

**Word of Mouth for Interpersonal Services: Communicating Value**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Word of Mouth for Interpersonal Services: Communicating Value**

Nathalie Spielmann, Ph.D  
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This thesis features three essays that provide a deeper understanding of how consumers evaluate interpersonal retail servicescapes and the values that are important to consumers within these servicescapes. In consequence to understanding that hedonic and utilitarian value is at the core of expectations within interpersonal retail servicescapes, the impact of value-based word-of-mouth (WOM) is tested.

The first essay uses exploratory research to show that interpersonal retail servicescapes are distinct from other servicescapes. Interpersonal retail servicescapes consist of objectively and subjectively evaluated features that can be related to both service and environmental features. Using interpretative methods, the essay demonstrates that interpersonal retail servicescapes could be measured using methodological approaches that account for the intricacies of these specific environments.

The second essay develops a measurement tool using personality theory to measure interpersonal retail servicescapes. The proposed five-dimensional scale accounts for the dynamic nature of interpersonal retail servicescapes, which consist of a high level of service occurring within a lean to highly elaborate environment. Each of the dimensions is related to consumer outcome behaviours, and it is found that rather than positive/negative value, it is hedonic/utilitarian value that orients the personality structure representing interpersonal retail servicescapes. In particular, three of the five dimensions

are related to WOM, putting into question the appropriateness of valenced versus value WOM for interpersonal services.

The final essay uses a factorial design to test the impact of value versus valenced WOM depending on the source (personal or anonymous) as well as the type of servicescape (self-service or interpersonal). In WOM for services, the source is far more important than the servicescape type. However the frame of the WOM used by consumers is most influential. Value-based WOM is shown to be more impactful on service quality perceptions than valenced-WOM, and this more so in interpersonal retail servicescapes than in self-servicescapes, regardless of the source.

Overall, the research program highlights that interpersonal retail servicescapes are particularly complex settings which combine both social and environmental features. As such, WOM regarding interpersonal retail servicescapes should be value rather than valence-based in order to properly transmit the hedonic and utilitarian value consumers expect within these settings. Future research directions are discussed.

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**ESSAY 1**  
**EXPLORING THE INTRICACIES OF INTERPERSONAL RETAIL SERVICESCAPES**

**Introduction**

Last week, Lisa went to her bank to get some cash. Since it was 8am and the tellers only open at 9am, she used the ATM machine. The procedure was simple: she inserted her debit card, inputted her PIN, retrieved her bills, and was on her way. Lisa likes her bank because it has ATM machines at very convenient locations around town, and the cash dispensed is provided in small bills, which she prefers. These are features that Lisa likes about her bank but doesn't necessarily advertise unless someone asks her.

A few days later, Lisa needed a loan to buy a house. She made an appointment during her lunch hour to meet with John, her bank account manager. When she arrived at the bank, she sat down at John's desk and listened carefully to his propositions. John seemed frazzled and wasn't communicating the details of bank mortgages very well. Lisa felt uncomfortable and left without a clear idea of what to do about a mortgage and at the same time she felt like maybe her bank wasn't the one best able to respond to her needs. In consequence to her experience, Lisa now asks a lot of people about mortgages and tells them about how complicated they seem to be to obtain at her bank. She tends to tell people that her bank is not too helpful and does not give good advice. She is reticent to recommend her bank.

This anecdote is meant to highlight that service reviews are not like product reviews. Rather than discussing the features of a tangible product, service evaluations are more ambiguous and complex and in part defined by the environment and the social experiences within that environment. Depending on the type of servicescape, it is possible that the importance of evaluative criteria used by consumers may vary.

Furthermore, it is also possible that as servicescapes become more physically or socially complex, the relationship between the tangible and intangible features and the physical and social aspects become more intertwined.

This essay will focus on how servicescapes communicate different values depending on the level of physicality and the intensity of services they offer. How are servicescapes that are physically complex and service-heavy, such as interpersonal retail servicescapes, evaluated by consumers? Are the social content and the intangible features more apparent in interpersonal retail servicescapes versus self-service scapes?

First this interpretative research paper will show that interpersonal retail servicescapes are evaluated differently than self-service servicescapes. Then how the various evaluative features within interpersonal retail servicescapes are interrelated and thus difficult to measure for tangibility or to classify as having uniquely physical or social components will be demonstrated. Rather than review how servicescapes transfer value to goods and/or services, this research proposes an understanding of how complex interpersonal retail servicescapes are evaluated by consumers.

This research puts into question the current methods and classifications of servicescapes and proposes that as servicescapes become more service-heavy, they also become more complex to evaluate. Thus current measurement tools may not be sufficient in order to understand the full scope of consumer perceptions of interpersonal retail servicescapes in particular.

The results provided can be used to better understand consumer behaviours. Specifically, the findings have repercussions on the way that marketers can anticipate consumers to evaluate service-heavy settings and then how consumers communicate what

they interpret in servicescapes to others. The functions of WOM include: emotion sharing, conversational value, uncertainty reduction, helping/damaging other consumers, helping/damaging providers (Mangold et al., 1999). Research shows that for services, the content of WOM consists mostly of quality-only communication, and that very little of WOM consists of explaining “the presence or absence of an attribute. In all cases such attribute-oriented communication also contained a quality-dimension (e.g. “the firm was honest, dependable...”)” (Mangold et al., 1999). As such, the objective of this research is to uncover the types and qualities of the evaluative features consumers may focus on in servicescapes.

The research for this essay, as well as for the remaining essays, will focus on restaurants as an optimal setting because it can be described and operationalized across of the different forms of servicescapes and also because it is a good example to showcase the holistic servicescape where the environment interacts with the service within it.

## **Literature Review**

A servicescape is a retail location where a service organization operates, the physical setting in which a service interaction can take place (Bitner, 1992). In contrast to a retail environment, a servicescape consists of the environment as well as the level of service taking place in that environment. In retail settings there are three types of servicescapes: (1) self-service, which involves only the consumer; (2) interpersonal service, which involves the consumer and the employees; and (3) remote service, which involves only the employee. Interactions within a service environment are elaborate (high

involvement from the parties) or lean (low involvement from the parties). Figure 1 shows Bitner's servicescape typology.

