomb, 2012). While this weakness is unavoidable to a certain extent, due to the nature of which the abductive approach is comprised, the researchers tried to refrain from the testing used in inductive approaches as much as possible and aimed to utilize relevant existing theory, as a starting point to develop own models and theories. Finally, besides these potential weaknesses, the researchers remain positive that the study at hand provides insights and findings, which are relevant, both in terms of theoretical as well as practical implications.

# 3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework starts with a literature review, which provides an overview and background knowledge of relevant concepts and theoretical key terms. From the knowledge provided in the literature review, the preliminary framework is build and its elements are elaborated upon. This research is grounded in the existing research fields of personal customer service and self-service technologies (SST). It bridges those two fields as it combines the importance of personal customer service and self-service technologies in order to identify which service requests can be facilitated through self-service-technologies (SST) and to what extent.

## 3.1 Literature review

Limited academic literature exists that bridges the two research areas, this study intends to combine. The literature review therefore presents both research fields, being personal customer service and self-service. It aims at providing the reader with background information relevant for this study, showing important concepts and presenting recent studies in the given fields. The literature review starts with a categorization of the retailer relevant for this study. In a next step the research field of customer service is presented and broken down into service quality and customer experience, followed by value creation and value co-creation. The last part of the literature review sheds light onto the comparatively small (as yet young) field of self-service-technology. All of the latter will be of conceptual relevance as they contribute attributes for measurement, which guide the data collection for this research.

Criteria were established for evaluating whether a concept or model and its knowledge are relevant for this study. The criteria are presented below. First of all, models were identified that provide the reader with a holistic understanding of the topic and therefore enable for a general and broad understanding of the relevant areas (Bitner, 1992; Verhoef et al., 2009; Vasconcelos, Barichello, Lezana, Forcellini, Ferreira and Cauchick Miguel, 2015). The second criteria is the relevance of the industry the study is positioned in, which could either be that the concept can be applied throughout industries, or has a focus on the retail industry itself. This is of relevance, as the research of the study at hand is conducted at a self-service retailer. Thirdly, the knowledge needs to be either grounded in literature and too a broad extent known throughout researchers, or to be a new study contributing new knowledge to the research area.

### 3.1.1 Types of retailers

As this research aims at identifying the requests customers pose in regard to personal service at self-service retailers, it is necessary to understand the characteristics a self-service retailer has. This is especially of relevance as the data collection takes place at a self-service retailer in order to meet the object of this study. The classification contributes to this study as it provides the knowledge, that a self-service retailer usually only provides small amounts of services to their customers. This insight itself can be seen as a paradox for the study at hand, as it looks at personal service requests within a self-service environment.

Retail stores can be categorized according to various characteristics such as types of products sold, relative price, control of outlets and store cluster type, including whether or not they have an online presence or employ a combination, and finally amount of service (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown and Armstrong, 2013). According to this classification, three major types namely, *self-service, limited-service* and *full-service retailers* exist. Kotler et al. (2013, p.426) defines a self-service retailer as

"retailer that provides few or no services to shoppers; shoppers perform their own locate-compare-select process". Moreover, Armstrong, Kotler, Harker, and Brennan (2009) elaborate that nowadays self-service builds the foundation for all discount operations and is usually employed by institutions selling convenience or fast moving shopping goods, such as supermarkets for example.

### 3.1.2 Customer service

Goworek (2015) in his definition of service states that customer service is an "almost abstract concept", saying that it is hard to achieve and maintain a valuable customer service. Therefore customer service and building on that, customer experience can be used as a differentiator and competitive advantage (Goworek, 2015). Retailers throughout the past decade put more and more focus on implementing digital tools, the retail landscape develops from a Multichannel to an omnichannel environment and it gets more and more important to differentiate themselves from competitors (Goworek, 2015). Often, elements of the Retail Marketing mix such as products, price or place are easy to copy and seldom function as differentiators (Goworek, 2015). At this point the importance of personal customer service comes into account, as members of staff providing service to customers is hard to copy by any competitor (Goworek, 2015).

The personal service encounter is to be said as being the best opportunity to provide the customer with a customized service delivery for each individual customer (Surprenant and Solomon, 1987). This customization opportunity is seen as a great chance for establishing a high service quality, which can then lead up to a competitive advantage for the retailer (Lewis & Entwistle, 1990). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) identified intangibility, heterogeneity and simultaneous production and consumption as being the key attributes of services. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1996) already argue for a radical development from traditional interpersonal service encounters to self-service technologies. The importance of self-service technologies is evident today and has become a whole research area, which will be reviewed separately below.

The importance of personal customer service is evident in previous research and often referred to as still being an important part of the retail experience despite technological development and digitalization (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Sousa, 2006; Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Resnick, Foster & Woodall, 2014; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015; Lee, 2015; Pugh & Subramony, 2016;). According to Sousa (2006) there are two different means of service: physical channels and virtual channels. In contrast to technology-based self-service channels, personal service channels always involve the presence of a service staff and include a direct interaction and communication between customer and service employee (Lee, 2015). Retailers should not anticipate that virtual channels could replace the physical channels (Lee, 2015). Rather, virtual channels should be combined with physical channels in order to enhance the shopping experience (Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012). Personal customer service has a larger impact on retail patronage than SST and knowledgeable and helpful employees are essential to maintain customers and keep their loyalty (Lee, 2015).

Murray (1991) provides relevant knowledge for this research as his study has also been done in a self-service environment and he looked at defining categories in which customer access personal customer service. Murray (1991) categorizes the information sources customers use to satisfy their information needs and to reduce their perceived risk. The greater the perceived risk customers see in a purchase the greater the engagement in an extended information search (Murray, 1991). Furthermore with an increased perceived risk the tendency to just buy a product in order to try it, decreases strongly. Rather

customers then try to access information about the purchase from various sources. Furthermore, if the perceived risk cannot be controlled or decreased sufficiently by informal channels the importance of personal service increases as it has greater opportunities for clarification and feedback (Murray, 1991).

Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) in their study asked customers about their interaction with service staff and found that even though retailers tend to heavily invest in familiarizing customers with the retail setting, 50% of all customers being asked rely on personal contact with a member of staff. Furthermore Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) in their study identify categories of information requests, which are classified in product-related, directions, procedures, physical assistance and others (see table 2). As Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) conducted their study in a self-service setting and the retailer used goes coherent with the one used in this study, their findings are relevant in regard to the categorizations of service requests. The model provides knowledge for the customer request part in the preliminary framework, which will be presented later on.

*Table 2: Classification of service requests according to Baron, Harris and Davis (1996)*

| Category | Examples of request |
| --- | --- |
| **Product-related** | |
| Product information | Colors of swivel chairs; sizes and fabric selections for settees; what comes with bathroom cabinet; widths of kitchen units; sizes of Christmas trees; colors of bathroom sets; sell items singly or in packs; strength of beds |
| Product price | Prices of clocks, light bulbs, crockery, baubles, office furniture, picture frames, jugs, rugs, curtains, etc. |
| Product usage | Kitchen layout advice; details on bathroom fitments; how to fit furniture together; how to operate a desk chair; advice on floor coverings; what else to buy with flooring; how to fold a table; how to unclip picture frames |
| Product availability | Items in stock? E.g. bed-side table, magazine racks, bookcase, flooring for bathroom, floor tiles, lamps, mini-greenhouse, etc. |
| **Directions** | To product displays, e.g. tables and chairs, cushions, light-shades, shoe racks, Christmas tree decorations, shelving, etc. To pick-up points, restaurant, yellow bags to carry goods |
| **Procedures** | How to collect items; how to order and purchase; about collecting by car; furniture ordering procedures; how to order a bed; payment systems, cash or cheque?; enquiry about delivery date; where to pay; delivery times for suites |
| **Physical assistance** | Help to lift stack of plates; help to carry chest of drawers – solid wood; cut material; help to lift coffee table |
| **Others** | |
| Returns/complaints | Return stool to customer services; exchanging goods; changing furniture – wrong colors; returning faulty goods |
| Moans/others | Moans/others Would not let me purchase display item; cut finger – gave me a plaster |

As seen from the literature above, customer service can, if implemented successfully develop into a competitive advantage for retailers. Self-service retailers as learned before, only offer customer services to a very small extent. This study looks at personal customer service requests at self-service retailers and how to facilitate them. If self-service retailer can better leverage their service offerings, it could in the end create value for both, customers and retailers.

*Service quality*

There have been various attempts to create models and dimensions in order to measure service quality (Grönroos, 1984; Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml, 1988; Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Zhu, Nakata, Sivakumar and Grewal 2007). However the most known and still most referenced models in regard to service quality and its measurement is the SERVQUAL model by Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988), which will however not been reviewed here, as it will not be used for the preliminary framework of this research. It is mainly concerned with measuring service quality from an organizational perspective. As this study will apply a customer-oriented approach, it will use elements from Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) model of service quality, which is more relevant for this research. Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) argue that the SERVQUAL model by Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988) has been used mainly for pure service providers and not for retail environments. He suggests a measurement said to be especially usefully in a retail environment, which is the reason why it is relevant for this study, which focuses on self-service retailers.

Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) suggest that customers think of retail service quality on three levels – a dimension level, an overall level and a sub dimensional level. Five dimensions are relevant for service quality to be measured and Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) argue that those dimensions are distinct but strongly correlated. The study at hand will make use of four of the dimensions of service quality Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) suggest. As this research will be conducted at a self-service retailer the *physical aspects* of the store as well as the *convenience of service* they request to access are of relevance and used as influencers of customers and employees in the preliminary framework. The dimensions are of relevance as they include the convenience of the service accessed. As this research does not only look at the different kinds of requests but also to what extent they can be facilitated through SST usage, convenience of the service plays a role in the decision about personal customer service or SST (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006). The dimension of *personal interactions* will be used for this research as it incorporates the importance of the physical interaction a customer decides to access and the influence a member of staff can have on the service request. Additionally the dimensions of *reliability* and *problem solving* will be used. The knowledge those influencers can have upon service quality will be used in order to be able to better pose interview questions as well as to increase the ability to understand their answers.
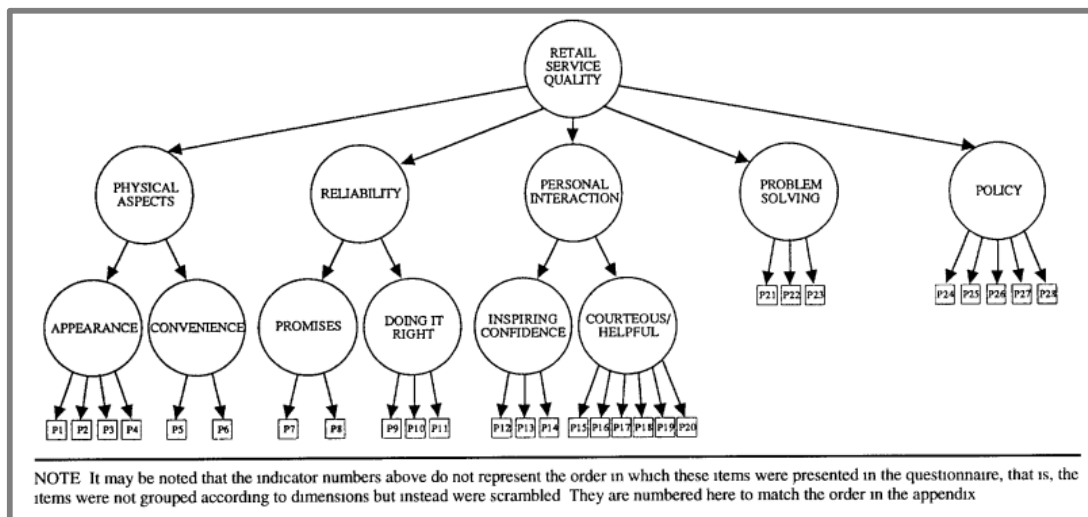
NOTE It may be noted that the indicator numbers above do not represent the order in which these items were presented in the questionnaire, that is, the items were not grouped according to dimensions but instead were scrambled They are numbered here to match the order in the appendix

*Figure 4: Proposed hierachical structure for retail service quality (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996)*

More recent studies show how relevant the two old models still are today, as they are referred to throughout the literature in the field of service quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Burton, Easingwood and Murphy 2001; Svensson, 2006; Jayawardhena & Farrell, 2011; Bawa, Gupta and Sharma, 2013; Simmers & Keith, 2016). Brady and Cronin (2001) suggest a model, which incorporates not only the measurement of service quality, but also the components of service value, sacrifice and satisfaction and the influence they have upon behavioral intentions. Their model combines the importance of service value in a service quality context, which opened up for many researchers to focus on service value and especially value creation in the following years. As the topic of value creation and value co-creation is of importance for this study, a literature review and an overview over current research in the field of value creation and co-creation will be given later on in this chapter.

### Customer experience

The area of customer experience is a research field that got much attention during the past decade and especially research in the retail industry has focused a lot on the topic. As a full review of customer experience literature is outside the scope of this paper a brief overview of the elements of a customer experience will be given. A full review of the customer experience literature in retail however can be accessed from Verhoef et al. (2009). The literature review of this study focuses on research relevant to the service experience, as this is the area of interest for this study.

Many researchers have looked at service experience and what it consists of (Carmon & Ariely, 2000; Mathwick, Malhotra and Rigdon, 2001; O'Cass & Grace, 2004). Vasconcelos et al., 2015 in their literature review of service experience give a collective definition of service experience as being "a cognitive, affective, and behavioral process, experienced during service delivery, which builds, solidifies or modifies the image of the organization and influences clients' current or future purchasing decisions; mediated by people, infrastructure and technology; biased by client values and needs, the socio-cultural and environmental context, previous experiences and the nature and duration of the service operations."

Vasconcelos et al. (2015) further define three dimensions of service experience: *predispositions* (inputs), *interactions* (transformations), and *reactions* (outputs) (see appendix D). Only the second

dimension of service experience however can be influenced by the organization as it is dependent upon factors such as *company staff*, *infrastructure*, *technology*, *duration of the event* and *nature of the operation*. The second dimension is relevant for this study, as it covers the possible interactions of customers with, for example, staff or technology.

Sandström, Edvardsson, Kristensson and Magnusson (2008) argue that experienced sales staff can best react to customers' needs and desires. Retailers without service-oriented staff will struggle to offer value propositions, which lead to positive service experiences (Sandström et al., 2008). This study agrees with the argumentation by Sandström et al. (2008) however for retailers to have knowledgeable and service-oriented staff is a big investment and not easy to implement in todays' highly competitive market. This study will therefore look at identifying those requests where personal customer service offers the maximum value to the customer, as well as those that can be sufficiently fulfilled by SST.

The functional part of the service experience mainly concerns the physical setting the service experience takes place in and has been studied by various researchers (Harrell, Hutt, & Anderson 1980; Bitner 1990; Hui & Bateson, 1991). According to Bitner (1992) the physical setting can be influenced by various different factors, such as lighting, color, signage, textures, quality of materials, style of furnishings, layout, wall decor, temperature, and so on. Bitner (1992) established a framework for understanding the environment-user relationship within service organizations. The framework Bitner (1992) suggests is however not only a customer-oriented approach, but also gives account to the fact that the physical setting equally influences the employees. Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1988) in their study also state the importance of the physical setting for both, customers and employees which should ideally account for both interests, those of customers and employees equally, as both have influences upon the service experience (Bitner, 1992). This research is aware of the importance of the physical environment as being crucial for the positive outcome of the service experience. Even though, focus will be given to the personal service encounter the physical setting is of relevance as it influences employees on the one hand and customers on the other, for example through the functionality of self-service-technologies which this research looks at.

Fisk and Grove (1997) researched the area of what influences the service experience. They show the importance of customer-to-customer relationships and how the presence of others influences the service experience either positively or negatively. According to them there are two different groups of incidents, which are caused by other customers, protocol incidents, and sociability incidents. Both can have a positive as well as a negative influence upon the service experience. As this study will be conducted with a large retailer the density of customer in-store are expected to be high and customer-to-customer interactions are unavoidable. Therefore insights from Fisk and Grove (1997) regarding the different incidents between customers will be useful for classification of information given in the customer interviews. Regarding the preliminary framework presented later on, this concept will provide knowledge for the influences of personal interactions.

### 3.1.3    Value creation & Value co-creation

As service quality, the area of value creation is much discussed and got much attention during the last twenty years. Value is created from the interaction between retailer and customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), which is the reason why for this study value creation is of relevance. As the aim is to facilitate personal service encounter through SST, the potential outcome of this could ideally be value creation for customer and retailer at the same time.

The terms of value and value creation have been of interest historically, however most attention was given from researchers over the last two decades during which the topic of value creation and more recently value co-creation became relevant (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Traditionally organizations followed a goods-dominant logic, where customers are not involved in any process of production or service exchange. Bitner (1992) in her early study declared the importance of value creation to be crucial for the customer experience and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p.137) agree by saying "value is now centered in the experiences of customers". Today's customers are much more knowledgeable than they used to be (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Organizations are moving towards an approach for offering unique experiences to customers and where there is a constant co-creation between customers and organizations (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

According to Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) value creation is the process of receiving value from the usage of resources and according to Gummesson (1998) value creation is only possible when a good or service is consumed. According to Vargo and Lusch (2004) service provider need to collaborate with the customer and adapt to theirs needs, as the customer plays a key role in the value creation process. Without interaction, the service provider can only offer value propositions, as value is not created until customers play an active role in the value creation process and the service is used (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). With their approach Vargo and Lusch (2004) define a new perspective on value creation, as it used to be regarded as the ratio between service quality and cost.

Two general terms are important to define in the area of value creation: *Service logic (SL)* and *service dominant logic (SDL)* (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). According to Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) they are fundamentally the same, as they describe the importance of service and the interaction between service providers and customers. Both concepts are perspectives on value creation and the kinds of resources used are not of importance for implementing a service perspective. However there are differences between them. A *service-dominant logic (SDL)* approach follows the notion that customers are always co-creators of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2007). *Service logic (SL)* however posits that customers are not only always value co-creator rather always value creator (Grönroos, 2011). Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo (2014) in a recent study argue for a service lense approach of combining *SDL (service dominant logic)* with *jobs to be done (JTBD)*. They say that *SDL* gives the perfect ground for an understanding of value creation and that will be made actionable with the *JTBD* mindset. Their model, which can be seen in appendix D, shows the difference between the traditional view on value creation and the new service focused view on value creation. On one side, value is something that is created by an organization whereas the other side gives information about what is being exchanged, why it is being exchanged and how value is created/co-created (Bettencourt, Lusch & Vargo, 2014). This study will position itself according to a service dominant logic in combination with JTBD, as it has a customer-centered approach and looks at customers' requests, which can be seen as JBTD.

Building on value creation, value co-creation has emerged from trends such as customization and personalization (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Customers used to be the passive audience wanting to get value from products and services. Nowadays they play an active role in the value creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). According to Vargo and Lusch (2004) value co-creation in a service dominant environment is the process of customers and organizations both being involved in the act of value creation. Value co-creation according to Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) is a process where the customer's value creation process and the service provider's service production process merge into one process. Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo (2014) state four main premises for the service lens approach: "Service is what is always hired in order to get a job done, The customer always co-creates value to get a job done successfully, All firms and

individuals integrate resources in order to get an entire job done, Value is always specific to the context in which the job is done (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014, p.50)". For this study, the customer comes into the service encounter with a request, which can also be seen as a JTBD (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014). In the next step, the customer co-creates value with the retailer in order to satisfy his need. This knowledge will be used in the preliminary framework, as it is the area where the interaction takes place.

### 3.1.4    Self-service technologies

This section of the literature review provides an overview of the research done in the field of self-service technologies (SST) and elaborates upon concepts, which will be used for the preliminary framework. This research is of relevance, as this study looks at how to facilitate customers request for personal service with SST. Campbell, Maglio and Davis (2011), define self-service as a channel, which requires customers to become increasingly involved in the service process and encourages them to deliver the service through the mere interaction with the organization's automatic system. The successful utilization of self-services depends on creating tasks in which customers engage independently as they are co-producers of the service experience (Chase & Tansik 1983; Chase & Erikson 1988). Due to the rapidly advancing technology however, the way in which customers interact with service providers changes and the traditional definition of service encounters has been expanded to account for technology driven contact (Salomonson, Allwood, Lind and Alam, 2013). Meuter et al. (2000, p.50) define and explain technology driven contact or self-service encouraging technology in the following way, "Self-service technologies are technological interfaces that enable customers to produce a service independent of direct service employee involvement". SST enables customers to produce service for themselves and thus presents a valid alternative to traditional service representatives when it comes to delivering customer service (Lee, 2015). This definition gained recognition in subsequent research by various authors namely, Curran and Meuter, 2005; Beatson, Lee and Coote, 2007; Dean, 2008; Forbes, 2008; Shamdasani, Mukherjee and Malhotra, 2008; Makarem, Mudambi and Podoshen, 2009.

Due to the diverse understanding of SST, the term is being specified further in order to provide the reader with a clear comprehension of the different dimensions it entails. To start, Meuter et al. (2000) classifies SST in terms of *interface* and *purpose*, with *interface* including everything from telephone voice response to interactive kiosks and online services. *Purpose* on the other hand is divided into customer service, transactions and self-help (Meuter et al., 2000). Curren and Meuter (2005) as well as Walker and Johnson (2006) verified the classification along *interface* and *purpose* by choosing the same segments for their testing of adoption factors in relation to different SST types.

Furthermore, Scherer, Wünderlich and von Wangenheim (2015) focus on the impact of personal service and self-service on customer retention over time. Their study argues that technology based self-service channels may not always lead to desired results "instead, firms must consider the unique value customers can derive from both self-service and personal service channels over time" (Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015, p.179). The study at hand builds upon the research by Langer et al., (2012), which identified that instead of realizing the advantages of both channels personal and self-service, more and more service providers push their customers towards the self-service channel. In addition to that, Kumar and Telang (2012) explain through their study that the value customers can derive from self-service channels differs from personal service in a way that does not allow for a simple substitution of these channels.

Another frequent topic in the research field of SST is to find the reasons why customers select self-service technologies (SST). These studies have primarily researched the influence of different single factors, such as motivations (Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005), technology readiness (Zhu et al., 2007) or, most recently, desire for autonomy and privacy (Oh, Jeong, & Baloglu, 2013). On top of that, Dabholkar (1994), have identified several service delivery traits that evoke positive attitudes toward SST among customers, such as enjoyment, convenience, fun and ease of use. Opposed to that, Dabholkar and Bagozzi, (2002) & Zhu et al. (2007) identified personal characteristics of customers who are more likely to engage in SST usage. In fact, individual traits such as self-confidence, independence and need for control were recognized in a study by Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) to positively influence customers to use self-service rather than seeking salesperson's assistance.

Despite the fact that these factors have shown to impact customer's decisions and intentions to utilize self-service technologies, they are restricted in their ability to describe this behavior in a fully sufficient way (Collier, Moore, Horky, & Moore, 2015). As a result of this, numerous studies scrutinize the impact of situational variables in the retail environment, product choice, media choice and shopping patterns and examine their influence on customer's actions, evaluations and intentions, which have in fact been validated in several studies (Mattson & Dubinsky, 1987; Verhoef et al., 2009;). Additionally, various researchers established that from a self-service perspective, SST is being used by customers to reduce their psychological, temporal or economic cost of transaction (Sneath, Kennett, & Megehee, 2002; Pujari, 2004; Curran & Meuter, 2007). Meanwhile, Collier et al. (2015) advanced that situational factors have the potential to increase or decrease these psychological, temporal or economic cost of transaction and thus affect customer's attitude toward self-service technologies. Their study focuses on identifying how the physical, social, temporal, and task definition situational variables influence a customer's overall evaluation of a self-service (Collier et al., 2015). While doing so, Collier et al. (2015) have empirically tested customer's shopping effectiveness and attitude towards using self-service technologies, as well as their perceived time pressure. According to their findings, during the SST transaction, situational variables such as order size, convenience of the location; tolerance for waiting times and employee presence all have a strong influence in customers' SST decisions (Collier et al., 2015). The study at hand aims at categorizing service requests, which can be facilitated through SST. When doing so, the knowledge from Collier et al. (2015) will aid this process by providing knowledge in terms of customer's decision for or against SST usage.

Even though, various recent studies are concerned with identifying the situational variables, which could encourage customers to use self-service technologies rather than traditional service channels, research concerning situation variables in terms of customer's personal service needs and how to facilitate them with SST is scarce. Consequently, this study will categorize customer's personal service demands in order to identify customer's requests for personal service encounter and to provide knowledge about the situations in which personal service requests can be facilitated through SST.

Another research angle, which has been quite popular in SST studies focuses on the benefits and shortcomings of self-service technology. Meuter et al., (2000) categorized critical incidents involving SST to determine the cause of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with SSTs. Their study found that the main advantages of utilizing self-service technologies as identified by customers are ease of use, time saved, money saved place convenience and avoidance of service personal (Meuter et al., 2000). Additionally, Bitner, Brown and Meuter (2000) discovered that SSTs are able to improve service quality perceptions, customize services to the individual needs of the customer and offer them greater flexibility. Ponder, et al. (2006) in their study on benefits and drawbacks of both, salesperson assistance and self-service, validated what Meuter et al. (2000) already identified and advanced that

the main reason why customers choose self-service over salespersons assistance is convenience as customers prefer to purchase where and when they want (related to shopping online).

Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) developed a model showing customers decision-making process when deciding for SST or personal service (see appendix D). They give account to individual differences, influencing the benefits sought by customers which then leads to the decision making style. The model is relevant for this study as it shows what influences customers' decision for SST usage or salesperson assistance. Those influencers can be used in order to find out when personal service situations can be facilitated with SST and what possible drawbacks or enhancers could be. However, as the study conducted by Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) interviews customers about their shopping experiences without looking at a specific industry, many customers stated their online shopping experience and talked about the convenience they gain from that. This study will not look at online shopping experience and rather ask customers about their requests of personal service. It will furthermore be conducted at a self-service retailer, so customers can directly relate to their current shopping experience.

Moreover, a study revealed that customers value self-service as it gives them a greater sense of independence and they are able to handle the aspects of the purchasing process themselves (Ponder, Lueg and Williams, 2006). In contrast to that, Meuter et al. (2000) also found that technology failure, poor design, customer driven failure and process failure cause customers to reject self-service technologies. Furthermore, past research has shown that even customers who possess favorable attitudes towards technology may avoid SSTs because they are unable to replace the personal interaction (Lee & Allaway, 2002; Dabholkar, Michelle Bobbitt & Lee, 2003) or require a fundamental change in customer's behavior (Curran & Meuter, 2007). On top of that Lee & Allaway (2002) uncovered that customers perceive self-service technologies as riskier than personal service due to the fact that they call for a higher level of customer participation and responsibility. Lee and Allaway (2002) hint that SSTs could be a valuable way to enhance personal service as they argue that self-service technologies allow employees to concentrate on delivering services in which a personal encounter adds more value by relieving them from routine responsibilities. The knowledge stated above will help this study to identify, what the drivers and barriers for SST-usage are.

## 3.2     Preliminary framework

Figure 5 shows the preliminary framework, which has been developed from the knowledge gained from concepts sated above. As literature is lacking knowledge in the specific area this research is positioned in, the preliminary framework combines the areas this study looks at with the knowledge provided in the literature review. The criteria for choosing the theories and concepts which are being used for this framework are as followed. The concepts need to be relevant for any industry or the retail industry in specific. Additionally, the concepts should all have a customer focus, as this study is not taking on an organizational but rather a customer approach. For the whole model a service-dominant-logic in combination with a JTBD focus according to Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo (2014) is applied which guides this research in terms of applying a focus on service at all times and having a customer centered view.

However it has to be pointed out that this framework is of preliminary nature and can under no circumstances be seen as set in stone. It includes various different insecure parts (marked with dashed lines), which have to be researched. The preliminary framework will rather guide the empirical data collection and helps in understanding the data collected. And while having a guiding function, the

preliminary framework still allows for new insights and theories to emerge. The analysis and discussion of the data collected, with the aid of the preliminary framework might then lead to framework, which can be used for further research and quantitative testing.

The model was built as it shows the different conceptual angles, which are of relevance for this study and can eventually guide the data collection. From the knowledge provided in the literature review, *customer* and *retailer* have been defined as coming into the *co-creation area*. The customer comes with a *request* or *job-to-be-done (JBTD)* and the *retailer* aims at satisfying it. *Physical aspects* and *personal interactions* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996), both influence the *co-creation area* and the outcome of the *co-creation area* ideally leads to *value creation*. All parts of the model are explained below and credit is given for the choice of the specific parts.
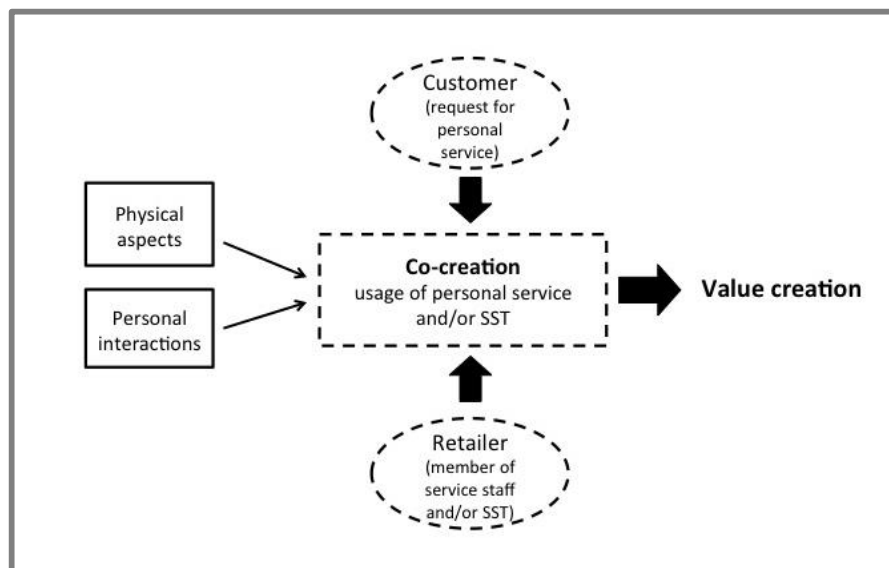


*Figure 5: Preliminary framework*

### *Physical aspects & personal interactions*

Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) created a model with a proposed hierarchical structure for retail service quality. From their knowledge this study will take the insights that *physical aspects* as well as *personal interactions* influence both, the customer and the service staff (see figure 4) and therefore both are relevant in the co-creation area. The *physical aspects* include the factor of convenience, which has also been said to be important by Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006). Furthermore, as seen in the literature review, Bitner (1992) researched the factors influencing the physical setting a service experience takes place in. She furthermore gives account that the physical aspects not only influence the customers, but also the employee. This knowledge will be used especially for the findings of the observation and the employee shadowing. *Personal interactions* include inspiring confidence and how courteous and helpful the interaction is (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996). Those influencers will be used as guides when analyzing customers' answers and the observations in order to see the importance of personal interactions. Furthermore Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) mentioned confidence as an important influencer when deciding between personal customer service and SST, which could be a helpful criterion for this research in order to find out which situations can or cannot be facilitated through SST. Additionally the knowledge provided by Fisk and Grove (1997) about customer-to-customer interaction is included here and will be used to understand customers' insights.

*Customer*

The customer, who plays one of the roles in the co-creation field of the model, is regarded as the one who comes with a request or a JTBD into the co-creation field. From a customer standpoint the request for personal service can be influenced by the *desire to reduce the perceived risk* (Murray, 1991; Ponder, Lueg and Williams 2006) as well as the *search for independency* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006). This knowledge will be used in order to better understand what customer's requests in regard to personal service are. Additionally knowledge from the service quality model Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) will be taken, as they define *reliability* and *problem solving* as to be influencers for the service experience. This knowledge will be important in order to better understand customer's answers and be able to categorize whether the assistance of SST could have for example solved the problem quicker or would have been more reliable as it would have been easier to access. Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) furthermore looks at the different requests for personal service in a self-service setting and categorizes them (see table 1). The attributes by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) will be used as a guideline for the data collection and for the categories this study aims at creating. The categories defined by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) will thereby function as a benchmark as their study was conducted in the same self-service environment this study will focus at. However as the research is from 1996, it will only function as a ground and needs to be reevaluated according to today's types of customers and their requests. The *customer* part of the preliminary framework is an insecure part (shown with dashed lines, see figure 5) as not enough knowledge is provided in order to understand customers' requests for personal service and especially not to what extent they can be facilitated through SST.

*Retailer*

The *retailer* part of the model incorporates a member of staff and/or SST, who/which goes/go into the co-creation process with the customer. Knowledge gained from the study conducted by Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) will contribute in a way that for the retailer side of the model convenience of the service plays an important role. Furthermore, Sandström et al. (2008) argue that only if retailer have service-oriented and knowledgeable staff, customers will be able to gain a positive service experience. However, to be able to offer this to customers, retailers have to invest large amounts of money on service staff. As this study aims at identifying those situations where personal customer service is highly needed and those that can be facilitated or replaced by SST, the efficiency of personal service encounters could be increased. As this study looks to what extent requests for personal service can be facilitated or even replaced by SST, the retailer side can be a member of service staff, a SST or both. The *retailer* part of the preliminary framework is still insecure as only the findings deriving from the data collection will show the offerings a self-service retailer has and how they contribute to this study.

*Co-creation*

According to Vasconcelos et al. (2015) a service experience consists of three different dimensions. The second dimension *interactions* was chosen to be relevant for this study as it incorporates according to Vasconcelos et al. (2015) not only the interaction with company staff but also with technologies. As this study looks at how personal customer service can be facilitated through SST, the part of interactions is relevant for this research. The knowledge Vasconcelos et al. (2015) provides will be used in the co-creation part as it gives guidance for the data collection. The area of co-creation had been adapted from the model by Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) who stated that in the co-creation area value is being created and used between a retailer and a customer. The knowledge

provided by Collier et al. (2015) will furthermore be used in order to better understand what makes customers decide for or against SST. The part of co-creation is marked as an insecure part in the preliminary framework and is regarded as the most insecure part of this research. Knowledge gives an overview of what co-creation consists of and what elements it incorporates, however for the specific service requests, where the co-creation could either be *customer-to-employee* or *customer-to-SST* or *customer to employee with SST* no knowledge is provided.

***Value creation***

Value is created from the interaction between retailer and customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), which is the reason why for this study value creation is of relevance. The study at hand looks at increasing the value for both, customer and retailer through making personal service encounters more efficient and facilitate them with the use of SST where applicable. Therefore figure 5 shows *value creation* as the output of the model. As for the nature of this, the part is still insecure as many of the variables influencing the value creation are still to be defined, evaluated and researched and the extent to which the outcomes of this study create value are still uncertain.