**Figure 1: Bitner's (1992) Servicescapes Typology with Examples**

Who performs service	Physical Complexity	
	Lean	Elaborate
<b>Self-Service (customer only)</b>	Mini golf Water slides	ATM Express mail drop off
<b>Interpersonal (customer and employee)</b>	Hotel Restaurant	Dry cleaner Hair salon
<b>Remote service (employee only)</b>	Insurance company Utility	Phone mail order Automated Voice Service

As proposed by Bitner (1992), all cues within servicescapes, including environmental, social, and ambient, must come together in order to influence consumer behaviours and perceptions. Furthermore, cues within servicescapes tend to be perceived holistically by consumers, and not as independent attributes, especially as the complexity and interactions within servicescapes increase. A servicescape can offer products like it can offer services and the offer will depend on the complexity of the servicescape (Bitner, 1992). While Bitner proposes these key characteristics of servicescapes, it is not clear how to measure the stated complexity of servicescapes or the consumer evaluations within these.

### ***The Physical Nature of Servicescapes***

In a store environment, physical layout, ambient sound, and product presentation are all used by consumers to establish judgments and perceptions (Bitner, 1992; Ward, Bitner, and Barnes 1992). Environmental cues in retail settings are ambient (e.g. music and odour), space/functional (e.g. layout), and signs, symbols, or artefacts (e.g. signage)

(Bitner, 1992). The type of retail environment will determine which types of physical features in a store are relevant to consumers. Consumer reactions will vary when changes to physical retail environment are made (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Context is important for consumers as certain physical factors can be servicescape specific. The legibility or ergonomics of a servicescape influence the way consumers approach or avoid servicescapes, as well as how they feel within them (Newman, 2007). The arrangement of the servicescape, particularly the layout and crowding of a physical space will have an influence on the consumers' mood (Babin and Darden, 1996, Newman, 2007). Shelf spacing and allocation will influence store perceptions such as image and quality of the store brand (Richardson, Dick, and Jain, 1994). Additionally, changes to numerous interrelated aspects of a store environment can impact affect, such as satisfaction in the case of scent and music together (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Spangenberg, Grohmann and Sprott, 2005). Understanding affective reactions is key when creating conducive physical shopping environments (Yoo, Park and MacInnis, 1998) since some store characteristics draw out positive emotions (e.g. product assortment) while others lead to negative emotions (e.g. unaccommodating facilities).

While outlining physical atmospheric effects in depth, Turley and Milliman (2000) point out that research on how atmospherics explain and predict consumer behaviour is lacking. Research shows how changes to the physical environment result in consumer behaviour but the social aspect of retail settings (e.g. interaction between a service provider and a customer) and its relationship with the physical features is rarely considered and remains understudied (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003). The purpose

of this essay is to understand how the interaction between service and physical environment common in interpersonal retail servicescapes is evaluated by consumers.

### ***The Social Dimension of Servicescapes***

Certain features of a physical environment can be measured with the senses (i.e. touching, consuming, seeing, smelling, etc.) and this makes these features easier to quantify as concrete, real, and tangible. In contrast, a service interaction, a social exchange in order to accomplish a task, typically does not entail as much sensory activity but rather an affective and intangible response (Richins, 1997).

For consumption experiences to lead to positive consumer outcomes, they must be congruent with the consumers' self-concept (Sirgy, 1985) and be self-enhancing (Malhotra, 1988). A consumers' choice of a product/service and the desire to engage with it is based not just on self-augmenting goals but also on the social environment in which the consumer exists. "The extended self operates not only on an individual level, but also on a collective level involving family, group, sub cultural, and national identities" (Belk, 1988, p.160). Social interactions can therefore influence perceptions and subsequent evaluations during the consumption process.

According to the social exchange theories, human factors in a retail setting are important elicitors of consumer responses. The relationships between consumers and firms are similar to those developed between two individuals (Fournier, 1998). "Interactions between people form the basis for the development of their relationship" and "the relationships are assumed to grow, develop, deteriorate, and dissolve as a consequence of the social exchange process (i.e. the interactions)" (Venkatesan, Kumar, and Ravishanker, 2007, p. 116). In service-heavy servicescapes, the outcomes of the

interactions between employees and customers, or the social content, is directly related to consumer perceptions of the overall servicescape (Bitner, 1992). Particularly in interpersonal retail servicescapes, the social content can be part of the environment (Parker and Ward, 2000). For example, a professional haircut cannot exist without a hairdresser in a salon.

Services are by nature experiential (Booms and Bitner, 1981), and consumers evaluate them differently than they do physical and tangible features. In a restaurant setting for example, the exchanges between consumers and employees are more complex simply because unlike tangible cues (e.g., tables, napkins), service providers can exhibit variable behaviours, to which the consumer can respond. A dirty glass cannot judge a consumer however a waiter can make a patron feel uneasy about their wine selection. Thus in service-heavy servicescapes the dynamics of social interactions may be as important as the physical environment in which they take place.

### ***The Intricacies of Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes***

“For interpersonal services, positive (negative) internal responses to the servicescape enhance (detract from) the nature and quality of social interactions between and among customers and employees” (Bitner, 1992, p.61). Interpersonal retail servicescapes are defined as those that are service-heavy because they include a service-interaction occurring within a lean or a complex physical environment. The physical environment matters in these types of services, and service quality of it is influenced by the physical environment (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003). And particularly in interpersonal retail servicescapes evaluating the success of a consumption experience using

only tangible attributes related to the physical environment does not capture the full scope of consumer perceptions (Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975).

Versus other servicescapes, interpersonal retail servicescapes are not as simple to classify as containing tangible and intangible features (Laroche, Bergeron and Goutaland, 2001). Physically complex environments with little service may be easier to objectively measure by using tangible features, but service-heavy settings offer more sensory as well as socially defined features and may be more subjectively evaluated in consequence. Using a binary tangibility classification to capture all potential consumer evaluations in servicescapes that are both highly physical and highly social may not be sufficient.

Tangibility as a construct has the three dimensions: (1) physical, (2) general, and (3) mental. “Services are perceived as general if consumers cannot refer precisely to identifiable definitions, features and/or outcomes. Inversely, services are perceived as specific if they generate numerous clear-cut definitions, features and/or outcomes in the consumer’s mind” (Laroche, Bergeron and Goutaland, 2001, p. 28). Service is subject to employees’ influence (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1999) and therefore much more unpredictable. This variability of service means that it can often be perceived as general. The mental dimension of tangibility “reflects the fact that physical tangibility does not ensure a clear, mentally tangible representation of an object” (Laroche, Bergeron and Goutaland, 2001, p.29). In service-heavy servicescapes, consumers may have general and more mentally tangible expectations regarding the service they will receive as the service will depend in part on the service-provider. In self-service servicescapes, consumers may expect a service with reduced implication and limited interaction with the service-

provider, thus they may be more likely to perceive the service as specific and less mentally tangible.