## 3.3    Chapter summary

Table 3 summarizes the concepts from the literature review, which relate to the research aim of this study and show its relevance. The table demonstrates that arguments are given for the relevance of personal service (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006; Sousa, 2006; Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Resnick, Foster & Woodall, 2014; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015; Lee, 2015; Pugh and Subramony, 2016). It is additionally said that personal service cannot be substituted by SST (Kumar & Telang, 2012; Langer et al., 2012) but should rather be combined with it (Lee & Allaway, 2000; Lee, 2015). Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) defined categories for customers' requests for personal service in a self-service setting Baron, Harris and Davies (1996), which is in line with one of the objectives for this study. Researchers are coherent in their opinion, that todays' shopping experience can be enhanced through the combination of virtual and physical channels (Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012). Murray (1991) in his study states the importance of reducing customers perceived risk and that an important source for that is personal customer service. This goes along with the findings of Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) who also state that perceived risk influences customers decision whether to access personal service or not. As seen from the literature review, various studies looked at the reasons why customers choose SST (Dabholkar, 1994; Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002; Meuter et al., 2005; Zhu et al., 2007; Oh, Jeong, & Baloglu, 2013). Furthermore it is stated that customers used to be the passive audience wanting to get value from products and services, while nowadays they play an active role in the value creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

All of the below mentioned concepts give account to the relevance of the study and the research aim, which has been stated in chapter 1. The preliminary framework that has been constructed from the knowledge generated throughout the literature review, guides the data collection for this study, as well as the presentation of the findings in the following chapter.

*Table 3: Researched concepts of relevance*

| Researched concepts of relevance | Researcher |
|---|---|
| Personal customer service is still important in order to create a successful retail experience | Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; Sousa, 2006; Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Resnick, Foster & Woodall, 2014; Pugh & Subramony, 2016; Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015; Lee, 2015 |
| Definitions of requests for personal service in a self-service setting | Baron, Harris & Davies, 1996 |
| Organizations are moving towards an approach for offering unique experiences to customers with a constant co-creation between customers and organizations | Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004 |
| Self-service-technologies (SST) are enhanced through personal customer service | Lee, 2015; Lee and Allaway, 2002 |
| Virtual channels should be combined with physical channels to enhance the shopping experience | Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012 |
| Personal service cannot be substituted by SST | Kumar & Telang , 2012; Langer et al., 2012 |
| Customers' sources for getting information and for reducing perceived risk. | Murray, 1991 |
| Customer confidence and perceived risk influencers for choosing personal customer service. | Ponder, Lueg and Williams, 2006; Murray, 1991 |
| Reasons why customer select SST | Webster (1989); Dabholkar (1994); Szymanski and Hise (2000); Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002); Meuter et al. (2005); Zhu et al. (2007); Oh, Jeong, and Baloglu (2013) |

# 4 Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings that were gathered throughout the data collection. The findings are analyzed according to the method of analyzing presented in the methodology (chapter 2) and the preliminary framework guides the analysis in this chapter. It has to be pointed out, that this study looked at two markets with the methods of customer interviews, employee interviews, participant observation and employee shadowing. The findings presented below therefore derive from the perspectives, being the customer, the employee and the researchers'. In regard to the preliminary framework it has to be stated that not all aspects of the preliminary framework are elaborated separately below. As physical aspects and personal interactions are being defined as influencing both, customer and retailer, they included in these parts. First the aspects influencing the retailer are analyzed, followed by the aspects influencing the customer. As a next step, the co-creation factors in-store are being analyzed and elaborated upon. Through the analysis important themes have been defined for all four elements of the preliminary framework, being customer, retailer, co-creation and value creation.

## 4.1 Retailer

The retailer is part of the preliminary framework and is therefore analyzed separately here. As stated in the theoretical framework, co-creation is of great relevance in order to create a positive customer experience. Retailer and customer together participate in the co-creation process and therefore the findings in regard to the retailer (here: IKEA) are vital for this study.

### 4.1.1 Self-service retailer classification

As elaborated in the literature discussion, based on the amount of service provided Kotler et al. (2013) and the definition of the term, IKEA is classified as a self-service retailer. This is validated by the information that was collected at IKEA Cardiff as well as IKEA Malmö. During the participant observations it became obvious for example that the *IKEA typical walkway* is a reliable tool to encourage self-service as customers serve themselves while walking through the store. This is facilitated by the fact that almost all products are presented with the necessary information available for the customer to read. Moreover IKEA's signature concept, which asks customers to assemble their purchased furniture themselves, is a clear proof of self-service. Above all the interviews with employees as well as customers showed not only that IKEA employees characterize the retailer as self-service oriented, but also revealed that customers rather perceive IKEA as a self-service retailer.

*"**IKEA is based on mechanical sales**. Customers should be able to buy everything by themselves. But today's customer is more picky and wants more help."* (Björn, (26-35) Employee IKEA Malmö)

*"This is how IKEA is built up, it is about you walking into the prebuilt show rooms and **you experience that yourself instead of asking for help**. Then you go down to the warehouse and collect your stuff yourself."* (Julie & Frederik (18-25), Customers IKEA Malmö)

Nevertheless, IKEA employees in both markets recognizes the importance of providing more service to their customers and moving away from a complete self-service concept towards offering more service to their customers.

*"IKEA's underlying theme used to be we do a little, you do a little, **now it is starting to become more of a 'we do a lot, you do a little' approach**."* (James Carew (26-35), project coordinator mobile co-worker app, IKEA Cardiff)

*"A few years ago we worked to help the customers help themselves, we presented several product options and ensured that customers can read information about them and we salesperson(s)were there to guide them but you (customer) were supposed to do it on your own. **Now we help the customer from hello to goodbye**."* (Johan (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

These statements clearly show that IKEA is moving towards a service concept, which offers more personal service to customers in order to increase their satisfaction and to keep up with competitors. The relevance of a service-oriented approach in combination with knowledgeable staff has also been found to be relevant in the literature review and pointed out by Sandström et al. (2008). It gives reason for the relevance this study has, especially for self-service encouraging retailers, as it aims at exploring a more efficient balance between self-service and personal customer service and examines to what extent SSTs can be utilized to facilitate personal service.

Shadowing employees, observations as participant, and employee interviews showed that while most departments at IKEA encourage mechanical sales processes, during which customers usually do not need to interact with a member of staff, customers are more likely to require personal service in a minority of the departments. These departments include, kitchens, beds & mattresses, and wardrobes, where due to the product's complexity, price and increased product involvement the need for advisory services is higher. Moreover, the observations in both markets showed that these departments were more crowded than others.

Even though some departments within the IKEA store provide more personal service than expected for a self-service retailer, it can be argued that the distinction as such retailer is still valid as most aspects of the store are designed to encourage the customers to take action themselves. More importantly, despite the previously discussed shift in the company's personal service offerings, the interviews show that customers still perceive IKEA as a typical self-service retailer. The validation of IKEA as a self-service retailer is important to the study and especially its setting as the study's aim is to explore customers requests for personal service in self-service encouraging retail stores and to identify the extent they can be facilitated with SST, which is in line with the underling research question.

### 4.1.2    Market differences

*Use of technology*

As previously discussed in the methodology in chapter 2, there are several differences between IKEA Cardiff and IKEA Malmö. In order to avoid repetition, this part merely focuses on the differences in physical aspects including the facilitation of personal service with mobile technology in Cardiff opposed to traditional personal service offerings in Malmö and the differences in store layout between the two markets. Currently, IKEA Cardiff is one of the few markets testing the mobile co-worker app, which runs on tablets that employees can carry with them in the store and use to access information and help customers. At this time, the app does not have all the features, which employees can utilize on the installed computers in-store and the information kiosks. The tablets are not connected to the printers yet for example, but in a next step IKEA's goal is to include all features that the computers

have in the mobile co-worker app ensured James Carew the project coordinator for the mobile co-worker app.

As previously discussed in the methodology (chapter 2), the way in which employees use the mobile co-worker app on the tablet during personal service encounters is the closest example of self-service technology utilized to facilitate personal service and thus is in line with the research objective and of great relevance to this study. Opposed to this, the study also derives data from the IKEA store in Malmö where traditional personal service is offered without being facilitated with mobile devices such as the tablet.

*Store layout*

*Appearance* is one of the physical aspects, which according to Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) influences the service quality. Considering the store layout, the difference that influences personal service encounters the most is the way in which products are presented in the living room department in Malmö compared to the *room for living* in Cardiff. While the other departments across the IKEA stores in Malmö and Cardiff are quite similar the before mentioned department vary significantly in the way they present products to the customer. The store in Malmö on the one hand is traditional with a clear and simple presentation of products. The entire department is rather open and can be overseen from almost every point in the department. More importantly this contributes to the fact that the sales staff working in this department are very visible and should be easy to find by customers.

In Cardiff on the other hand, a new concept called *room for living* was recently implemented. This concept includes significantly more built-in show rooms and real-life-alike living rooms in which products are presented in their usual environment. Furthermore, the room for living concept is characterized through the fact that the built-in show rooms have a ceiling, which gives them a more realistic and cozy feeling. In fact, during the observations, many customers where seen getting comfortable in these rooms, laying on couches and sitting in arm chairs for an extended period while taking a break from shopping. Due to the increased amount of built-in show rooms, the *room for living* department is less structured and hard to be overseen. In fact, if a salesperson steps into one of them, it is almost impossible for customers to find them, unless of course they stand in the same showroom. In order to get a better imagination of the department layout, a picture of the room for living department in the IKEA Cardiff store can be found in appendix B This is another important factor which influences the personal service experience of customers, as naturally they will find it more difficult to access personal service in a department like this, compared to the very clearly structured and visible living room department in Malmö. Accordingly, the ICSS shows that staff availability is the most frequent source of dissatisfaction among customers that visited the IKEA Cardiff store.

### 4.1.3    Convenience through technology

In his model of retail service quality Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) identify two sub categories of physical aspects that influence the retail service quality for customers. The first one, *appearance* has been described above while the second one, *convenience* is considered in this part. Furthermore, as elaborated in the literature review in chapter 3, Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006), found that *convenience* plays an important role when customers decide if they engage in personal service or rather use SST. This part focuses on convenience through technology but from the salesperson's perspective. As outlined in the market differences above, IKEA employees utilize a co-worker app on tablets during personal service encounters while IKEA employees in Malmö offer traditional service

without the app or the tablets. The main advantage of using the app on tablets opposed to the computers and service kiosks is the increased convenience for both the salesperson, as well as the customer. This is due to the fact that, the employees in Cardiff do not have to go back and forth between the point of contact with the customer and the service kiosk, instead they are able to access the information they need right where the customer approach them or where the product of interest is located. Consequently, employees are able to get the requested information to the customer faster than if they would have to walk to a fixed location like the service kiosks to look it up.

Another advantage of carrying the tablets is, that employees are able to make use of all kinds of apps and functions offered by the tablet, such as reminder, size converter (UK to EU) and various others to answer customers' questions and simplify their work life.

*"**The tablet gives me freedom** in my work and **makes my life easier**."* (Pete (36-45), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

This statement clearly emphasizes the increased convenience employees derive from the tablet and mobile co-worker app.

### 4.1.4    Interim conclusion

This section of the findings and analysis chapter states the insight gained concerning the *retailer* part of the preliminary framework. It gives evidence for the classification of IKEA as a *self-service retailer*, shows the *market differences* between IKEA Cardiff and IKEA Malmö and highlights the *convenience of technology*, which has especially been noticed at IKEA Cardiff. A summary of all findings can be found in table 4.

## 4.2    Customer

As elaborated in the theoretical framework, this study has a clear customer-centered service-dominant-logic view according to Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo (2014). This part is also a part of the preliminary framework and the findings are therefore of great relevance for this study in order to find an answer to the research question.

*Importance of technology*

The importance of technology has already been stated in the introduction (chapter 1) as well as during the literature review (chapter 3). As this study aims at combining technology (SST) with personal service, it is inevitable to argue for the relevance of technology on the customer side and see how mobile devices are used in a self-service environment today. First of all, the observations in both markets show that many customers in-store carry mobile devices with them. Some use it for calling or texting; others just walk around with it. Many customers take pictures with the smartphones in the store. This has also been pointed out in the interviews in both markets where customers said they take pictures of product tags in order to find it later on in stock.

*"Two minutes ago we looked at TV furniture and **took a picture of the tag in order to find it in the warehouse**."* (Julie & Frederik (18-25), Customers IKEA Malmö)

Furthermore the interviews show that customers like to look up the reason for their store visit online and research it, before they come to the store to see it in real life or to pick it up.

> *"**I looked it up online** on my tablet. I had seen what I wanted and just wanted to pick it up (candle holders)."* (John, (56-65) Customer IKEA Cardiff)

Customers then come to the store with a picture on their mobile devices in order to then see the product they found online in real life.

> *"**We wanted to see it (the wardrobe) in real life** in the store as well as the simulation of it."* (Jenny & Henrik (26-35), Customers IKEA Malmö)

All of those findings show the importance mobile devices and technology have for customers in-store today. Furthermore almost all customers in both markets stated their mobile usage as being constant or frequent. Those aspects show that mobile devices and technology in store enhance customer experience and customers are open for the usage of it.

### *Convenience through technology*

Convenience is included in the service quality model by Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) saying that it is a great influencer of the overall service quality and the service experience that emerges from that. This section shows how technology increases the convenience for customers in-store and therefore enhances their customer experience. Technologies used in store or own mobile devices are also identified as being a great influencer of the convenience customers perceive in store. The observation and shadowing showed the omnipresence of mobile devices and the examples given also show the convenience that derives from that. At IKEA Cardiff, during an employee shadowing the employee showed the customer a sofa, however the customer liked to have the sofa in another color, which was not displayed in the showroom. The employee showed him the sofa in a different color in the room set on a tablet, without having to go back to an installed PC. This shows the convenience of technology for the customer, who doesn't have to walk through the store but can rather be served at any point in the store. At IKEA Cardiff, through the use of tablets customers are able to see the full product range directly in-store, which was said in the customer interviews as being very helpful and in the employee interviews as being highly beneficial, as customers sometimes don't know what they would like to have and can see everything on the tablet.

> *"While buying furniture **an employee with a tablet helped me** during a previous visit. I wanted to see the range of product and **found that very helpful**."* (Jacqui (56-65), Customer IKEA Cardiff)

> *"Sometimes **customers are not sure what they look for** so they have a look on the tablet."* (Houman (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

However technology increases convenience in both markets, for example, as customers are able to pay for certain products directly in the department and only have to pick it up at the end of their visit. That has been observed in both markets and pointed out by interviewees to be very convenient.

> *"**I paid in the department** so that I just had to pick it up."* (Jo (46-55), Holly (26-35) & Ben (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

However technology comes to a hold here as customers still get a printed payment confirmation when paying in the department. This could be a point for further investigation; if that service was to be digitalized it would enhance customers' convenience even more.

### *Reduce perceived risk*

The concept of the *desire to reduce the perceived risk* (Murray, 1991) has already been identified as relevant in the literature review and the preliminary framework and can now also be seen relevant from the findings. Employees in both markets point out that customers often ask for what is their best value for money and that they would like to get advice on what they get for the money they spent.

> *"They (the customers) want to know **what their value for money is** and advice about what's the best mattress for them."* (Pete (36-45), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

This has especially been mentioned in the departments of mattresses, kitchens and wardrobes where based on the comparatively high price the involvement is quite high. Furthermore interviewees in the mattress department point out that customers perceive products with a higher price to have a higher quality and that higher costs go along with a higher perceived risk.

> *"**Especially if I would buy something expensive** e.g. a dining table, I would like more personal service."* (Mark & Sinead (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

One of the salespersons interviewed in the IKEA Malmö store furthermore stated that one of the most common questions he receives is about reassuring the customer for a product he or she wants to buy. He states that they would like to know his opinion on whether the color is nice or whether the salesperson believes the color suits a certain room decoration. This can also be found in the theoretical framework as Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) mention *inspiring confidence* to be an important influencer of the service quality.

> *"They (the customers) just want to **have reconfirmed that what they buy is nice** (e.g. they ask: is this color nice?). They want a second opinion."* (Björn, (26-35) Employee IKEA Malmö)

As this shows that customers demand some sort of reassurance for the products they buy it gives reason for the importance of personal service and the purpose of this study to facilitate it. Furthermore customers point out that they want to see the product in the store in real life before they buy it, which has been stated as a reason they actually come to the store and shows that physical stores are still of importance today. However also in departments with lower price involvement, the factor of perceived risk has been observed. A customer at IKEA Cardiff pointed out that she asked an employee to unpack a textile bed throw for her so that she could see the full size of the product and see if it fits.

> *"She opened the product (a throw) for me, as there was not the size I wanted on display. **I wanted to see if it fits and try to gage the size.**"* (Jacqui, (55-65) Customer IKEA Cardiff)

### 4.2.1    Service requests

One of the objectives of this study is to categorize the service requests customers have and to analyze what kind of service it is they demand. Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo (2014) define service requests as jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) with which the customer comes into the store. This can also be seen from the

customer interviews, as each customer was able state his or her reason for the store visit. The foundation of the service request data collection was the research by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) who conducted a study at IKEA in 1996 and identified customers' service requests (see table 2). The categories that were identified as being relevant in this study to a certain extent go along with the findings by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) however new categories were found to be relevant in addition to that and others were dropped as they did not arise from the empirical data collected in this research. The categories by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996), which were not identified by this study, are *product price*, *product usage*, *directions*, *physical assistance* and *others*. This is mainly due to the nature of this study, as this research focuses on the in-store service request without looking for example at the checkout area, the returns area or the restaurant. Other categories have been left out as they have been defined differently in this study or did not emerge from the empirical data that was collected. Furthermore it has to be pointed out, that the level of advisory needed for the requests customers had could be seen as a reoccurring theme throughout the data collection (independent from the service request category *advisory*). This is a finding, which is unexpected. From the knowledge deriving from the literature review the researchers were aware of the importance of personal service, however that the amount of personal service depends on the level of advisory needed for a certain request is a new finding.

### a. Product information

The category of *product information* has been found to be relevant for this study and goes along with the findings of Baron, Harris and Davies (1996). Examples of requests for this category were questions about sizes of the product, measurements, colors, product ranges and the assembly of the product. The category of product information has been found to be relevant for both markets.