In interpersonal retail servicescapes the features that are defined as being tangible and intangible are not necessarily limited to the features that are objectively evaluated and physical versus those that are subjectively evaluated and service-related. In service-heavy settings, many services lack physical differentiation points (Zeithaml, 1981). Thus in services, tangibles are least influential on service quality perceptions (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990). Within the service quality measure, SERVQUAL, service tangibles are evaluated in tandem with intangible evaluations regarding the reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy of the service but tangibles is the weakest dimension of the measurement tool (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). Reimer and Kuehn (2005) show that tangibles are not just a dimension of service quality but are also evaluated as antecedents to the other four dimensions of SERVQUAL that then lead to service quality perceptions. Service can also be intangible and can be less important than the tangibles present in a consumption experience. Intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability are all part of services (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996) but how these characteristics vary between servicescapes is not clear. It is shown that the SERVQUAL scale is more valid when it considers the context in which it is being used, such as a cultural context (Carrillat, Jaramillo and Mulki, 2007), although this relationship has not been demonstrated by service type.

Therefore, it cannot be expected that the evaluative methods used by consumers will be the same across different types of service environments, as various servicescapes seem to have different levels of service, physicality, and in consequence potentially

different evaluative criteria. Simpler services may be evaluated with more objective tangible features and more elaborate and involving services may be evaluated with more intangible features prone to subjective influence.

### ***Consumer Evaluations of Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes***

Consumer perceptions of interpersonal retail servicescapes are dependent on perceived physical complexity and the quality of the service experience. Consumers evaluate consumption experiences from a benefit perspective. Whereas functional attributes are linked to tangible features related to costs and benefits (quality, space, price, and performance), image attributes are linked to other non physical features (advertising, price, stereotypes, psychological and marketing driven associations) (Sirgy, 1985). More recently, Salzer-Mörling and Strannengard (2007) reference brandscapes as meanings that consumers derive based on the image resources from brands available in the environment. Brandscapes reference a brand associated to a servicescape but servicescapes are general and are not necessarily branded. In servicescapes that are congruent with the consumers' self-image, the consumer is more likely to derive value from the service and the environment than when there is no congruence with self-image (O'Cass and Grace, 2008).

The quality of the store environment as well as the type of store (i.e. prestige versus discount) shape store image and quality perceptions (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman, 1994). Service evaluations depend on the physical environment in which they occur but are also contingent on moderators related to the consumer (e.g. experience, personality traits (Gurviez, 2001)), as well as to the service context (e.g. complexity of the servicescape (Bitner, 1992)). Wakefield and Bodgett (1999) argue that a service

environment is evaluated based on the time spent in it as well as the utilitarian and hedonic features perceived within the environment.

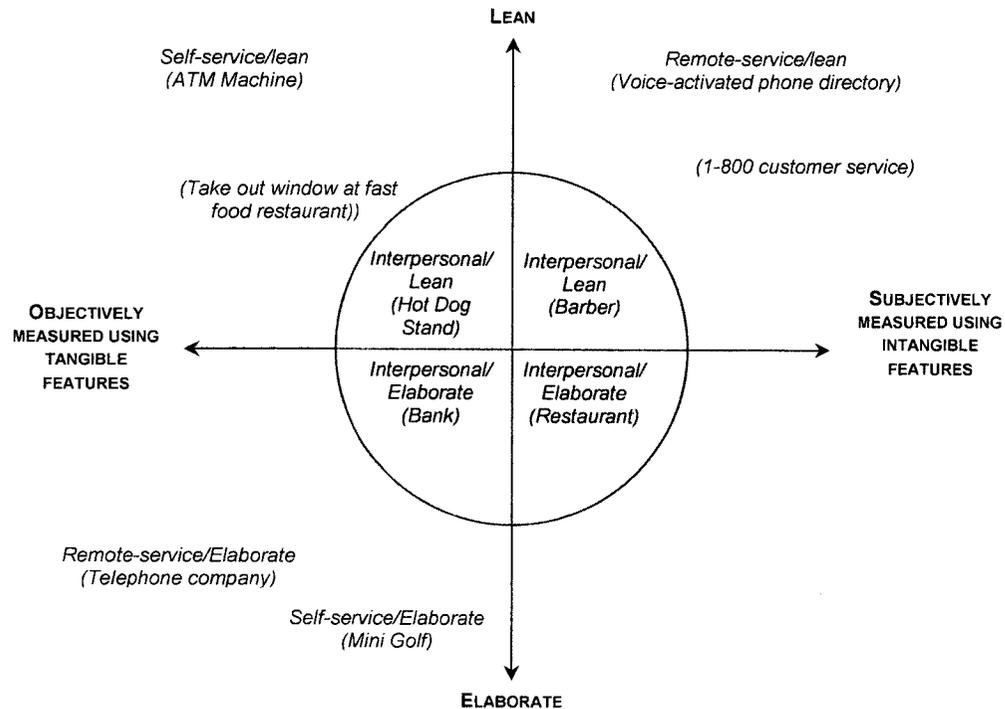
Within interpersonal retail servicescapes, which consist of interactions between service and physical cues, consumer evaluations are difficult to define using current measures outlined within the literature. How service is the result of the physical environment, how the physical environment influences service evaluations, and how reliant the service and the physical aspects are on each other is vaguely examined. Due to the limited contexts researched and that the evaluations of the service or the physical environment are conducted independent of each other, the following unanswered research questions remain: Are the service factors within a servicescape influential on the type and quality of the evaluations of the servicescape? Does the social factor take on more importance as the overall complexity of a servicescape increases?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Understanding how consumers perceive and evaluate interpersonal retail servicescapes is complex and may be more multidimensional than the current literature and measures propose. While there is a lot of research on the impact of the physical features on consumer outcome behaviours, and while there is a lot of research on the impact of service features on consumer perceptions of quality, very little research focuses on the interaction between these two features. In particular there is no research to the knowledge of this author that discusses how the different types of servicescapes can impact consumer responses.