*"I was just looking for **different colored** little storage boxes and they only had the green and blue ones. I wanted a pink one for a girl's room. She (the employee) looked underneath the table and got the right color out for me."* (Anette (26-35) & Emma (36-45), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

*"A request could be: "Is this model **available in a given size**?" or "**Can I buy this in another color?**" basically anything from the size to if you want your bed to look like this or that."* (Johan (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

### b. Product availability

This category goes align with the category defined by Baron at al. (1996). This study found examples for this category to be questions about the availability in stock or on shelve. Additional request were questions about when a certain product range arrives in-store. This category is of relevance for both markets.

*"We wanted to know about a new glass product from a glass and ceramic designer that is supposed to come in May. **We wanted to know when the product arrives**."* (Lotta (36-35) & Denis (46-55), Customers IKEA Malmö)

*"I asked for a hanger as **it wasn't on the shelf**. She (the employee) checked on a PC if it's available."* (Erik (46-55), Customer IKEA Malmö)

### c. Procedures

*Procedures* has also been defined as being an important category by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996). This study found examples for that category in both markets. Examples were questions about whether to pick up the product in the showrooms or in the warehouse. Further requests are concerning products that cannot be picked up in the warehouse but have to be picked up separately or procedures about the general buying process of products.

> *"We wanted a specific lamp and **weren't sure when to pick it up**. On the way around or at the end. We asked and it made our journey easier. We were walking around blindly."* (Tom & Liam (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

> *"As you can't pick up beds and sofas yourself, **I printed it out for them so they can go and pick it up**."* (My (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

### d. Location

This category has been found to be relevant in both markets according to the findings of this study and has not been mentioned as a category by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996). Service requests about location included questions about where to find a specific product, where in the warehouse to find a product, showing a product on a mobile device and asking where the specific product is in the store and questions about where certain product ranges can be found in the store. Those requests have been seen in the shadowing, as well as in the interviews.

> *"I've got a rug at home that I couldn't put down because I've got laminate flooring and it was slipping all over the place so **I asked where I could find some anti-slip mat** to stop that."* (Annette (26-35) & Emma (36-45), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

> *"Mostly I experience service encounters when I am in the warehouse and **I can't find the product I'm looking for**."* (Veronika (26-35), Customer IKEA Malmö)

### e. Opinion

Opinion is a new category that has been found to be relevant for both markets in this study. The knowledge from Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) who say that service quality is enhanced through inspiring confidence helped the analysis for this category as it has been seen to be relevant in theory that customers are being inspired and reassured by a member of service staff. Service requests in this category include questions from customers about the opinion of the salesperson in regard to a specific product or decoration. The relevance of this category has been seen in both, customer and employee interviews. Customers stated that they would like to know the salespersons opinion on whether they believe certain products match each other or not. Other questions include the opinion on whether the size is the right size or not. Employees also stated that customers ask for their opinion in order to receive confirmation that what they buy is nice. Additionally employees mentioned that in the bed department they are being asked about which mattress they would buy if they would need one. Björn (18-25; Malmö Employee) sees this as a shift towards a more demanding customer.

> *"They (the customer) ask me open-ended questions like "**I like this but what do you recommend goes with it?**"."* (Kathryn 26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

*"Customers just want to **have reconfirmed that what they buy is nice**. They want a second opinion."*
(Björn (18-26), Employee IKEA Malmö)

## f. Customization

The category of customization has been identified in the employee shadowing when a customer at the IKEA Cardiff store asked about whether he could mix and match certain draws in a cupboard. Additionally questions in the wardrobe department usually are customization requests, as customers design their wardrobe according to their own preferences there. However the same can be seen in all other departments where customers ask about rearranging or mixing certain products. This category could be seen from the findings in both markets.

*"I would like to know **whether I can only buy the heating plate** or have to buy the whole BBQ station."* (Veronika (26-35), Customer IKEA Malmö)

*"They need help with colors of the handles. They **want to know if they can mix and match** different handles or draws?"* (Kathryn (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

## g. Advisory

The importance of advisory in certain departments was omnipresent in both markets and played an important role for the customer as well as for the employees. For the customer the importance of advisory derived from their desire to reduce the perceived risk, which was elaborated above. For the employee the level of advisory played an important role for knowing what kind of service they have to provide and what kind of knowledge the customer expects them to have in certain departments. In Cardiff the mobile co-worker app and the tablet, as mentioned before, could support the knowledge provided.

*"I wanted to check which mattress works for my extendable. The service staff showed me the mattresses that would fit this specific bed. **I was lying down on them all to see which one I like most.**"* (Ann (46-55), Customer IKEA Cardiff)

*"The service can take up to an hour. We usually narrow it down to 2-3 choices, and then discuss which ones feel best for the customer's back. **More and more people actually ask for help, appreciate the service and take their time.**"* (Johan (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

## h. Extra services

Extra services include questions about home delivery, guarantees and return policies. In a customer interview it also turned out that customers would be willing to pay an extra amount for certain services if it increases their convenience noticeably. Requests for extra services have been seen in both markets, however they were not always the same.

*"They (the customer) often ask about the **delivery and how long it takes**. Or about guarantee and return policies."* (Houman (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

*"I know what I want and **I'm happy if someone else gets it to me and assembles it**. I would pay extra for that."* (Katerina (36-45), Customer IKEA Malmö)

### 4.2.2 Interim conclusion

This section of the findings and analysis chapter presents the insights collected for the *customer* part of the preliminary framework. It includes findings in regard to the *importance of technology*, the *convenience through technology* and customer's *desire to reduce the perceived risk*. Additionally this section presents the findings in regard to the *service request categories* this study aims to identify and categorize. A summary of all findings can be found in table 4.

## 4.3    Co-creation

Co-creation between customers and retailers becomes a constant process in organizations and for retailers to offer a unique service experience to their customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This part, which is guided by the concepts in the preliminary framework, shows the findings that were gathered in regard to Vargo and Lusch (2004) who say that co-creation is a process where both, customer and retailer are involved. Findings and analyses reveal co-creation between customer and salespersons, co-creation between customers and technologies and co-creation between customers, s and technologies. The focus of this part is, as already stated in the preliminary framework, on the service-dominant logic in regard JTBD according to Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo (2014). This goes back to the previous part, which argues that customers always go into service experience with a certain service request. The service request, which is equal to the JTBD is being solved by the possible interactions mentioned above. The findings in this section are of relevance for this study, as they show the benefits and barriers of co-creation and customers' position in regard to it. Furthermore this part aims to create an understanding of SST usage in-store, which is relevant in order to answer the research question of this study. The first part shows the findings in regard to interactions between 'the salesperson and the customer'. The second part shows the interactions between 'the customer and technology' and 'the customer and a salespersons and technologies'. Reoccurring themes are presented and analyzed according to the themes defined as relevant in the theoretical framework.

### 4.3.1    Interactions with staff

The interactions a customer experiences with a member of staff is directly linked to what kind of service request he or she raises. As the kind of service request a customer poses plays an important role, those requests have been elaborated in the previous part. In general it became appeared that if service was accessed, almost all interviewed customer in both markets stated a positive and helpful service experience. This has been stated as relevant in the preliminary framework as well. Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) state that for a high quality of service and a positive service experience to be perceived by customers, the staff has to be courteous, the overall interaction has to be helpful, the statements made by a member of service staff have to be reliable and the service experience has to solve the problem. All aspects can be confirmed from customer interviews, as positive feedback about a service encounter has been a reoccurring theme in the findings. This leads to the analysis that if a personal service is accessed, customers are satisfied with it and it creates value for them as it enhances their shopping experience.

*"I asked for help twice and both times the **staff has been more than happy to help**."* (Jacqui (56-65), Customer IKEA Cardiff)

*"**It was a very good service**. He (the employee) helped us with the wardrobe, to pick the right pieces for us."* (Lars (56-65) & Marie (46-55), Customer IKEA Malmö)

Employees in both markets indicated that they try to approach customers as much as they can. In Cardiff, employees especially pointed out that they approach a customer if he or she looks confused or if they overhear a question. They pointed out that they like to be close to their customers. This is also a reason for the high satisfaction of service when it was accessed.

*"**We try to be close to our customers**. Sometimes I overhear a question and approach them in order to help."* (Kathryn (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

Also, customers in both markets stated that they themselves did not have to think, as the employee was taking care of everything they needed, which they liked. This shows that in terms of *reliability* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996), which has been stated to be relevant in the literature, customers had no concerns but were happy to be guided by a member of staff.

*"We were **very satisfied with the experience as we didn't have to think**."* (Lars (56-65) & Marie (46-55), Customer IKEA Malmö)

### *Sources of frustration*

The main factors that influence the service experience which were identified in the customer interviews were the sources of frustration, which were mainly the lack of availability of staff and the waiting time at information desks. Staff availability has however been identified as being one of the main drivers of customer dissatisfaction in both markets (ICSS, 2015) however in the interviews especially customers at IKEA Cardiff mentioned the problem. This could be explained with the UK market in general being more demanding in terms of service expectations (James Carew, co-worker app project coordinator, IKEA Cardiff). Customers explained that they either walked off and tried to approach someone in a different department or dropped their request and proceeded without accessing the personal service at all.

*"**I couldn't find staff in the right department** so I moved on and then approached someone in dining (the dining room department)."* (Jo (46-55), Holly (18-25) and Ben (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

An additional problem was the waiting time when the sales staff that customers wanted to approach was busy with another customer. Again, this either resulted in long waiting times for the customer or in dropping the request. Both lead to a high level of frustration on the customer side.

*"But the salesperson I saw talked to someone else, so **I waited for 20min and then walked off** and continued shopping."* (Ann (46-55), Customer IKEA Cardiff)

However customers state that the level of accessibility of staff depends on the overall amount of customers in the store that day. On days where the store is less crowded customers reported less difficulties with accessing a member of staff this has also been seen in the observations that it was dependent on the day and the time of the day whether customers had difficulties to access personal service.

*"If we couldn't find anyone it would be ideal, because it's a big **place sometimes difficult to find people**, especially when it's busy."* (Tom & Liam (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

Fisk and Grove (2006) furthermore mentioned customer-to-customer interactions as potential source of negative service experience. Their concept is included in the preliminary framework, as the influence of customer-to-customer interactions was believed to be important for this study, especially as IKEA is a big retailer with large amounts of footfall. However no indications could be found in regard to customer-to-customer interactions.

### 4.3.2 Interactions with staff and technologies

This part shows the findings from interactions among customers and technology. This includes the interaction with a SST as well as with a member of staff and SST. The importance and convenience of technology has already been elaborated upon in the previous part. This part therefore focuses on the interactions themselves and the co-creation elements.

Customers mentioned that while buying furniture, employees in the Cardiff store assisted them with a tablet. In one case an employee was able to show the customer the whole range of products on the tablet and she could get a feel for the other colors and materials which were not displayed in the showroom. Customer and employees were both creating this service experience, as the customer gave input in regard to her preferences and the employee could directly assist her and provide the knowledge she was looking for through the tablet. The employee was able to co-create the experience directly in the department without any need to go to a stationary PC. It has been seen in the employee shadowing as well as in the customer interviews, that it makes the service experience much more convenient for the customer as well as the employee. It increases efficiency, there is no need to go back and forth and it creates value for both.

*„When I wanted to buy a piece of furniture last time, an employee with a tablet helped me during my visit. **I found that very useful as I could see the full product range**."* (Jacqui (55-65), Customer IKEA Cardiff)

The interviews show that employees perceive the tablet as an enhancer of their job as it enables them to show the customer aspects they would usually have to show on a regular PC where they would have to go to with the customer. With the tablet they can simply stay in the place where the customer requested the service.

*"The tablet **enables me to show the customer what matches the products** they are interested in."* (Kathryn (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

Customers in the Malmö store reported that they tried to access SST on their own. In the wardrobe, as well as in the kitchen department customers have the option to design the furniture they want according to their preferences. However, all of them reported that they needed help and advice with that as it was too complicated to do it alone. This finding is coherent with the concept of Kumar & Telang (2012), who argue that SST cannot substitute personal service and which has been included in the theoretical framework. Additionally as both departments are high involvement product departments in terms of price, customers look for a reassurance through personal service anyways.

*"We wanted to buy a wardrobe. We **tried first to design it ourselves, but then felt like we didn't really know what we were doing**. With the PAX (the wardrobe) there are so many different options to choose from, we needed someone to help and advise us with that"* (Jenny & Henrik (26-35), Customer IKEA Malmö).

Employees in the interviews confirmed this by saying that customers want advice and help, especially in certain departments.

*"Usually customers **don't understand how the PAX system is build up** and how to design the wardrobe. **They want help to draw it.**"* (Claudia (26-35), Employee IKEA Malmö)

As already mentioned in the methodology chapter, this study incorporated an elicitation showing customers and employees an example of a SST (app shown on a tablet), which could facilitate personal service. The reactions and interpretations from this example are presented here, as it is also an example for an interaction of customers, employees and technology. It is therefore a potential co-creation element. However customers were told that this example of SST could be operated either through their own mobile devices or through a tablet on the wall in-store. The example of SST (the app) would enable customers to click a button to call for personal service. This study does not look at how this can be technically implemented, as it just functions as an example of a SST that could facilitate personal service for self-service retailers. In this part the feedback from customers and employees on this and the benefits, concerns and sources of frustration that were analyzed from it are outlined.

The reasons why this kind of SST would facilitate personal customer service have become obvious not only from the secondary data, as already discussed in the methodology chapter, but also from observations, as well as customer and employee interviews. The observation at IKEA Cardiff showed that due to the new concept in the *Room for living* department the chances for employees to be seen by customers decreases. This is caused by the ceilings and walls that are recently included in that department. As Malmö still has the traditional layout of the living room department, the problem is less apparent, however there the chance to find an employee immediately is lowered by the comparably big size of the IKEA Malmö store. Employees in Cardiff state that in small departments in the store the click for personal service would not be needed as an employee can be easily found there.

*„**In small departments a call for personal service does not make sense**. The co-workers there can be seen at all times."* (Kathryn (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

Employees in Malmö also state that it would help in certain departments where it is not that easy for employees to see customers or approach them right away. They mentioned the kitchen department as an example for that as they are highly involved with the customer for a longer time period and therefore not accessible for other questions at all times.

*"In my department (living room), I can always see if they need help. But **it would help in kitchens** because they are not as active in their selling approach and customers don't get that much attention as it is more you and me sitting on computer."* (My (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

However the observations also showed that not all small departments in the store are staffed at all times. This has been seen to be due to an employee taking a break or due to the fact that the employee moved to a different department to help a customer there. Furthermore, employees state that the click for service would be of help in the market hall and the warehouse area as there is not so much service staff there than upstairs.

*„**It would help downstairs because there is not much personnel downstairs** and we are quite visible here (in the living room department)."* (My (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

### 4.3.3 Benefits of SST usage

This section shows the benefits customers and employees see for an implementation of SST. Even though this study takes on a customer-oriented approach employees mentioned benefits of the SST example (click for personal service) for their jobs as well. Employees in the interviews stated that the click for personal service for the customer would be of great help for them as they as employees don't have to worry about their visibility so much anymore. They would be notified if a customer poses a service request and can directly approach them. Customers would therefore be served quicker, as employees can immediately find them when they asked for the personal service. This would, according to some employees, save time for both, the customers and the employees. Furthermore employees stated that if the customer would be accessed directly by someone who is knowledgeable in the department, this could facilitate the service experience for both and save time as well.

*"I think it would be of help as this is a big store. **I can be accessed better** and will have a better visibility."* (Houman (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

*"The click for personal service would help the customer by **being served quicker**. We can find them quicker and **they don't need to be passed on from one to another employee**, which can be very time consuming."* (Terry (56-65), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

Furthermore employees indicated that for them it would be beneficial as they don't have to a approach customers several times to find out whether they need help or not. With the SST example the customer would decide when to access the personal service, which would add value to their experience.

*"For me it would be very helpful. As a co-worker **I wouldn't need to go back to the customer several times to ask whether they need help** now."* (Joanne (36-45), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

Additionally employees mentioned that they could increase their active selling through the click for service, as customers do not need to walk away from their point of request. Rather, the employee would receive a notification at the exact location where the customer needs help in the department and thus would be able to approach him or her right away, directly at the point of request.

*"I can increase my active selling. **I can immediately help and approach people** and I am not limited to one spot."* (Houman (26-35), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

Furthermore it was indicated in both markets that it would help to have two or three people that are only responding to this click for personal service. This would according to the employees benefit and add value for both, the customer and the employees, as they would be able to provide the service immediately when customers need it. Customers would not have to actively search for an employee but would be approached by an employee. Furthermore employees mention that sometimes customers walk off because they see that an employee is busy or they cannot find anyone to approach. Employees state the importance of picking up every customer so that no sales opportunity is missed.

*"It would be good if there would be **two to three people on the floor only responding to the requests coming from the app** (the click for personal service), but also very expensive as we would need more staff. But of course otherwise it would be terrific. **We can meet all customers in a better way. They don't have to look around, but will know that someone will come.** Sometimes customers don't have the time to wait or they see that we (the employees) are busy. They then walk off and leave, which is*

*not good for is. **It is important that we pick up every customer.***" (Björn (26-35), Employee IKEA Malmö)

A reoccurring benefit stated by customers in both markets is that when it is busy in the store they would not need to wait in line but could walk around and continue their shopping process if they like to. This would save them time they would usually need to access personal service and enable them to go through a streamline experience.

*„In the kitchen area where it's always busy and there are many people I would use it and like it, because then **I can just push the button, go around and pick other stuff. I wouldn't need to wait in a line.**"* (Veronika (26-35), Customer IKEA Malmö)

*"The app with the button **would speed up the whole process for us** and **we could have a streamline experience** here in the store."* (Jo (46-55), Holly (18-25) and Ben (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

A theme that reoccurred during the customer interviews in both markets (however much more at IKEA Cardiff) was the difficulty accessing a member of staff, which has already been elaborated in a separate part above. However customers mentioned it again in combination with the SST facilitation, which would enable them to inquire personal service without having to find a member of staff. This was stated as being of importance as the store is big and it is sometimes difficult to access a member of staff there, especially in times with high amounts of footfall. The click for personal service could be used at any point in the store and would therefore not force customers to go back and forth through the departments in order to find a member of service staff.

*„If we couldn't find anyone it would be ideal, because it's a big place and **sometimes it's difficult to find people, especially when it's busy**. So I think it would be very helpful as it allows you to use it (the click for personal service) wherever you are in the store. **With such options you can cater everyone's needs** not just one target group. It has a nice personal touch."* (Tom & Liam (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

At IKEA Malmö it furthermore got pointed out that asking for help can be a barrier for customers and that they for various reasons sometimes rather not approach a member of staff in the store. At IKEA Cardiff however, this has not been seen or heard, which could be due to a difference in markets.

*"In occasions where I need personal help it would be fantastic if I could just press it and someone approaches me. **Asking for help can be a barrier-breaking situation**. **When you have to go and approach someone that's always a bit awkward.** You never know if you are interrupting something or it they are actually able to help you."* (Julie & Frederik (18-25), Customers IKEA Malmö)

Another aspect that got mentioned in the customer interviews at IKEA Malmö was that customers do not like to be approached by a member of staff. They rather go through the store on their own and approach someone themselves if they need help. This aspect however has only been mentioned once and can therefore only give an indication. The concept of *search for independency* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006), which was included in the theoretical framework, suggests that customers like to search for independency during a shopping experience and that this search could be facilitated through SST, as customers do not have to personally approach someone.

*"If I come into a store and someone directly approaches me and asks me if I need help, no I don't like that. **I will approach them myself if I want something.**"* (Julie & Frederik (18-25), Customers IKEA Malmö)

### 4.3.4    Concerns of SST usage

In regard to concerns about the usage of SST to access personal service there have been various different themes defined from both sides: customers and employees. Employees for example mentioned that if the service would only be provided through an app, some customers might not even know that it exists as not many customers use the app as it is right now. However this concern could be addressed through providing the service on tablets in the store so that there is no dependency on the own mobile devices.

*"**I'm not sure how the customers would use it and if they would understand that the service exists**. It might be a matter of time or how it is marketed."* (Johan (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

The concern can also be seen from the customer perspective and has been addressed multiple times. Customers are concerned that some people might not even know that the app or the tablet to click for service exists, if they then see people getting access to personal service right away they could easily get frustrated as they would not understand why they would need to wait in line. Furthermore customers see a conflict for the employee, they would have to decide if they serve a customer that was standing in line, or one that has clicked for service through the app.

*"Some people may know the app exists and some don't. People who don't use the app or don't know about it could get really frustrated if they see people getting personal service while they have been waiting in line. **It needs to be fair.**"* (Daniel (36-45) & Natalia (26-35), Customer IKEA Malmö)

Furthermore employees are concerned about how to react to a call for personal service if they are involved in a service encounter during that time. They would also not know whether the service request would then still be valid after they finished the service encounter with the previous customer. They also see a need for making clear who needs to react to it. Otherwise they would also be worried about the customer getting frustrated if they click for personal service and then would not be approached. Therefore, employees stated that the click for service might not be useful during times where the store is busy.

*"If I have a customer and then get a message **I don't know if it is still valid after let's say 10 minutes** when I'm done with the previous customer. Would the service call go out to everyone?"* (My (18-25), Employee IKEA Malmö)

*"It's a good thing but could be hard in logistical terms because the customer thinks that they now receive help right away but when I'm busy, sometimes I get stuck with a customer for 20 minutes. **Customers could get disappointed, especially when it's busy.**"* (Björn (26-35), Employee IKEA Malmö)

Furthermore, some employees are concerned that this service would make their job more stressful as they might be called to another department and then the department they actually work in would be empty. It could furthermore add to the stress level when they hear that someone requests personal service but they are currently involved in an advisory service encounter, which takes long. This would

then be disturbing and would lead to the customer not getting the best service encounter. This concern has been raised mainly in the bed, PAX and kitchen department where service encounters can take a long time.

*"I see that it would add value for the customer, but **it makes my work more stressful**. If I would be called over to another department, no one would cover my department during that time. Sometimes I sit with a customer for up to two hours, if I would then always be notified that someone clicked for personal **service it would disturb the customer and me**. The customer I'm with at that moment would then not receive the best service."* (Pete (36-45), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

A concern that reoccurred throughout the interviews in both markets was how it would work if there were several customers clicking at the same time and requesting personal service. From the interviews of many customers the need for some sort of queuing system emerged.

*"How would that work if there are **ten people clicking at the same time?** "* (Jo (46-55), Holly (18-25) and Ben (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

*"If I knew **how long I would have to wait** that would be good."* (Ann (45-55), Customer IKEA Cardiff)

*"**Here in Sweden we like to wait for our turn and put ourselves in a queue**. Sometimes a long tail of people follows an employee to wait for their turn. If the button would be in the store you can queue there, but otherwise how do employees know whose turn it is?"* (Daniel (36-45) & Natalia (26-35), Customers IKEA Malmö)

Additionally customers were worried about not being able to cancel the service they requested in case they decide that they do not need it any longer. This concern has been addressed several times, however only during interviews at IKEA Malmö. Still, it is relevant for this study, as an option to cancel the requested service would help the employees to not approach customers who are not asking for service anymore.

*"I would want **to be able to cancel it** in case I need to leave or I don't need the service anymore."* (Daniel (36-45) & Natalia (26-35), Customers IKEA Malmö)

Another concern, which was found, is that some customers see a barrier in first needing to download the app before they can use the click for service. Customers said that they would only use it through the app if they already had the app; otherwise they would use it on a tablet in-store.

*"If I already had the app, I would use it. But **getting me to get the app is the hard part.**"* (Julie & Frederik (18-25), Customers IKEA Malmö)

A concern, which has been in the foreground for customers and employees in several interviews, is the amount of staff that would be needed for the implementation of an SST tool such as the click for service. A customer in Malmö also stated the possibility that customers get more inclined to ask questions if they would know the personal service would be that easy to access.

*"The tool would be good but we would **need an adequate amount of staff** and maybe even some co-workers only being responsible for this."* (Pete (36-45), Employee IKEA Cardiff)

*"Through the app people would be inclined to ask more questions. There would be more staff needed I guess. **The minute you put it in front of the customer they will start using it to a great extent.**"* (Mark & Sinead (26-35), Customers IKEA Cardiff)

As already elaborated in the literature review, value creation is crucial for the customer experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and the process of receiving value from the usage of resources (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014). Vargo & Lusch (2004) say that the customer plays a key role in the value creation process; value is not created until the service is used (Vargo & Lusch, 2007) and that value is always co-created. The findings in this part support this and have shown the relevance of co-creation. Furthermore, it became apparent that all mentioned aspects of co-creation could lead to an enhanced customer experience and create value for both, customer and service staff.

### 4.3.5    Interim conclusion

This section of the *findings and analysis* chapter shows the findings that were classified to belong to the co-creation part of the preliminary framework. It includes insights in relation to *the interaction with staff*, *the interaction with staff and technology*, as well as *benefits* and *concerns of SST usage*. A summary of all findings can be found in table 4.

### 4.4    Chapter summary

Table 4 summarizes the findings conducted from the customer interviews, employee interviews, participant observations and employee shadowing in both markets (IKEA Malmö and IKEA Cardiff). It provides an overview of the main findings according to the categories defined in the preliminary framework.

| Findings | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Retailer | Customer | Co-creation |
| IKEA Malmö | *Use of technology*<br>• Traditional personal service offerings<br><br>*Store layout*<br>• Traditional living room department layout (structured and open)<br>• Staff is visible | • Asking for help can be a barrier<br>• Some customers don't like to be directly approached | *Interactions with staff and technology*<br>• Big size of the store as reason for click for service |
| IKEA Cardiff | *Use of technology*<br>• Facilitation of personal service through mobile technology<br>• Testing mobile co-worker app on tablets<br>• Tablet enhances employee's job<br>• Closest example of SST to facilitate personal service<br><br>*Store layout*<br>• New living room department concept: Room for living<br>• Built-in showrooms with ceilings, cozy, real-life conceptualization<br>• Customers get comfortable there and rest from their shopping trip<br>• More difficult to access personal service due to decreased staff visibility<br>• ICSS result shows *staff availability* as source of dissatisfaction<br><br>*Convenience through technology*<br>• Convenience through the mobile co-worker app, no need to go back and forth to a service desk<br>• Employees can make use of other functions and apps (such as size converter and reminder) | *Convenience through technology*<br>• Convenience enhanced through tablet usage<br>• Customers can see product range directly on the tablet | *Interactions with staff and technology*<br>• New room for living concept and decreased visibility as reason for click for service |

| Both markets | Self-service retailer classification | Importance of technology | Interactions with staff |
|---|---|---|---|
| | • IKEA typical walkway classifies IKEA as self-service retailer<br>• Most aspects in the store are designed to encourage customers to take action themselves<br>• Customers are expected the assemble the furniture themselves<br>• Employees and customers classify IKEA as self-service retailer<br>• IKEA employees recognize the need for providing more service<br>• Some departments have a higher need for advisory services, due to the product's complexity, price and increased product involvement | • Customers carry mobile devices with them in the store<br>• Customers take pictures from products (for inspiration or to find the location in the warehouse)<br>• Customers look up reason for store visit online before coming to the store<br>• All customers stated frequent or constant mobile device usage<br>• Customers come to the store to see product in real-life<br><br>*Convenience through technology*<br>• Pay for products in department or usage of SST (e.g. drawing the wardrobe on a PC)<br><br>*Reduce perceived risk*<br>• Customers ask what there best value for money is<br>• Customers want high amount of advice on product with high involvement<br>• Customers ask employees to get reassurance for their buy<br><br>**Service requests:**<br>*a. Product information* (Size, color, measurements)<br><br>*b. Product availability* (availability in stock/on shelve, when product ranges arrive in-store)<br><br>*c. Procedures* (How to pick up the product, general buying process of products) | *Interactions with staff*<br>• Service experience always positive<br>• Helpful and courteous staff<br>• Customers don't have to think<br>• Employees try to approach customers as much as they can<br><br>*Sources of frustration*<br>• Availability and accessibility of staff<br>• Waiting time at service desks<br>• Customers walk off or approach a member of staff in a different department<br><br>*Interactions with staff an technology*<br>• Customers and employees co-creating the service experience through tablet usage (increased efficiency)<br>• SST usage alone not satisfying (need for personal service, e.g. for designing the wardrobe)<br>• Customers want help and advice, especially in certain departments (beds, mattresses, wardrobes, kitchens)<br><br>*Benefits of SST usage (click for service)*<br>• Customers would be served quicker, saves time for customers and employees<br>• Customers ideally are provided with knowledge in requested department<br>• Employees don't have to approach customers several times<br>• Increase of active selling |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *d. Location* (Where to find products/product ranges, where to park the car)<br><br>*e. Opinion* (opinion needed from salesperson in regard to a specific product or decoration, whether they believe certain products match each other, whether the size is right, confirmation that what they buy is nice)<br><br>*f. Customization* (mix and match products, designing wardrobes according to own preferences)<br><br>*g. Advisory* (e.g. which mattress suits best, derived from desire to reduce the perceived risk, level of advisory depends on department)<br><br>*h. Extra services* (questions about home delivery, guarantees and return policies, willingness to pay for it if it increases convenience) | • Creates streamline experience<br>• Extra staff needed for SST (click for personal service), would be beneficial for customers and employees<br>• Increased accessibility of staff<br><br>*Concerns of SST usage (click for service)*<br>• Not many customers use the app yet<br>• Customers might get frustrated if they don't know about click for service and see others being served first<br>• Employees don't know how to react if they are in a service encounter if the request comes<br>• Employees are concerned it might make their job more stressful<br>• Need for a queuing system for the click for service<br>• Want to know when they are approached by a service staff<br>• Click for service raises expectations<br>• Need for being able to cancel the service request<br>• Barrier of downloading the app<br>• Amount of staff needed |

*Table 4: Summarized findings*

# 5        Discussion

This chapter shows how the previously outlined findings and analysis contribute to meet the two objectives which were set for this study and then proceeds by discussing the research question, which the study poses: *What are customer's personal service requests in self-service retail stores and to what extent can they be facilitated with self-service technologies?*

## 5.1        Personal service request categories

This part of the chapter relates back to the first objective of this study and discusses it in relation to the findings stated in the chapter above. The first objective of this study has been: *Identifying and categorizing customer's personal service requests in self-service retail stores.* To start, the preliminary framework included the service request categories, which were defined by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996). However, as stated in the theoretical framework, due to the age of the study, there is a need to reevaluate and validate the categories. This study was guided by their findings however, the abductive approach of this study provided enough room for or additional categories, detached from the findings by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) to emerge. Concerning the service request categories, the data is broadly consistent with the findings from Baron, Harris and Davies (1996), however in contrast to their findings some categories were not found to be relevant, while additional new categories emerged.

The categories *product information* and *product availability* are consistent with the categories found by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) and have therefore been named identically. However, they also stated *product price* and *product usage* as important product-related categories. This study however has not found any requests regarding the category of product price during the data collection. This can be explained by the fact that this study concentrates on in-store departments only and did not consider the checkout area or the restaurant. According to Baron, Harris and Davies (1996, p.82) the category of product usage includes "Kitchen layout advice; details on bathroom fitments; how to fit furniture together; how to operate a desk chair; advice on floor coverings; what else to buy with flooring; how to fold a table; how to unclip picture frames". Those specifications have also been found in this study, however, they have been assigned to different categories. The example of 'kitchen layout advice' thus belongs in a new category namely, *advisory* and the other specifications have been classified as *procedures* by this study.

Baron, Harris and Davies (1996, p.82) also defined *procedures* as a category in their study, however for them it includes "How to collect items; how to order and purchase; about collecting by car; furniture ordering procedures; how to order a bed; payment systems, cash or cheque; enquiry about delivery date; where to pay; delivery times for suites" and no product-related procedures customers ask about. Another category that was renamed by the researchers is the category Baron, Harris and Davies (1996, p.82) defined as *directions*. For them it includes "product displays, e.g. tables and chairs, cushions, light-shades, shoe racks, Christmas tree decorations, shelving, etc. pick-up points, restaurant, yellow bags to carry goods". This study however found that customers not only ask about how to get to a certain point in the store, but also about the location of certain items in store. Both elements are closely related, however this study found that the name for the category should rather be *location,* as most requests concerned questions about where things are, rather than asking for directions how to get there.

Furthermore, Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) found the categories of *physical assistance* and *others* to be relevant. The category of physical assistance however has not been validated by the findings of this study. This might be due to the fact that the research only comprised the different store departments while checkout area, restaurant and car park have not been included in this study. The category of *others* for Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) contained service request regarding "returns, complaints and moans", which were not found relevant from the findings of this study. However, this again can be due to the aforementioned narrowed focus of this study. Baron, Harris and Davies (1996), to the researchers knowledge, is the only study to define service request categories for a self-service retailer the results of this study therefore add new categories to their knowledge.

*Table 5: Service request categories*

| Service request category | Specification |
|---|---|
| Product information | Size, color, measurements |
| Product availability | Availability in stock/on shelve, when product ranges arrive in-store |
| Procedures | How to pick up the product, general buying process of products |
| Location | Where to find products/product ranges, where to park the car |
| Opinion | Opinion needed from salesperson in regard to a specific product or decoration, whether they believe certain products match each other, whether the size is right, confirmation that what they buy is nice |
| Customization | Mix and match products, designing wardrobes according to own preferences |
| Advisory | Derived from desire to reduce the perceived risk, desire to hear employee's opinion, level of advisory depends on department |
| Extra services | Questions about home delivery, guarantees and return policies, willingness to pay for it if it increases convenience |

The categories which emerged from the research and were added to the list of service request categories are *customization*, *opinion*, *advisory* and *extra services* (table 5). *Extra services* is slightly linked to the *procedures* category of Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) as it includes service requests about delivery, which is also included in the category of *extra services* introduced by in this study (see table 5). *Customization* has been found as a new important category, as customers during the observations and shadowing frequently asked about whether they can mix and match products, or about designing a wardrobe to their own preferences. *Opinion* has also been found as a new category of personal service requests, which has been seen throughout the methods as a reoccurring theme. As elaborated in the preceding chapter, the category of opinion comprises of situations in which customers ask a member of service staff for their opinion regarding certain aspects (see table 5). Another new category, which was stated in the findings, as a reoccurring theme is the category of *advisory*. *Advisory* derived from customers intends to reduce their perceived risk and to make sure customers get the best value for their money. As far as the researchers know, this study is the first to define the category of advisory as an important service request for self-service retailers.

## 5.2 SST to facilitate personal customer service

This part of the discussion elaborates the findings and analysis which contribute to answering the study's second objective: *Analyzing the extent to which self-service retailers can utilize SSTs to facilitate personal customer service in-store.*

Iterating between the findings and analysis, the research revealed that despite some existing concerns among customers and employees, a self-service technology allowing customers to request personal service in-store would value to the customer and retailer simultaneously. This is underlined by benefits of SST usage, which the research uncovered to include: *increased staff availability and accessibility, customers decreased need to actively search for staff, decrease need of starting a conversation, increased efficiency for customers and employees* and *creating a streamline experience for the customer.* On a more general level, this shows that SSTs are in fact able to facilitate personal service in a self-service environment. The extent to which these SSTs can facilitate personal service are further discussed later in this chapter. One of the main findings of this study is the importance of advisory, not only as a service request category itself, but also throughout all service requests. However, the importance of advisory depends on the level of advisory customers expect from a specific service request. More precisely, the level of advisory is dependent upon various criteria, which reoccurred throughout the findings and have been connected to relevant concepts from the topics of *customer experience*, *service quality* and *value creation,* which in turn have been presented in the literature review and applied in the theoretical framework.