When physical features are intertwined with service, such as in interpersonal retail servicescapes, the tangible and intangible features become harder to separate (Laroche, Bergeron and Goutaland, 2001) and attribute based evaluations become less encompassing of the overall experience (Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975). Consumer evaluations may be moderated by the place in which they occur (Kupiec and Revell, 1998) but also by the level of service interaction, which can enhance or reduce the perceived experience (Venkatesan, Kumar, and Ravishanker, 2007). “Dynamic models of the environment and behaviour should identify those personal factors descriptive of the individual or group, and their interaction, relevant to the context under consideration” (Clitheroe, Stokols, Zmuidzinas, 1998, p.104). Figure 2 attempts to model the relationship between the levels of sociality of servicescapes by adding a measurement axis to the physical servicescape typology proposed by Bitner (1992). The figure demonstrates that unlike other servicescapes, interpersonal retail servicescapes hover in the middle of the axes relating features that can be evaluated using tangible and intangible features for either physically lean or elaborate servicescapes.

**Figure 2: Bitner's (1992) model of servicescapes with addition of evaluative features**



How components in a servicescape influence quality perceptions has been researched (Reimer and Kuehn, 2005) but the results do not shed light on how the level of service within these servicescapes may also influence quality perceptions. Parasuraman et al. (1988) reveal the dimensions of service quality within servicescapes in general, but do not distinguish between types of service levels, or how the weight attributed to the tangible dimension of service quality may vary in consequence to various servicescapes.

A review of the literature demonstrates that it is hard to disconnect the physical and service features of interpersonal retail servicescapes. Particularly as social features and interactions can be considered environmental stimuli, especially in service-heavy settings. The role of place and service within retail is important but rarely researched

together (Hightower, Brady, Baker, 2002). The role of servicescapes in retailing is discussed but very little research focuses on the role of servicescapes in services. While Hightower, et al. (2002) discuss how the quality of a servicescape can influence service, the research was conducted in a single setting - a sporting venue.

In light of the difficulty in explaining consumer evaluations in interpersonal retail servicescapes, this essay proposes to uncover their scope. By doing so, it will seek to uncover the key evaluative criteria for the various features of interpersonal retail servicescapes and demonstrate which bases consumers tend to use to evaluate them. What has meaning in a self-service setting may not be equivalent to what has meaning in an interpersonal servicescape. If this is the case, then using purely service driven or atmospheric measures in order to better understand consumer behaviour within interpersonal retail servicescapes is not representative of the actual evaluative processes consumers engage in.

This essay proposes to review interpersonal servicescape from an interpretive perspective rather than to focus on segmenting the dependent variables (i.e. scent, layout) common to servicescapes in order to understand their effect in interpersonal retail servicescapes. By doing so, it will seek to better understand which variables are important to consumers in their evaluations of interpersonal retail servicescapes specifically.

*Proposition 1: Consumers attribute different levels of importance to features in servicescapes depending on the level of service within the servicescape.*

Products and services are appraised using different evaluative criteria, some that are tangible and others that are intangible. However, the features that are considered tangible may not just be limited to physical features, as postulated by SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1988). For interpersonal retail servicescapes, which include physical and social features, it is likely that both intangible and tangible features are present. As such, evaluating what is important in interpersonal retail servicescapes, which are complex and where both the physical and social factors are deeply associated, should depend on features that are tangible and objective, intangible and subjective, as well as some that are perceived to be a blend of both – thus making the tangible classification not ideal in this type of servicescape.

*Proposition 2: Interpersonal retail servicescapes are evaluated with features that are perceived as both tangible/objective and intangible/subjective.*

Particularly in interpersonal retail servicescapes, it remains unclear how social features of the experience are evaluated: as either a result of the human interaction or independent of it. If they are independent of the social content, then attribute-based measures could be used to evaluate the physical environment and SERVQUAL and other service quality measures could be used to evaluate the service interaction. But for interpersonal services it may not be possible to separate the features that consumers evaluate as being related to the physical layout from those that are directly related to the service encounter, especially if service is subject to a physical influence and vice versa (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003).

*Proposition 3: Interpersonal retail servicescapes are evaluated with features that are related to both the physical nature and social content of the servicescape together.*

## **Methodology**

The purpose of the following exploratory studies is to uncover the scope and the dimensions of the evaluative criteria consumers use in interpersonal retail servicescapes. The first study will attempt to show how the importance of features used to evaluate a servicescape will differ if the service within the servicescape is interpersonal or if it is self-service (P1). It will then seek to understand if these features are perceived to be a blend of subjective(intangible) and measurable(tangible) features (P2). As well, it seeks to uncover if the service and physical components of interpersonal services are intertwined (P3). These exploratory studies attempt to show a more in-depth definition of interpersonal retail servicescapes, and in consequence question how appropriate current classifications are at showing the scope of consumer evaluations in these specific settings.

A qualitative study was conducted first, the objective of which was to discover the evaluative features consumers use in interpersonal retail servicescapes. This inductive approach allows for information to be gathered from consumers, rather than deduced from the current literature (Masberg and Silverman, 1996). The features from this list were then tested in a second study that incorporated two scenarios: one with self-service and one with interpersonal service. The purpose of this study was to see how the level of importance associated to the features varied by servicescape. The final research studies

were classification studies to uncover the tangible (objective)/intangible (subjective) and social/physical qualities of the features used to evaluate interpersonal retail servicescapes.

In the first phase, an online survey was conducted to test three different purchase contexts. These were: going to a restaurant, using financial services, and going to a spa. The consumption situations were varied in order to capture as much of the potential features common to service settings, all of which could be studied as self-service or interpersonal. A restaurant meal, financial services, and a spa session all offer varying levels of service. In some cases the features of the experience can be more subjectively measured (taste of meal or quality of massage) or be mostly intangible (aromas emanating from a plate or market worth of placed assets).

The survey was administered online to students in a North American university, who were asked to state, with open-ended questions, all the individual features that they personally consider when in these consumption situations. A total of 44 respondents completed the survey. This sample resulted in 34 usable questionnaires. While the sample is not large, it does allow for a wide base in order to understand the researched phenomenon (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Respondents were 56% male, 68% between the ages of 18-49. One hundred percent had eaten in a restaurant, 82% had used a financial service, and 68% had been to a spa in the past year. Overall, the sample resulted in 490 items that were outlined as evaluative criteria. A recapitulative of the mentions is presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: Recapitulative of Mentions per Interpersonal Scenario**

	<b>RESTO</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>	<b>SPA</b>
<b>total # of mentions</b>	203	147	140
<b>max # of features per respondent</b>	15	11	9

A content analysis (as per Krippendorff, 2004) was conducted to see the frequency of the attributes mentioned. The top 10 mentions per consumption situation are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Features Evaluated in Various Servicescapes**

<b>RESTO</b>	<b><i>Freq.</i></b>	<b>FINANCE</b>	<b><i>Freq.</i></b>	<b>SPA</b>	<b><i>Freq.</i></b>
price	8.4%	reputation	10.9%	price	13.6%
service	8.4%	Cost	8.8%	cleanliness	10.0%
ingredient quality	7.9%	rate of return	8.8%	service quality	9.3%
taste	6.9%	Service	8.2%	scope of offer	8.6%
presentation	6.4%	History	4.1%	skill of technician	8.6%
cleanliness	3.9%	recommended	3.4%	location	7.9%
location	3.9%	scope of offer	3.4%	reputation	5.7%
scope of menu	3.9%	Value	3.4%	décor	4.3%
atmosphere	3.0%	competence	2.7%	ambiance	2.9%
freshness	3.0%	interest rate	2.7%	product quality	2.9%

The second step regrouped synonyms. As part of the content analysis, the premise was to classify and to categorize the features, if possible. The top 75% of the mentions were coded for all the consumption scenarios. After this cut-off point, most of the mentions tended to appear once or twice and could be perceived as artifacts (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, Tatham, 2006).

The next step of the interpretative process was to see to which evaluative criteria consumers associated the most amount of importance to and if this differed between service types. The objective was to uncover if features in self-service servicescapes are evaluated with a different level of importance than if these same features are used to evaluate interpersonal retail servicescapes.

The evaluative criteria that consumers outlined as relevant in restaurant settings were retained. This setting was selected because it is an industry that consumers are most likely to have access to, in comparison to banks and spas, as demonstrated in the first exploratory research. For this survey the same criteria were used but two different restaurant contexts were specified: a self-service restaurant (e.g. a cafeteria) and a full-service or interpersonal restaurant (e.g. sit down restaurant with a waiter). The evaluative features were placed in an online survey and respondents were asked to rate them as not at all important to extremely important on a seven-point scale. The survey was distributed to a convenience sample of students in three North American universities and the respondents were offered extra credit for their participation.

A total of 74 usable surveys were collected online, from a total of 102. 49% of the sample was male and 81% were between the ages of 18 and 29 years old. Before the analysis was completed, those who had not been to either a full-service or a self-service restaurant in the past six months were removed from the analysis. A total of 70 respondents were retained.

Based on the means, it is possible to see that consumers value certain features more than others depending on the self-service versus full-service (interpersonal) context. Table 3 shows that for interpersonal retail servicescapes in particular, service, ingredient quality, taste, presentation, atmosphere, ambiance, setting, wine list, attentive staff, temperature of the food, décor, and type of cuisine are all more important than they are in self-service settings. A closer review of these features in particular demonstrates that while some are easy to quantify objectively and tangibly (e.g. ingredient quality), others

are not (e.g. ambiance). Whereas some features are socially driven (e.g. service), others are a mix of both (e.g. setting). These findings support P1.

**Table 3: Importance of Evaluative Criteria per Servicescape**

	Category	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Sig (2-tailed)
<b>price</b>	full-service	35	5.00	1.328	.440
	self-service	35	5.29	1.725	
<b>service</b>	full-service	35	6.40	.775	.000*
	self-service	35	3.26	1.669	
<b>ingredient quality</b>	full-service	35	6.03	.954	.009*
	self-service	35	5.31	1.255	
<b>taste</b>	full-service	35	6.60	.651	.000*
	self-service	35	5.60	1.168	
<b>presentation</b>	full-service	35	5.17	1.248	.024*
	self-service	35	4.31	1.795	
<b>cleanliness</b>	full-service	35	6.66	.591	.067
	self-service	35	6.29	1.017	
<b>location</b>	full-service	35	4.37	1.352	.316
	self-service	35	4.71	1.487	
<b>scope of the menu</b>	full-service	35	4.51	1.314	.503
	self-service	35	4.74	1.521	
<b>atmosphere</b>	full-service	35	5.49	1.011	.000*
	self-service	35	4.26	1.358	
<b>freshness of ingredients</b>	full-service	35	6.26	.780	.178
	self-service	35	5.91	1.269	
<b>ambiance</b>	full-service	35	5.40	.914	.000*
	self-service	35	4.03	1.403	
<b>setting</b>	full-service	35	5.20	.868	.001*
	self-service	35	4.23	1.477	
<b>value</b>	full-service	35	5.91	.981	.295
	self-service	35	5.60	1.459	

<b>wine list</b>	full-service	35	3.97	2.007	.000*
	self-service	35	2.26	1.669	
<b>attentive service</b>	full-service	35	6.00	.907	.000*
	self-service	35	4.20	1.368	
<b>temperature of food</b>	full-service	35	5.40	1.063	.004*
	self-service	35	4.54	1.336	
<b>type of cuisine</b>	full-service	35	5.71	.957	.005*
	self-service	35	4.74	1.704	
<b>décor</b>	full-service	35	4.74	1.245	.000*
	self-service	35	3.60	1.241	
<b>innovation</b>	full-service	35	4.43	1.357	.055
	self-service	35	3.77	1.457	
<b>originality</b>	full-service	35	4.43	1.461	.159
	self-service	35	3.94	1.392	

\* Significant at the  $p < 0.05$

The next study was motivated by the need to understand how consumers classify the evaluative features in interpersonal retail servicescapes. The first phase consisted of asking expert judges to code all of the mentions either as tangible/objective or intangible/subjective. For the first part, four expert judges (one marketing professor with a PhD and three PhD students) used the following instructions:

*For each of the words, please replace them with either “M” for measurable or “S” subjective or “O” for other. Please use the following as a guide for each choice option.*

*MEASURABLE: A feature that is quantifiable and assessable using measures or metrics that are universally agreed upon. There is tangibility and/or an aspect of the feature that is material enough for it to be gauged, for it to be evaluated in a real and objective manner. It remains undistorted by emotion or personal bias.*

*SUBJECTIVE*: This feature is considered intangible and not measurable because all evaluations of it would incorporate some form of bias, based on a person's emotions or prejudices. A subjective feature would be evaluated personally, instinctively, and intuitively. It would be difficult to make comparisons between the various levels of or different responses regarding this feature because all evaluation of this feature would be considered non-objective.