### 5.2.1 Criteria to establish the level of advisory

The theoretical concepts which were used in order to define the level of advisory needed for each service request category are *inspiring confidence* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996), *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006), *reliability* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996) and *search for independency* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006).

*Inspiring confidence* - an important part of the service quality model which Dabholkar et al. (1996) developed, is a central concept to determine the level of advisory customers need in each service request. It entails customer's need for reassurance or search for opinion which has been defined as relevant throughout the findings and analysis. If customers expect a high amount of reassurance or opinion for the request they raise, the level of advisory is high as personal contact to a member of staff is indispensable for this concept (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996).

The same applies to the concept of *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006), which has been seen to be relevant in the findings and analysis. The findings highlighted that in order to satisfy the desire to reduce perceived risk, customers demand to engage in personal service encounters. Therefore, if the *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006) is high, the level of advisory needed is high as well.

*Reliability* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996), which entails how trustworthy and reliable a service encounter is, has been set as another criteria to evaluate the level of advisory. If customers, in order to satisfyingly meet their service request, expect a high amount of *reliability*, the level of advisory needed is accordingly high. For example, if a customer wishes to buy a new mattress and likes to know which one is the best for him or her, he or she needs to find the statements made by the service staff reliable in order to have a positive service experience.

*Search for independency* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006), has been seen relevant in the findings as customers said they enjoy the self-service concepts and do not like or want to be approached. Consequently, if customers aim for a high amount of independency within their service request, the level of advisory needed from a member of staff is low.

Table 6 summarizes the level of the criterion in relation to the level of advisory for all criteria explained in this section.

*Table 6: Advisory criteria Summary*

| Advisory criteria Summary | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Criterion** | **Level of criterion** | **Level of Advisory** |
| **Inspiring Confidence** | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| **Desire to reduce perceived risk** | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| **Reliability** | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| **Search for independency** | ↑ | ↓ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↑ |

### 5.2.2 Criteria to establish the level of SST

Importantly, the term "level of SST" needs to be clarified to avoid misunderstandings. The term level of SST describes the extent to which a service request category and more specifically the personal service which customers demand can be facilitated with SST. It does not describe the amount of SST that should be utilized in each service category, but rather reveals how effectively SST can be utilized in this category to facilitate the respective request.

Considering this, the theoretical concepts used to define the criteria which are employed to assess the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate each service request category are: *convenience* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Meuter et al., 2000; Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006), *technology readiness* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Meuter et al., 2000; Zhu et al., 2007;), *desire for autonomy* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006; Oh, Jeong & Baloglu, 2013), *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006) and *simplicity* as well as *duration*. These concepts derive from the research fields of *customer experience*, *service quality and SST*, which have been outlined in the literature review.

In their service quality model, (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996) defined convenience of service experience as an important influencer of customer's shopping experience. Meuter et al. (2000) found in their study that customers perceive *convenience* as one of the main advantages of SST utilizing SST. This is consistent with the findings of this study that show that the use of SST has the ability to increase customer's convenience while shopping. Moreover, Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) advance that *convenience* influences customer's decision regarding the use of SST or personal service. All three of these concepts are incorporated in the *convenience* criteria used to assess the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate the service request categories.

*Technology readiness* influences customers decision to use SST or personal service depending on the proper functioning SST (Zhu et al., 2007). However, this criterion also entails the concept of *reliability* which has been developed by Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) and which has already been outlined as a criterion for the level of advisory. However, reliability can also indicate if a service category can be facilitated with SST, and to what extent. If customers were to use SST to facilitate certain service requests, the SST needs to be reliable and the information it provides must be accurate, which consequently refers back to its readiness. As already identified in the literature, technology failure is one of the main drawbacks of the use of SST (Meuter et al., 2000).

*Desire for autonomy* has been found to have a significant influence on wheatear customers decide to use SST or rather engage in personal service to solve their request (Oh, Jeong & Baloglu, 2013). This criteria is closely related to the concept of *search for independency,* introduced by Ponder, Lueg & Williams, (2006) and explained in the previous criteria for advisory above, which is also important for this criteria. As seen in the findings, some customers might perceive an inertia to approach a member of service staff. This can be due to various different reasons, such as the staff being busy, or the customer not feeling comfortable approaching people. In this case, SSTs can help to facilitate requests without personal interaction. Furthermore, solving a problem without having to ask for help or providing the answer to a question via self-service technologies satisfies the customer's desire for autonomy, as they are able to help themselves.

Another criteria which is relevant in order to assess the level to which the service request categories can be facilitated with SST, is the *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006). Despite being a significant criteria when evaluating the level of advisory, this concept is also of major importance to assess the extent to which a service request category can be facilitated with SST. In fact, the research indicated that high involvement products, which are usually more expensive, trigger a higher need to reduce the perceived risk among customers. This results in higher demand for personal opinions and advisory among customers. Due to the fact that the *technological readiness* of SST is still low in regard to advisory and opinion requests (as SST currently fails to fulfill such complex demands in a reliable and satisfying manner), it causes the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate these requests to be low.

The criterion of *simplicity* is one that was developed by this study through the insights that were gathered. *Simplicity* refers to how simple or in fact complex a service request is. Simple requests are requests that are highly standardized and reoccur often. In that sense they are almost like FAQ's. Complex service request on the other hand are the opposite, they differentiate and vary from previous questions and often involve opinion or advisory elements. The *simplicity* criteria often effects the *duration* of the service interaction as simple request can usually be answered over a shorter period than more complex ones. In a similar fashion, *simplicity* also affects the concept of *technological readiness*, which has previously been outlined. Currently, SSTs are well able to

handle frequently reoccurring requests with a high level of *simplicity* in a reliable manner but often fail to provide complex, personalized and varying requests.

The last criterion deployed to assess to what extent SST can be utilized to facilitate personal service request is d*uration*. This concept has been developed through the findings, which suggest that the longer the personal service encounter takes, the more advisory is requested and the higher need for reinsurance. Therefore, opinions, as outlined above, are two functions which SST currently fails to provide in a reliable manner. Consequently, it can be argued that the longer the need for personal service, the lower the level of SSTs that can be utilized to facilitate it. Conversely, shorter service encounters usually also have a higher level of *simplicity* thus causing the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate shorter request to be higher. Table 7 summarizes the level of criterion in relation to the level of SST for all criteria explained in this section.

*Table 7: SST criteria Summary*

| SST criteria Summary | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Criterion** | **Level of criterion** | **Level of SST** |
| Convenience | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| Technology Readiness | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| Desire for autonomy | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| Desire to reduce perceived risk | ↑ | ↓ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↑ |
| Simplicity | ↑ | ↑ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| Duration | ↑ | ↓ |
| | → | → |
| | ↓ | ↑ |

### 5.2.3    Service request categories and their level of advisory

This section discusses the extent to which customers demand advisory in the service request categories, which were identified in the findings. Table 8 shows the level of advisory for each service request category. An arrow pointing down indicates a low level of advisory needed for the category, while an arrow pointing up states a high level of advisory needed for the category. Some categories have horizontal arrows, which means that in these categories a medium amount of advisory is needed

or that the amount of advisory is dependent upon the specific request. Below, the level of advisory for each service request category will be stated and explained.

*Table 8: Service request categories and their level of Advisory and SST*

| Service request category | Specification | Level of Advisory | Level of SST |
|---|---|---|---|
| Product information | Size, color, measurements | ↓ | ↑ |
| Product availability | Availability in stock/on shelve, when product ranges arrive in-store | ↓ | ↑ |
| Procedures | How to pick up the product, general buying process of products | → | → |
| Location | Where to find products/product ranges, where to park the car | ↓ | ↑ |
| Opinion | Opinion needed from salesperson in regard to a specific product or decoration, whether they believe certain products match each other, whether the size is right, confirmation that what they buy is nice | ↑ | ↓ |
| Customization | Mix and match products, designing wardrobes according to own preferences | → | → |
| Advisory | Derived from desire to reduce the perceived risk, desire to hear employee's opinion, level of advisory depends on department | ↑ | ↓ |
| Extra services | Questions about home delivery, guarantees and return policies, willingness to pay for it if it increases convenience | → | → |

**Product information**

In regard to the criteria, which were chosen to be used in order to identify the level of advisory for each category, the service request category of *product information* has been found to have a low level of advisory needed. The findings of this study showed no suggestion, that *inspiring confidence* is an important factor for customers when asking about product information. The same applies to the *desire to reduce perceived risk*, which also has not been seen to be relevant for this service request category. *Reliability* however, has been seen to be important, as the information needed about certain products needs to be correct. However, no findings have indicated that this information needs to be provided by a member of service staff and cannot be provided by other means. *Search for independency* has been explored in the findings in relation to this category, as customers stated that they try to answer the questions themselves before asking for help, e.g. trying to find the right size of the product or trying to find a different colored product on a shelve. Therefore, the product information category has been evaluated to require a low level of advisory, as no findings emerged suggesting an explicit need for a member of staff to be involved in order to satisfy service request category.

### Product availability

This service request category has been assessed to require a low amount of advisory based on the findings, as well as on the criteria, which were established above. Similar to the category of product information, the findings do not show any indications of *inspiring confidence* or the *desire to reduce perceived risk*. *Reliability* as for the product information category is of importance to the extent that the data provided needs to be accurate and trustworthy. However no indications have emerged from the findings that customers demand a salesperson to provide this information. However, the findings do show that in the category of product availability the *search for independency* is high. If looking for a product, customers first tried to locate it themselves, before addressing a member of staff. Therefore, the level of advisory demanded in the *product availability* category is low.

### Procedures

Procedures have been defined as a service request category with a medium level of advisory required. As for the criteria of *inspiring confidence*, it depends on the request raised by the customer. For example, one request which was stated in the findings concerned the question of where to collect a certain product, directly in the store, or in the warehouse. This request is low in *inspiring confidence*, as no reassurance or opinion from a member of sales staff is needed for the request. However, another finding was that customers like to approach a member of service staff about the buying process of certain products. They stated that the information is given on product tags, however they perceived the information as too complicated and liked to receive reassurance regarding the buying process. This request would therefore be high in *inspiring confidence*. The concept of *desire to reduce perceived risk* has been seen of medium importance for this category as well. Moreover, the findings outlined that customers approach salespersons with the aim to *reduce perceived risk* regarding mistakes that can be made during the buying process. Similar to the desire to reduce perceived risk, *reliability* is of medium importance in this category. Of course, the information given to the customer needs to be correct and trustworthy, however the product involvement when asking about a procedure is rather low. In terms of s*earch for independency*, the category has been evaluated with a medium amount. The findings suggest that customers for some of the requests stated in the findings, tried to access the information themselves first before approaching a salesperson, for example when they looked at the product tag first and only then decided to approach a member of staff.

### Location

For the location service request category low level of advisory has been defined. This is due to the fact that the criteria for the level of advisory have been found to be low for this request category. Similar to the *product information* and *product availability* category, *inspiring confidence* and the *desire to reduce perceived risk* are both low for in this category. Service requests in this category concern the location of products or the location of other items in the store. The provided information does not require customer specific advisory as the demanded information is of rather mechanical nature. *Reliability* in this category has been found to be important, as the information given needs to be correct and trustworthy. However, none of the findings reveal that a member of staff is indispensable for this request. The criteria of *search for independency* is high for this category, as customers stated that if they don't know the location of the product or place they need, they first try to find it themselves before they approach someone and ask.

### *Opinion*

This service request category has been found to have a high level of advisory demanded by customers as the overview below, outlining all advisory and SST levels reveals. The first criteria of *inspiring confidence* has been identified through the findings as significant, because customers asked employees for their opinion in order to get reassurance that the product they bought is nice or that it suits a other products. This reassurance from a salesperson ensured them to make the right decision regarding a product. This also goes hand in hand with the *desire to reduce perceived risk*. Customers for example were seen asking salespersons about their opinion regarding a certain product and if they themselves would buy it. Especially for products with a higher involvement in terms of price the desire to reduce perceived risk has been found to be vital. *Reliability* in this category is also highly needed, as customers when asking employees about their opinion need to trust in what they say in order to experience a good service quality and a satisfying answer to their request for opinion. The criterion of *search for independency* is low for in this category, as customers are actively seeking the opinion from a member of sales staff. This category comprises a necessity for the involvement of a member of sales staff and has therefore been assessed with a high level of advisory.

### *Customization*

Customization has been assessed as a category where a medium level of advisory is expected from customers. *Customization* encompasses requests regarding designing products according to customer's wishes, or about the possibility to mix and match certain products. In terms of *inspiring confidence*, the criteria has been seen to be of medium importance for this category. For some requests customers just demanded information about whether they can mix and match products. For others customers actually requested the advice of a member of staff in terms of how to customize it best. The criteria of *desire to reduce perceived risk* has also been found to be of medium relevance for this category. Similar to the first criteria, it depends on the request itself. Customers stated that in some cases where they were designing a product themselves on a PC according to their own wishes, they at some point needed the advice of a salesperson in order to lower the risk of making a mistake in the customization process. The amount of *reliability* in relation to customer's demand for this category has been found to be high for all requests in this category, as the information given provided customers with an indication whether or not the customization is possible. Additionally, customer's *search for independency* in this category has been evaluated to be on a medium level. Customers stated, that they tried the customization themselves first before approaching a salesperson, however in order to satisfyingly meet the request, a member of staff was needed. For some requests that only involved the question of whether or not the products can be mixed and matched, the need for a member of sales staff could not be seen however.

### *Advisory*

The service request category of advisory has been evaluated to be high in the level of advisory demanded by customers, as the overview below outlines. This is due to the fact that this category is concerned with advisory which customers demand itself. The requests for advisory have especially been relevant for products with a high involvement in terms of price (e.g. mattresses). In terms of *inspiring confidence*, customers tried to receive advice on the product they want to buy in order to obtain reassurance that the product is right for them and that they receive the best value for their money. As the findings have shown, customers felt more confident with their buying decision after receiving advice from a salesperson. The same applies to the criteria of *desire to reduce perceived*

*risk*. The findings show that in order to reduce their perceived risk in the buying process, customers engage in service encounters. The r*eliability* criteria can also be seen as an essential factor in this category, as customers need to trust and rely on the statements made by employees in order to receive a positive service experience and to satisfy their request for advisory. In contrast to that, the *search for independency* in this category has been seen to be low from the findings presented and analyzed in the previous chapter. In order to obtain the advisory customers demand, they were found to always engage with a member of sales staff. Therefore, the personal interaction with an employee is crucial in this service request category and the level of advisory demanded is high.

### *Extra services*

For the service request category extra services, the findings again show that it depends on the customer and the specific request whether a high level of advisory is needed from a salesperson or not. Some of the requests in this category only include questions in regard to mechanical information; such as if there is a delivery option for the products that can be booked. Other requests seen in the findings however were concerned with extra service, which involve an employee. The importance of *inspiring confidence* has been seen as low in this category, as the findings did not indicate any need for reassurance or opinion. This also applies for the *desire to reduce perceived risk*, which has also not been relevant for this category. Instead r*eliability* has been found to be of medium importance in this category, as the findings showed that it depends on the request itself and whether it only required plain information in regard to a certain service, or if the service involved a member of staff (e.g. assembly), where customers need to trust the service provided. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the *search for independency* is low in this category. In fact, no tendency has emerged through the findings that customers tried to solve their request themselves before approaching a member of staff.

### 5.2.4    Service request categories and their level of SST

Similar to the previously discussed level of advisory, which customers demand in each service request category, this section discusses the extent to which each service request category can be facilitated with self-service technologies. The table above outlines the level of SST specific to each service request category based on an arrow indicating that requests can only be facilitated with SST to a low extent via down pointing arrow. Conversely, an arrow pointing up indicates that this service request category can be facilitated with SST to a high extent, while a horizontal arrow represents a medium level of SST to facilitate the category. The extent to which each service request category can be facilitated with SST is discussed and explained accordingly.

### *Product information*

In light of the previously outlined criteria which are used to determine to what extent SSTs can be utilized to facilitate the service requests within a category, product information has been determined to have a high level of SST. This can be seen in table 8. The findings have shown that this category mainly receives simple requests such as size and measurable specifications of a product that can be answered quickly. Hence, the *simplicity* is high, and *duration* of the interaction is very short in this category. Due to the high *simplicity* of the request, SST would currently be able to provide the needed information in a reliable and correct manner, thus a high level of *technology readiness* has been assigned for this category. In terms *desire for autonomy* the findings have revealed that customers try to help themselves first, for example by finding the right size or color themselves, before seeking salesperson's assistance. Moreover, the findings did not show that customers *desire to reduce*

*perceive risk* in this category. Considering this, it does not make a difference if the information is provided by salespersons or via SSTs, but it can be argued that the *convenience* for customers can be increased by utilizing SSTs in this category. This is because customers can access the information themselves without having to find and approach an employee first, which the findings have discovered to be a major source of frustration. Consequently, this category could be facilitated with a high level of SST.

### Product availability

This service request category has similar characteristics as the previously discussed product information category, causing the *simplicity* to be high and the *duration* of the service encounter to be short also. Due to this, and the high *technology readiness* of SST for requests with a high *simplicity*, facilitating the product availability category with SST would increase the *convenience* for customers. In fact, customers would not have to find salespersons and wait for them to look up the availability of a product, but could access the information themselves immediately. As discussed in the previous advisory section, *the desire to reduce perceived risk* did not emerge from the findings, however, the findings did uncover that if customers look for a product, they first try to find it themselves before contacting a salesperson. This indicates that their *desire for autonomy* is high in this category. Considering this, product availability could be facilitated with SSTs to a high extent.

### Procedures

Considering the following criteria, procedures could be facilitated with a medium level of advisory as depicted in table 8. As previously discussed during the determination of the level of advisory, customer's *desire to reduce perceived risk* is medium high in this category as it depends on the individual and the type request. The empirical data has shown that some customers wanted to reduce the perceive risk of making a mistake concerning the purchasing process and thus contacted a salesperson. Others however, were confident enough to interpret the data provided on the product tags themselves. Considering that customers did both the *desire for autonomy* has been ranked on a medium level also. In terms of *simplicity,* procedures are considered to be in-between simple and complex as it depends once again on the type of request, which also leads to the fact that the *duration* of the service encounters could not be classified as either long or short, but was assessed to be on a medium level as well. In fact, the findings showed that some requests were solved quickly while others involved additional actions, like printing a receipt to be able to pick up the product later, and therefore took longer. It is similar in the case for *convenience*, as some requests like paying for a product in a department right away required salespersons assistance, while questions regarding the general purchasing process could be facilitated quite easily via SSTs. Hence, if the request could be facilitated with SST, which level of technology readiness has been assessed to be mediocre in this category, it would increase the convenience for the customer. However, if this would not possible customers would become frustrated and it would be more convenient to contact a salesperson right away.

### Location

The service request category location could be facilitated with a high amount of SSTs, this is due to the following reasons. Just like for product information and product availability, the requests in this category are quite simple, as the range of requests is limited to location specific questions only. Hence, the level of *simplicity* is low and the *duration* of the service encounter is short. Similar to the

aforementioned categories, the findings for this category did not reveal any information that customers *desire to reduce perceived risk.* Similar to the product availability category, customers try to find products themselves before approach employees to ask where to find them. Hence the *desire for autonomy* has been evaluated high in this category. Due to the *simplicity* and the fact that location requests are already being facilitated with SSTs, such as Google maps for example, the *technology readiness* of SST has been assessed to be high. In light of the fact that customers already utilize location services to access location information themselves, SST is almost expected in this category and would increase the *convenience* whilst shopping dramatically, as the empirical findings showed that this is one of the most frequently asked questions among customers.

## *Opinion*

Compared to the location category, the category opinion is quite different. Not only has the extent to which this category could be facilitated by SST has been assessed to be low (as outlined in table 8), as almost all criteria show opposite results. The findings outlined that as the name of the category suggests, customers frequently ask employees for their opinion in this category, which consequently shows their high *desire to reduce perceived risk.* In regard to *simplicity* this criteria has been found to be low as the requests are highly personalized in this category, and customers were often seen asking for personal opinions of salespersons to verify their sense of taste. Moreover, due to the complex nature of these requests, the findings showed that the *duration* of the service encounter is often quite long. Considering the complex and personal nature of the requests, the *technology readiness* of SST in this category has been evaluated to be low. In fact, the findings show that customers actively seek the opinion of the salesperson, which causes the *desire for autonomy* to be low, as previously outlined when the level of advisory was established. In this category the *convenience* of using SSTs has not been given, as customers look for personal interactions and personal opinions specifically.

## *Customization*

The *customization* category has been evaluated to be able to be facilitated with SSTs to a certain extent but not fully. Unlike product information, product availability, and location for example, thus this category has been assigned a medium level of SST (see table 8). In this category, many of the criteria have been scored on a medium level as it often depends greatly on the individual request that customers have. These requests may include anything from simple questions regarding the combinability of certain products, to more complex requests where customers seek advice on how to customize certain products according to their ideas and perceptions. Consequently, the criteria *simplicity, duration, technology readiness, convenience, desire for autonomy* and *desire to reduce perceived risk* have all been evaluated as mediocre. Due to the different customization requests, the *simplicity* has been assigned to be medium high, which then caused the *duration* of the service interactions to be either short, if the *simplicity* is high or long if the *simplicity* of the request is low. *Convenience* and *technology readiness* are effected by the *simplicity* in a similar manner, as simple service requests can be facilitated with SSTs reliably which would increase the convenience for the customer. If the service request is more complex and requires more time however, the *technology readiness* and the *convenience* of utilizing SST to facilitate these kinds of requests drop to lower levels. The research showed that customers first tried to customize themselves before approaching a salesperson for help, however satisfying results were only obtained when a staff member was present. Therefore, *desire for autonomy has* been assigned a medium factor as well. Finally, the *desire to reduce perceived risk* has been found to be medium high as it depends on the type of requests. If the customer only needed information, the *desire to reduce perceived risk* was low, when customers asked

for advice concerning the customization of a product according to their ideas; the *desire to reduce perceived risk* was quite high however.

*Advisory*

Due to the fact that *advisory* comprises similar characteristics as the *opinion* category discussed before, the level of SST with which it could be facilitated has been defined to be low as well. To start the *desire to reduce perceived risk* has been assessed as high, particularly concerning products where the involvement is high - which is usually linked to an increased price. The findings revealed that customers demanded advisory from employees and reassured them that the product fit their needs and was the best value for money. Due to the wide range of advisory requests identified in the findings, and the personalized nature of the requests, the *simplicity* has been evaluated as low. Equal to the opinion category, the complexity caused the *duration* of the service encounters to be long. In fact, the research showed that the service encounters concerning advisory requests take longer than in any other category. Once again, SSTs are not yet advanced enough to deliver the same complex customer service as a salesperson and therefore the *technology readiness* has been defined as low. However, the research did reveal that due to the long duration of service encounters, it could be beneficial to introduce queuing systems in departments that offer products, which trigger advisory requests. The queuing systems could be facilitated with SST to a large extent, as the technology readiness of SSTs is quite high already for such services. As outlined in the advisory section, the criteria *desire for autonomy* has been found to be low as customers actively search for advisory from salespersons in this category. Just as discussed in the service requests concerning opinion, the level of *convenience* when using SSTs to facilitate this category would be almost none existing as customers specifically look for personal advisory.

*Extra services*

In this category, the level of SST that could be utilized to facilitate the extra service request significantly depends on the type of request posed by the customers. Hence, the *simplicity* has been defined as mediocre and the *duration* as medium long. Simple questions concerning guarantees and return policies for example, could already be facilitated with SST in a reliable manner, as the *technology readiness* in of SST is already quite high in this aspect. Hence this would increase the *convenience* for the customer, while more complex request, like questions in regard to an additional product assemble services are difficult to facilitate with SSTs in a *reliable* manner as the *technology readiness of* SSTs is not advanced enough to deal with these complex and diversified request causing frustration rather than *convenience*. In light of the criteria, *desire for autonomy* and *desire to reduce perceived risk*, have not emerged from the findings, and thus are evaluated to be low. No tendency has been seen among customers that would suggest that they asked for reassurance, or confirmation, or tried to find the answers to their questions themselves before approaching a staff member.

## 5.3    Relationship between level of advisory and level of SST

As illustrated, this study has been able to assign each service request category a specific level of advisory which customer's demanded to be satisfied. Additionally, the distinct level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate the personal service in this category. Furthermore, the levels of advisory and SST depicted in the table above from the empirical findings, suggests that a relationship exists between the level of advisory demanded, and the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate personal service. The discussion previously confirmed the relationship between the service request categories

and the level of advisory on the one hand, and the relationship between the service request categories and the level of SST on the other hand, which can be seen in section 5.2. While both of these relationships have been established individually, figure 6 also suggest an existing relationship between the level of advisory customers expect regarding each service request category and the level of SST that could be utilized to facilitate this request. In order to visualize the relationship between the level of advisory customers demand in each service category and the level of SST that could be utilized to facilitate the personal service in the respective category, the following graph has been developed:

As portrayed in the graph, each service request category has been positioned according to its respective level of advisory and its respective level of SST. Consequently, the graph illustrates the suggested relationship between the level of advisory and the level of SST. More specifically, the individual levels of advisory and SST which have been previously established and discussed for each service request category, suggest that if the level of advisory in a service request category is high, the level of SST that could be utilized to facilitate the types of request within the category is low.

The same relationship can be seen the other way around, as the graph displays that each time the level of advisory demanded by customers is low, the level of SST that could be utilized to facilitate the personal service requests is high. This can for example be seen in the service request categories *product information, product availability* and *location.* Furthermore, the service request categories *customization, procedures* and *extra services* exemplify that if customers expect a medium level of advisory in their service request, the request can be facilitated with a medium amount of SST. Consequently, the data presented indicates that the level of advisory customer's demand, directly influences the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate the respective requests. More precisely, the graph illustrates that the higher the level of advisory that is demanded, the lower the level of SST that could be utilized to facilitate the service request and vice versa.
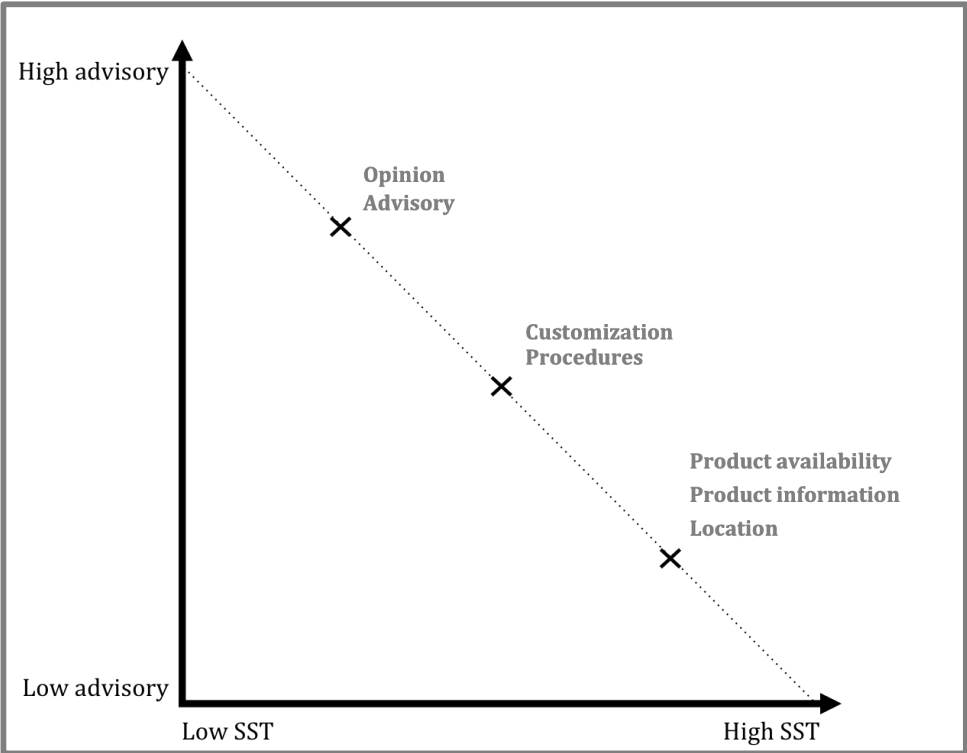


*Figure 6: Relationship between level of advisory and level of SST*

Despite the fact that all eight service request categories clearly outline the existence of a relationship between the level of advisory and the level of SST, the study at hand is unable to confirm this relationship due to the qualitative nature of the study. Hence, the empirical testing of the suggested relationship between the level of advisory customers demand and the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate the personal service in a specific category presents a further research venture for quantitative studies.

## 5.4　　Chapter summary

In the beginning of the discussion, the first objective of this study has been accomplished as customer's request regarding personal service have been identified and categorized. Despite the fact that this categorization has been undertaken based on the service request categories introduced by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996), new categories emerged from the findings and were added while others have been rejected. Opposed to this, the next step has been unexpected. Criteria to assess the level of advisory, which customers demand in regard to their personal service request and criteria to evaluate the level of SST then can be utilized to facilitate each service request category (table 8). While the aforementioned criteria have been established based on existing theoretical concepts, this study is the first to bundle them into criteria which have then been deployed to assess the level of advisory and level of SST in regard to personal service request categories. Following this logic, each of the identified request categories have been assigned with the respective level of advisory and SST, as can be seen in table 8 in section 5.2.

In light of this, the second research objective, *analyzing the extent to which self-service retailers can utilize SSTs to facilitate personal customer service in-store* has been fulfilled as well. The third part of the discussion explains the relationship between the level of advisory and the level of SST, which is illustrated in figure 6. As depicted in the graph, the personal service request categories demonstrate that the higher the level of advisory demanded in a category, the lower the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate each category. Therefore, this chapter does not only accomplish both research objectives, but also answered the research question, w*hat are customer's personal service requests in self-service retail stores and to what extent can they be facilitated with self-service technologies*.

# 6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify and categorize customer's personal service requests in self-service retail stores, analyze whether these categories can be facilitated with SST and if so, to what extent. Therefore, the research adopted a customer-centered approach according to (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014), even though the value that can be created from the findings benefits customers and retailers simultaneously. This study is positioned in a self-service environment, as self-service retailers are more likely to implement SSTs and usually provide personal customer service to a small extent. When considering existing research in the field, the focus is merely on fixed points of SST, such as information kiosks or self-service-checkouts (Lee, 2015). However, as this study focuses on customer's requests in regard to personal service, which can occur at any given location in the store, it is concerned with SST in terms of mobile devices so that the service request can be fulfilled anywhere in the store. However, not all customers might be willing to download an app to use the SST on their mobile device. Therefore, the option of an integrated tablet in-store was presented as an alternative. This chapter refers to the introduction (Chapter 1), as it shows the contributions that are made with this study. It additionally points out the limitations this research faces, as well as the suggestions for further research.

## 6.1 Contributions

This chapter presents the theoretical and practical contributions derived from this study. It relates back to the expected contributions stated in chapter 1, as well as introducing unexpected contributions, which emerged along the process of this research.

### 6.1.1 Theoretical contributions

Throughout this study, a service-dominant-logic point of view with a JTBD (job-to-be-done) focus according to (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014) has been applied. Their knowledge states that every customer engages in co-creation and comes into the process with a certain request, which then needs to be fulfilled either through co-creation with a member of staff, or through technology (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014). This study confirms the knowledge provided by (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014) as it has identified throughout the findings that customers in the stores have certain requests, which in a next step require interactions with staff or technology (see section 4.3). This study adds to the knowledge provided by (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014) by classifying those service requests into categories and identifying to what extent they can be facilitated through SST.

One of the findings which has not been expected from the preliminary framework and concepts used for this study was that the amount of personal service needed is strongly dependent on the level of advisory needed for a certain request. The *level of advisory* is therefore a contribution in itself as it emphasizes the relevance of considering the amount of advisory which customers demand, according to the kind of request they have. As can be seen in the discussion (section 5.2), various criteria were established in order to identify the level of advisory, which is demanded in each service request category. The agglomeration of those criteria contributes to the literature as it provides researchers with a guideline to define the level of advisory for each of the service request category mentioned above. This contribution accounts for the inductive part of the study, as the finding was not expected. However, each of the criteria identified evolves from a theoretical concept which has been stated in the preliminary framework (Chapter 3). These criteria are: *inspiring confidence* (Dabholkar, Thorpe

and Rentz, 1996), *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Murray, 1991), *reliability* (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996) and *search for independency* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006). Table 6 shows each of the established criteria and how it relates to the level of advisory.

The criteria of *inspiring confidence* and *reliability* originate from Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) and their service quality model. Both concepts have been included in the theoretical framework in order to identify customers' requests in regard to personal service. The findings (Chapter 4) show that both concepts are of high relevance, and the discussion shows how they can be used in order to identify the level of advisory needed for each of the identified service request categories (Chapter 5). This knowledge adds to the understanding of Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) in a way that their concepts, which they introduced as influencers of service quality, can also be used as criteria in order to identify the level advisory.

The *desire to reduce perceived risk* and the *search for independency* are introduced by Murray (1991) and Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006), respectively. Both researchers explain that their concepts influence customer's decision in regard to choosing personal service or SST. This study contributes to their knowledge as it identifies their concepts as criteria to assess the level of advisory for each service request category.

Additionally, criteria to evaluate the level of SST for each service request category were identified in the discussion (Chapter 5) in order to answer the second research objective. The collection of criteria identified for the level of SST can be seen as a theoretical contribution itself as it sheds light onto how the adequate level of SST that can be utilized for a certain service request category can be identified. The contribution was unexpected, and therefore displays an inductive part of this study. The criteria to assess the level of SST for each service request category are *convenience* (based on Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Meuter et al., 2000; Ponder, Lueg and Williams, 2006), *technology readiness* (based on Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Meuter et al., 2000; Zhu et al., 2007), *desire for autonomy* (based on Oh, Jeong & Baloglu, 2013; Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006), *desire to reduce perceived risk* (Murray, 1991), *simplicity* and *duration*. Table 7 shows each of the established criteria and how it relates to the level of SST.

The *convenience* criterion adds to the theoretical knowledge of Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) and Meuter et al. (2000). Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) state *convenience* as an important influencer of the service quality and customer's service experience. This study contributes to their knowledge, as it shows that *convenience* can also be used to define the adequate level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate a certain service request category. Furthermore, this study confirms the understanding provided by Meuter et al. (2000) that customers perceive *convenience* as one of the main advantages when using SST and the knowledge of Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) who state that convenience influences customer's decision in regard to SST or personal service.

The criterion of *technology readiness* entails multiple theoretical concepts, which this research contributes to. Frist of all, the study at hand confirms the knowledge provided by Zhu et al. (2007) who state that customer's decision whether to use SST or not depends on the readiness of the technology. Furthermore, as this criterion entails the concept of *reliability* by Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) it adds knowledge to the service quality model in a sense that reliability can also depend on the technological readiness of the SST the customer aims to use, which in a next step influences the service quality. The insight that technology failure is one of the main drawbacks for the use of SST (Meuter et al., 2000) can also be confirmed by this study.