*OTHER*: Any word that you feel does not qualify as solely measurable or subjective.

After each judge coded the mentions, inter-judge reliability tests using percentage agreements were conducted (Ebel, 1951). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4:

**Table 4: Subjective/Measurable Classification of Features Evaluated in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes**

	<b>Inter-judge Reliability</b>	<b>Subjective Mentions</b>	<b>Measurable Mentions</b>	<b>(Other) Mixed Mentions</b>
<b>RESTO</b>	95%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service</li> <li>- Ambiance</li> <li>- Atmosphere</li> <li>- Attentive</li> <li>- Cuisine</li> <li>- Décor</li> <li>- Innovation</li> <li>- Originality</li> <li>- Presentation</li> <li>- Scope of menu</li> <li>- Setting</li> <li>- Taste</li> <li>- Value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Price</li> <li>- Freshness</li> <li>- Ingredient quality</li> <li>- Location</li> <li>- Wine selection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cleanliness</li> <li>- Temperature</li> </ul>

	<b>Inter-judge Reliability</b>	<b>Subjective Mentions</b>	<b>Measurable Mentions</b>	<b>(Other) Mixed Mentions</b>
<b>FINANCE</b>	86%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reputation</li> <li>- Competence</li> <li>- Honesty</li> <li>- Service</li> <li>- Value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cost</li> <li>- Accessibility</li> <li>- Affiliation</li> <li>- Availability</li> <li>- Interest rate</li> <li>- Liquidity</li> <li>- Opening hours</li> <li>- Ownership</li> <li>- Proximity</li> <li>- Rate of return</li> <li>- Scope of offer</li> <li>- Size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Benefits</li> <li>- Convenience</li> <li>- History</li> <li>- Recommended</li> <li>- Web quality</li> </ul>
<b>SPA</b>	66%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ambiance</li> <li>- Product quality</li> <li>- Quality</li> <li>- Reputation</li> <li>- Service quality</li> <li>- Skill of technician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Price</li> <li>- Scope of offer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cleanliness</li> <li>- Décor</li> <li>- Location</li> </ul>

When reviewing the classification of the judges, and taking into account all the mentions they classified, it seems that depending on the type of industry, there are different levels of perceived subjective and intangible features, as well as features that are considered a blend of both. For restaurants, subjective mentions comprise of the majority of the total mentions (58.1%), as is also the case for spa services (42.1%). Although for financial services subjective mentions (35.1%) are second to measurable mentions in terms of the total weight of mentions, the most frequent feature that consumers evaluate is a subjective one – reputation. This research supports P2 and also confirms that context is important.

The second phase of the classification process was to establish which features could be related to the physical environment, the social content, or a blend of both. In order to test this, another panel of expert judges was recruited: three professors with marketing PhDs. They were given the same list of features as per the previous experiment but asked to follow these instructions:

*For each of the features outlined per consumption experience, please indicate them as being dependent (checking the column YES) or not (checking the column NO) on at least one form or type of human intervention. Being dependent on a human intervention would mean that an individual:*

- *would not be able to evaluate this feature without associating it or relating it back to a service component of the experience*
- *would need to relate back to a human interaction inherent to the experience,*
- *would see it as capable of being modified by the presence of others who are in part responsible for experience.*

Again, inter-judge reliability tests that consider percentage agreement were conducted (Ebel, 1951). The reliability statistics as well as the mentions per category are outlined in Table 5.

**Table 5: Social and Physical Features Evaluated in Interpersonal Retail**

**Servicescapes**

	<b>Inter-judge Reliability</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Mixed Mentions</b>
<b>RESTO</b>	78.4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service</li> <li>- Ambiance</li> <li>- Atmosphere</li> <li>- Attentive</li> <li>- Presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Décor</li> <li>- Innovation</li> <li>- Scope of menu</li> <li>- Taste</li> <li>- Freshness</li> <li>- Ingredient quality</li> <li>- Location</li> <li>- Temperature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cuisine</li> <li>- Originality</li> <li>- Setting</li> <li>- Value</li> <li>- Price</li> <li>- Wine selection</li> <li>- Cleanliness</li> </ul>
<b>FINANCE</b>	80.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competence</li> <li>- Service</li> <li>- Value</li> <li>- Affiliation</li> <li>- Convenience</li> <li>- Recommended</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cost</li> <li>- Accessibility</li> <li>- Interest rate</li> <li>- Liquidity</li> <li>- Opening hours</li> <li>- Ownership</li> <li>- Proximity</li> <li>- Size</li> <li>- Web site quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reputation</li> <li>- Honesty</li> <li>- Availability</li> <li>- Rate of return</li> <li>- Scope of offer</li> <li>- Benefits</li> <li>- history</li> </ul>
<b>SPA</b>	50.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ambiance</li> <li>- Quality</li> <li>- Service quality</li> <li>- Skill of technician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Product quality</li> <li>- Reputation</li> <li>- Price</li> <li>- Scope of offer</li> <li>- Cleanliness</li> <li>- Décor</li> </ul>

The results in Table 5 demonstrate that there is no simple categorization for the attributes common to interpersonal retail servicescapes. It is apparent that there are social attributes just as there are some physical attributes, but there are also many that are considered both social and physical, supporting P3.

When reviewing the classification results of both Table 4 and Table 5, there does not appear to be a defined relationship between features that are intangible and subjective, and those that are uniquely service related. In tandem, there is no evident relationship between those that are tangible and objective, and only related to the physical aspects of interpersonal retail servicescapes. The content analysis demonstrates that in interpersonal retail servicescapes, tangible features can be related to physical features, but are also often related to service features. Additionally, the content analysis demonstrates that there are numerous features that are perceived as being both subjective and measurable, as well as been socially and physically dependent.

## **Discussion**

The results show that it is important to consider the level of service content within a servicescape at the same time as considering the physical nature of a servicescape. Service within a servicescape is significant because it creates intangible meaning for consumers, often more important than the tangible features common to the servicescape. These research findings confirm that the interaction and the quality of the relational experience between customer and employee are more valued by consumers than the simple presence of the employees (O’Cass and Grace, 2004). In addition the research confirms that service providers are not mere items within a servicescape; employees are instrumental in the creation of attitudes towards services (O’Cass and Grace, 2004). Consumers can perceive value from a physical environment (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, Voss, 2002) just as they can also derive value from a service encounter (Broderick, 1999). In interpersonal retail servicescapes, consumers seek value in the

combination of the environment and the service and expect additional benefits from the interaction with a service provider within a service environment.

Consumers use tangible and intangible criteria that can be both socially and environmentally driven and that are spread between the subjective and objective domains in interpersonal retail servicescapes. The criteria are also evaluated differently depending on their likelihood of being shaped by a human interaction. As demonstrated by the two classification studies, there are significant amounts of mixed mentions – those that either cannot be qualified as entirely subjective or objective, and those that cannot be entirely socially driven or entirely free of social interference. There are also some features in interpersonal retail servicescapes that are evaluated as being entirely a mix of all dimensions: those that are mixed in terms of their subjectivity and their human interaction. These are: cleanliness in restaurants, benefits and history in financial institutions, and cleanliness and décor in spas.

The exploratory findings suggest that classifying features within interpersonal retail servicescapes according to what the literature proposes, i.e. by attributes that are tangible or intangible (Sirgy, 1985) may not be adequate in fully explaining how consumers evaluate servicescapes. The results also do not support the notion that in interpersonal retail servicescapes the environmental stimuli can be defined as being isolated from the social content (Bitner, 1992). Rather it suggests that classifying the features common to servicescapes as tangible or intangible and then as social or physical does not accommodate all the evaluative features consumers use. There are features in interpersonal retail servicescapes that are multidimensional and integrate social and physical as well as tangible and intangible features.

Interpersonal service evaluations are influenced in part by the perceived quality of the personal interaction to be had (Bitner, 1992, Fournier, 1998). In consequence, evaluating these service experiences cannot be done without bias as the quality of the subjectively assessed features is dependent on the perceptions of the evaluating individual. This is particularly the case when consumers have personal expectations and reasons for engaging in consumption experiences (Belk, 1988). As presented by the research results, there may be an interaction between the tangible and intangible features and how these are differently influenced by social content makes the interpersonal retail servicescapes complex to assess. For example, it is interesting to note in the collected data that certain evaluative criteria tend to be identified as personality traits and that these are considered to be subjectively evaluated criteria, for example attentive in restaurants and honesty in financial services. Additionally, features that are proposed as ambient (ambiance) and environmentally manipulated are established as being perhaps motivated by human influence.

Between the three interpersonal industries evaluated, there are some commonalities and potential relationships. A brief review of the top three mentions in all three of the industries shows that value is as important to consumers as service and quality. This confirms research outlining that quality and value are interrelated, and that this relationship is based on the nature of the experience and dependent on consumer expectations (Kupiec and Revell, 1998; Oliver, 1980).

## **Limitations**

In light of the exploratory nature of this research project, it remains that certain results may be indications rather than confirmations. However, the premise was to uncover directions and to use an interpretative rather than positivist approach. As such, the qualitative research methods as well as the small sample sizes are comprehensible. In the first two studies, it appears that inter-judge reliability is low for certain classification categories. While the use of inter-rater reliability is interesting as a means of refining research tools, it may not be an appropriate tool since coding patterns and raters are not always consistent (Braunsberger, Buckler and Ortinau, 2003). In the case of this research, the objective was to show potential trends regarding a servicescape rather than to refine a proper marketing tool, and the use of PhD-trained raters was also a means to offset potential coding bias (Braunsberger, et al. 2003). As such, this method of isolating tendencies is justified. Additionally, the inter-judge classification exercises asked the judges to classify the features outlines on three categories when it might have been possible for a fourth to be included, one that considered that none of the traits could be classified.

## **Contributions of the Research**

While the results of the research are exploratory, the outcomes still indicate the presence of some relationships between the social and physical features of servicescapes. The research points to a need for a more complex understanding and classification of the criteria consumers use when evaluating interpersonal retail servicescapes. It shows that for interpersonal retail servicescapes, measuring tangible attributes in isolation may lead

to incomplete comprehension of consumer evaluations. It is also shown that service-based consumption settings are full of potentially subjective features that are likely to be modified further by a social interaction.

Prior to this initial research, there were few results that explored the variable evaluations made by consumers depending on the type of servicescape. Actually, the literature regroups servicescapes as an entity rather than considering that service-lean scapes may not have the same influence on consumer perceptions and evaluations than service-heavy scapes.

This essay sought to answer seminal questions, such as: Are consumer evaluations in servicescapes based on the tangible/objective or the intangible/subjective features in the environment? Are the social factors within a servicescape influential in the evaluation of the servicescape? Does classifying the features as service related and environmentally related explain why consumers prioritize specific evaluative criteria? How important are service features to consumers within interpersonal retail servicescapes and how related is the service with the physical context in which it occurs? The results show that indeed, consumers use an amalgam of tangible and intangible features that are not necessarily uniquely related to service or to physical features. Rather consumers evaluate servicescapes, and particularly interpersonal retail servicescapes, as a blend of all of these, and they do so differently than for self-servicescapes. This research is a first attempt to demonstrate that all servicescapes cannot be regrouped as one, and that the level of service within the servicescapes may actually lead consumers to evaluate them differently, by attributing different levels of importance to various features common to the individual servicescapes.

The research contributes to the service literature by adding definition to the type of impact that service can have within an environment as well as the scope of consumer evaluations of services. From a marketers' perspective, this is extremely relevant as service can cultivate brand meaning especially as services can be perceived as brands (Berry, 2000). O'Cass and Grace (2003) show that the quality of a servicescape is an important consideration when defining a service brand. However, the type of service and the level of physical complexity it offers, as well as how these influence brand perception of services is indistinguishable in the current literature. Branding literature references the subtleties of brand personality (Aaker, 1997), brand meaning (Berry, 2000), and brand image (Keller, 1993), yet most of the branding literature is weak in evaluating these features for services, as most focuses on products (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley , 1998). Branding for services occurs via the experience of a service, which often happens within a retail setting. Brand strategies tend to be oriented towards products, and are subsequently customized and reworked when it comes to services (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). Service brand strategies should thus be created in consideration of the servicescape and how much they offer. The research presented offers a step towards resolving some of the service brand issues and how to assess consumer evaluations of service brands.