*Desire for autonomy* has been defined as a criterion based on the knowledge Oh, Jeong and Baloglu, (2013) and Ponder, Lueg and Williams (2006) provide. Both state the influence the *desire for autonomy* (Oh, Jeong & Baloglu, 2013) and the *search for independency* (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006) have on customers' decision whether to use SST or personal service. This study confirms this through the insights derived from the findings (Chapter 4) that customers might perceive inertia to approach a member of staff and therefore rather engage in SST usage.

Additionally, the study at hand confirms the understanding provided by Murray (1991) and Ponder, Lueg & Williams (2006) who argue that customer's desire to reduce perceived risk influences whether they choose SST or personal service. Knowledge is added in a way that the criterion *desire to reduce perceived risk* influences the level of SST which can be used to facilitate the request.

The criteria *simplicity* and *duration* emerged from the findings and were identified to be relevant in order to establish the level of SST for certain service requests (see Chapter 5). Both criteria account for an inductive part of this research as they were found unexpectedly and do not build on any previous literature or concepts. They add knowledge in a way that service requests that are high in *simplicity* account for a high level of SST, as they can usually be easily facilitated with SSTs. Service requests that are high in *simplicity* have furthermore been seen from the findings to be low in *duration*, meaning that the service encounter is short in nature. Service encounters with a long *duration* have been seen from the findings to be low in *simplicity* as the service request raised is complex. Therefore, service requests that are low in simplicity and high in duration account for a low level of SST that can be used to facilitate the service request.

### *Service request categories and their level of advisory and SST*

One of the objectives of this study has been to identify the extent to which personal customer service can be facilitated through SST. In order to meet this aim, the service request categories and the criteria for the levels of advisory and SST were established first. In a next step, they were combined in table 8 which shows each category with the corresponding level of advisory and level of SST (section 5.2). The table adds knowledge to the research area of self-service technologies as it provides knowledge in regard to the extent with which the service request categories can be facilitated with SST. Furthermore, it supplements the research field of personal customer service, as the level of advisory is stated for each service request category. Additionally, this study contributes vital knowledge to the research area of service quality, as the table shows customer's requests and how they can be met successfully.

### *Relationship between level of advisory and level of SST*

As stated in the discussion (section 5.2) table 8, which shows the level of advisory and level of SST for each service request category, lead to the supposition that there is a relationship between those two (see figure 6). The level of advisory and the level of SST have been identified separately for each of the service request categories. However, the figure 6 illustrates a relationship between the level of advisory needed and the level of SST that can be used to facilitate a service request. It depicts that for the service categories where the level of advisory needed is high the level of SST that can be used to facilitate the request is accordingly low. On the other hand, if the level of advisory is low, the level of SST that can be used is accordingly high. Therefore, an existing relationship between those two levels is suggested in Chapter five (section 5.3) and visualized in figure 6. The relationship between the level of advisory and level of SST adds knowledge to the existing research areas of self-service

technologies, customer service, service quality and value creation as it suggests a way to facilitate personal service with SST.

*Theoretical contributions to current research and existing research fields*

As stated in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), this research found a knowledge gap in regard to the influences of SST on personal service, which can now be filled with the insights from this study. In fact, this research outlines which service request categories can be facilitated through the usage of SST and which need a high level of advisory. Recent studies have already stated the need and importance of combining SST and personal service (Scherer, Wünderlich & von Wangenheim, 2015; Langer et al., 2012; Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012; Ahearne & Rapp, 2010) and the results of this study emphasize this. Other researchers have focused on the combination of the two fields in regard to how personal service facilitates SST usage (Lee, 2015). However, no research has been concerned with how SSTs can facilitate personal service, which has been illustrated with a red cross in figure 1 in Chapter 1. This study now contributes knowledge to a new research area that combines SST and personal service as the study at hand outlines a way to facilitate certain personal service requests with SST. Additionally, as highlighted in the sections above, this study also contributes to the research fields of customer service, service quality, and value creation. In fact, knowledge is added to the research area of customer service, as service request categories and their respective level of advisory have been identified. Furthermore, it shows to what extent those categories can be facilitated with SSTs, which in the next step increases the service quality and creates value for the customer and as well as the retailer.

### 6.1.2 Practical contributions

Besides the theoretical contributions explained above, the study also makes two major practical contributions, which have emerged from the empirical findings of the research. The contributions outlined below are predominately inductive in nature, as they only build on existing literature in regard to the service request categories introduced by (Baron, Harris & Davies, 1996) to a very small degree. First, the study significantly enhances the understanding of customer's personal service request and is the first to identify the extent to which these categories can be facilitated with SST. Contrastingly, the second contribution of this study introduces a new way of utilizing SST to increase staff availability in retail stores, and thus substantially adds in reducing one of the major sources of frustration customer's experience while shopping.

The first contribution presents an expected finding as this study delivers on its aim to identify and categorize customer's personal service requests. Additionally, the study does not only explore whether these categories can be supported by SST but, as intended and stated in the introduction, goes one step further by outlining the extent to which each category can be facilitated with SST, as shown in table 8 in section 5.2. The table also depicts the level of advisory, which is demanded in each service request category to satisfyingly solve the specific request. This is another important research finding which emerged from the study and which has not been expected. As the previously stated theoretical contributions explain, the research findings suggest a relationship between the level of advisory customer's demand in each service request and the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate the specific request.

Consequently, table 8 provides a framework which enables retailers and specifically self-service retailers to identify the different service requests. As categorized in this study, it allows retailers to determine the level of advisory that is demanded in their stores. Hence, the table also allows them to

facilitate the service requests customers pose with the adequate level of SST. Thus, self-service retailers and those aiming to deploy SSTs are able to implement a more efficient balance between SST and personal customer service in their stores, which has been another aim of this study. The implications of deploying a more efficient balance between SST and personal service are substantial. It empowers retailers to provide customers with more service experience, as certain requests can be facilitated or even handled completely with SST, allowing staff members to devote more time to personal service intensive service request.

While the first practical contribution has been intended to a large extent and therefore expected, the second practical contribution of this study is greatly unexpected. This is due to the fact that the availability and accessibility of staff members has been identified during the research to be major source of customer's frustration within the research setting. In combination with that, the researchers needed to come up with a valid example of how SST could possibly be utilized to facilitate personal service. This was crucial to be able to explain this concept as authentically as possible, and in order to receive reliable and valid data from the customer and employee interviews. In light of this, the researchers developed the idea of a "click for personal service" button that could be integrated into an existing store app. This aims to support the shopping experience, whilst providing customers with the ability to receive personal service when clicking the button on their mobile device or on a fixed tablet in store (see section 2.4.4 and 4.3.3 for details).

Notwithstanding the relatively small sample of interview participants and the limited amount of concerns which were raised, the findings of the study suggest that the "click for personal service" button would significantly enhance customers shopping experience and create value for both customers and retailers. Moreover, the evidence from this study suggests that the "click for personal service" would not only allow retailers to drastically improve the accessibility of their employees, and hence hinder a major source of customer's frustration. Additionally, it would also allow them to deploy their personnel more efficiently as employees would not need to identify those customers who seek help, but have immediate information on who needs assistance, and thus who to approach. Finally, as previously elaborated, both contributions have significant implications for all retailers who employ, or aim to utilize self-service encouraging concepts in their stores. However, considering the self-service retail setting of this research, these contributions are especially valuable for self-service retailers.

## 6.2    Limitations and suggestions for further research

This part of the conclusion outlines the limitations of this study and provides directions for further research. These can either arise from the need for validation of certain contributions or from new areas of interest which emerged throughout this study. One of the major limitations of this study is that the research conducted at a self-service retailer solely focused on the in-store departments. Areas such as checkout and restaurant were left out. This study is therefore limited by the lack of information from those areas. Furthermore, the research itself is limited through the small sample size and the qualitative approach of this study, which does not allow for broad generalizations to be made. One of the contributions this study presents is the categorization of customer's personal service request in a self-service setting. This is not completely new to the theoretical discussion in this research field as Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) already made a similar contribution. However, while some of their service request categories were confirmed, many were rejected and new categories emerged through the empirical findings of this research, and were thus added. Due to the above-mentioned limitations, further research should be carried out to validate the new service request categories being *location*,

*opinion*, *customization*, *advisory* and *extra services*. Although *location* was introduced as a new service request category, it is believed to be more reliable than the other new ones as these requests constantly kept reemerging during the data collection in both markets researched. Moreover, the *location* category includes many of the requests that were classified by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) to belong to their *directions* category, but were found to be more accurate for the new service request category *location* (see section 5.1). Additionally, the service requests *product price*, *physical assistance, returns/complains* and *moans/others* as introduced by Baron, Harris and Davies (1996) were rejected by this study, as they did not emerge from the findings. Consequently, a recommendation for further research is to validate the rejection of the aforementioned categories through a broader research scope and quantitative testing.

Another major contribution, as suggested by the findings of this study, is the relationship between the level of advisory customers demand for different service requests and the level of SST that can be utilized to facilitate the specific requests. More specifically, the research suggest that the higher the level of advisory in a service category, the lower the extent to which this category can be facilitated with SST and vice versa (see section 5.3 for more detail). However, this relationship is based on findings that emerged from a relatively small sample size with a qualitative research approach, and is seen as valid in the eight service request categories outlined in table 8 (section 5.2). Hence, there is a need for further quantitative research with an extensive sample size in order to validate the aforementioned relationship between the level of advisory and the level of SST.

In view of the fact that the "click for personal service" contribution has been established under the same circumstances as the previously discussed relationship between the level of advisory and the level of SST, it could be valuable to further validate and test the feasibility of the service by deploying a large quantitative study. Even though the "click for personal service" is presented as a contribution, it entails the limitation of this study of not being able to suggest a technical implementation for this service and how it could be realized. This would consequently be a fruitful area for further research.

Furthermore, it is important to state that an additional uncontrolled factor is the possibility that interview participants influenced each other in the interviews, which could have resulted in a bias in the results. This would be caused by a weakness highlighted in the methodology, namely that most interviews were conducted with more than one interview participant. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study to this in different industries to contrast and compare the findings and the resulting contributions as this study only focuses on self-service retailers. A further limitation in relation to this is that this research was conducted as a single case approach, and only focused on one industry. Therefore, the findings and contributions in regard to the service request categories, the relationship between level of advisory, and level of SST and the "click for personal service" would benefit to a large extent from a multiple case approach in various industries. Additionally, it has to be pointed out that this study is the first to focus on how self-service technologies can aid personal service encounters. This presents the opportunity for further research to be conducted in this new small research area, adding knowledge to the crucial findings this study contributes.

Finally, despite the previously outlined concerns and limitations, the researchers are confident that the study at hand provides insights and findings of theoretical and practical relevance.

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# APPENDIX A

## Interview guide customer interviews
Name:
Gender:
Please state your age group: 18-25, 25-35, 35-45, 45-55,55-65, 65+
Occupation:
Mobile device usage: never, once a week, multiple times a day, and every hour
How often have you been to an IKEA store in the last 12 months?

### Part 1 Unstructured (CIT)
- Please tell us about your shopping experience at IKEA today
- Reason for store visit
- Personal service encounter

### Part 2 Semi-structured & Photo elicitations
- App print outs, modified with click for personal service button
- Through personal mobile device or through mobile devices in-store

### Questions
- Would you use it?
- Do you believe it would enhance your service experience and if so, in what ways?
- Do you have any concerns?
- Are there any specific situations in which you think this would be especially helpful?

## Interview guide employee interviews
Name:
Gender:
Please state your age group: 18-25, 25-35, 35-45, 45-55,55-65, 65+

### Part 1 Semi-structured & Photo elicitations
- App print outs, modified with click for personal service button
- Through personal mobile device or through mobile devices in-store
- Would you use it?
- Do you believe it would enhance your service experience and if so, in what ways?
- Do you have any concerns?
- Are there any specific situations in which you think this would be especially helpful?

### Questions
- What are the situations in which customers demand personal service?
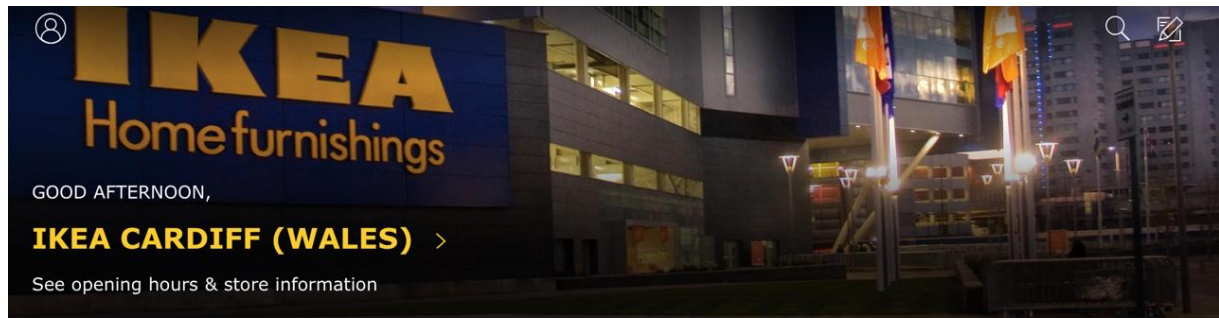
**Photo elicitations**



*App print out, modified with click for personal service button*

# APPENDIX B

**Room for living concept at IKEA Cardiff**

# APPENDIX C



*MAXQDA Code Relations Browser*

# APPENDIX D

| Concept | It is a cognitive, affective, and behavioural process, experienced during service delivery, which builds, solidifies or modifies the image of the organisation and influences clients' current or future purchasing decisions; mediated by people, infrastructure and technology; biased by client values and needs, the socio-cultural and environmental context, previous experiences and the nature and duration of the service operations |
|---|---|
| Dimensions | Predispositions | Interactions | Reactions |
| Components | Socio-cultural context | Company staff | Behaviours |
| | Environmental context | Infrastructure | Feelings |
| | Preconceived images | Technology | Learnings |
| | Previous experiences | Duration of the event | Perception of value |
| | Personality traits | Nature of the operation | Image (re)construction |
| | Needs | | Intentions |
| | Values | | Wishes |
| | Beliefs | | |
| | Skills | | |

**Table III.**
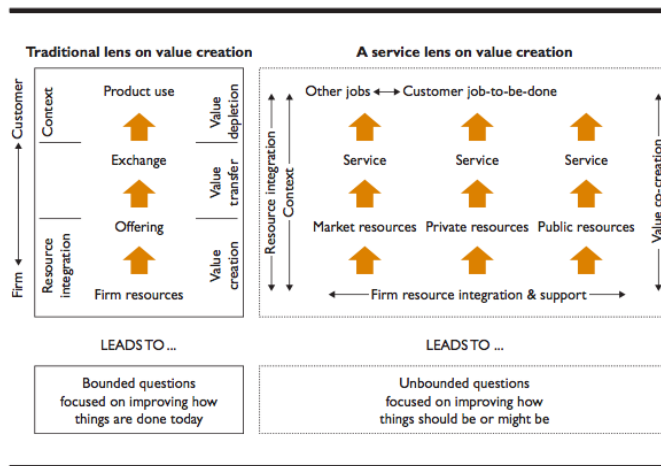Concept, dimensions, and components of the service experience

*Concept, dimensions, and components of the service experience. (Vasconcelos et al., 2015)*



**FIGURE 1**
**Proposed Model of Consumer Choice of Salesperson Assistance or Self-Service**
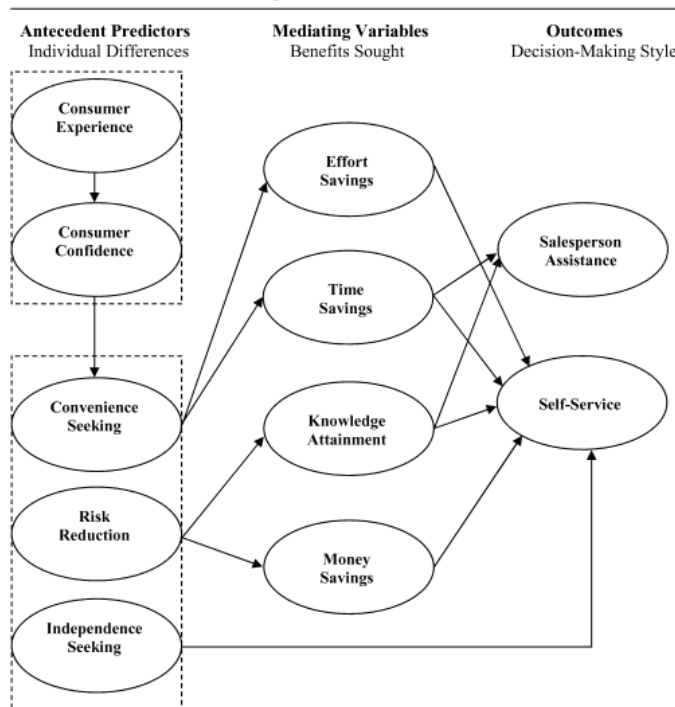
*Proposed model of customer choice of salesperson assistance or self-service (Ponder, Lueg & Williams, 2006)*

**FIGURE 1.** Traditional and Service Lenses on Value Creation

**Traditional lens on value creation**

Customer ↑ — Context — Product use — Value depletion ↑
Firm ↓ — Resource integration — Exchange — Value transfer
— Offering — Value creation
— Firm resources

**A service lens on value creation**

Resource integration / Context ↑ — Other jobs ⟷ Customer job-to-be-done — Value co-creation ↑
Service — Service — Service
Market resources — Private resources — Public resources
← Firm resource integration & support →

LEADS TO ...                    LEADS TO ...

Bounded questions focused on improving how things are done today

Unbounded questions focused on improving how things should be or might be

*Traditional and service lenses on value creation (Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo, 2014)*