This work allows for interpretive conclusions about distinctions in evaluative criteria and the width of consumer evaluations in interpersonal retail servicescapes. As such, this research provides a foundation for measuring evaluations within these servicescapes along relevant dimensions that incorporate and adequately represent consumer expectations in these settings. In light of the research presented in this essay,

future results will focus on proposing an alternative measure to understand what basis consumers use to assess the overall image of interpersonal servicescape, which are very service-heavy. The premise would be to develop a measurement tool that considers the tangible, intangible, social and physical features common to service-heavy settings in order to see if these actually better explain consumer image, personality, quality and value perceptions.

**ESSAY 2**  
**MEASURING INTERPERSONAL RETAIL SERVICESCAPES USING PERSONALITY TRAITS**

**Introduction**

Many modern servicescapes are considered interpersonal, in that they incorporate some level of interaction between a service provider and a consumer. Servicescapes of the sort are present in numerous hotels, restaurants, health clinics, airlines, and banks. An interpersonal servicescape is one where the relationship between the service provider, the environment, and the consumer is complex and a social interaction is essential in order for the service to occur (Bitner, 1992). The image of interpersonal retail servicescapes is defined by a blend of environmental and social features.

Most retail settings are dynamic as many are continuously attempting to update their image via physical modifications in order to accommodate changes in tastes and fashion. Numerous measures have been developed to evaluate interpersonal services, such as service quality (Parasuraman, et al. 1988), personality of the store brand (d'Astous and Levesque, 2003), and personality of the brand related to the service (Aaker, 1997). However, none of the proposed measures consider all three concurrently.

How consumers evaluate consumption scenarios that incorporate both service/image features and physical features together remains unclear. Product/service perceptions are often projections of the self (Belk, 1988) and this has led researchers to use personality traits as a means to independently evaluate brands (Aaker, 1997) and physical retail settings (d'Astous and Levesque, 2003). Personality measures allow researchers to understand the image evaluations of services and of stores but not both together. Interpersonal services contain these two inseparable features. For example, one

cannot order a meal in most restaurants without a waiter; one cannot take a flight without ever interacting with a flight attendant.

Retail atmospheres are capable of guiding behaviours, and can be described based on the relative amounts of functional and affective qualities inherent to the environment (Darden and Babin, 1994). Measures for retail environments should consider not just in/tangible features but the hedonic and utilitarian features of a setting (Foxall and Greenley, 1999). Servicescapes do not just project an image, but also signal a type of value (Baker, et al. 2002; Darden and Babin, 1994). Yet if and what type of value consumers interpret and expect in interpersonal retail servicescapes specifically however remains undefined.

Borrowing from existing theory, and using an exploratory personality approach, a multidimensional scale is proposed to measure consumer image perceptions in interpersonal retail servicescapes. This scale incorporates context-specific traits and accounts for both the image and physical qualities of these particular servicescapes. In light of the complexity of this type of servicescape, the scale brings together brand, service, and environmental perceptions and incorporates them holistically rather than independently. In consequence, the proposed scale offers a more comprehensive understanding of consumer image perceptions in interpersonal retail servicescapes and how these perceptions motivate various consumer outcome behaviours.

Whereas previous managerial measures such as those that evaluate attributes (e.g., Zagat's for restaurants) or those that have one-dimensional representations (e.g. star or fork ratings for dining experiences) seem interesting, they say little about how consumers evaluate these types of interpersonal settings. The proposed scale enables

retailers to see in more elaborate and consumer-centric terms how the combination of all the features within their servicescape shape the retail image projected to their consumers. Rather than using expert ratings that have limited measurement standards, the proposed measure is wider in scope.

Finally, the scale items proposed are reviewed in order to understand the value they project to consumers. The results demonstrate that consumers engage in interpersonal servicescape with self-augmenting goals in mind as they seek out hedonic and utilitarian value within these settings.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Current Measures for Consumer Interpretations in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes***

All cues in retail settings, including those which are environmental and social, come together and have the potential to influence perceptions. These features can interact not just with the consumer but with each other to elicit responses (Bitner, 1992).

Physical and social aspects of servicescapes can independently influence the quality of image perceptions. Modifications to physical variables in retail environments can have consequences on consumer perceptions and reactions (Kimes and Robson, 2004; Turley and Milliman, 2000). Similarly, changes in service features can also result in variable image perceptions (SERQUAL by Parasuraman, et al. 1988). Retail setting can be “humanized”, making the interaction between the social cues the most important elicitor of consumers’ responses (Fournier, 1988). Social evaluations and perceptions can also have an impact on satisfaction, which can lead to purchase intent (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

Both the physical and the social features of servicescapes can be variable and thus result in varying image construal tactics by consumers. Changes to physical store environments result in a multitude of consumer behaviours (a summary of the physical store environmental factors capable of eliciting affect is outlined by Turley and Milliman (2000)). However, service variability is also a reality. For example, various actions by a service provider can influence the level of tip they receive and this causal relationship is dependent on the types of sales techniques used and the contexts in which they are applied (Lynn and McCall, 2009). Service providers are essential in communicating the image of the retail environment to consumers. If they do not do so effectively, negative consequences on the image of the service provider are likely (Malshe, 2010). Image construal is also dependent on the level of physical complexity (lean or elaborate) as well as the level of social interaction (self-service or interpersonal) (Bitner, 1992) – two features which are naturally intertwined and thus ought to be considered together when evaluating image in interpersonal retail servicescapes.

When consumers evaluate experiences, there are numerous factors that can distort their evaluations. Research demonstrates that individual attributes may be influenced by overall impressions of objects, just as strong impressions regarding one attribute may influence the perception of all other attributes, what is otherwise known as the halo effect (Wirtz and Bateson, 1995). Particularly for services, where numerous attributes are either ambiguous or credence attributes, it is difficult to specify what consumers perceive and subsequently evaluate (Wirtz and Bateson, 1995). If consumers do not evaluate the full scope of a service or an experience, they may use limited information in order to establish perceptions, which in turn shape their expectations (Hoch and Deighton, 1989). The halo

effect is most present when services are evaluated using attributes, which renders this sort of evaluative mean only appropriate for comparisons between features of an experience, and not between varieties of different experiences (Wirtz and Bateson, 1995). One of the ways to control the halo effect is to use well timed, fixed scale measurements, as was shown for retail store image (Wu and Petroschius, 1987). The halo effect has been observed not just for pre-choice evaluations (Holbrook, 1983), in retail stores (Wu and Petroschius, 1987), in interpersonal judgement scenarios (Murphy and Jako, 1989), and for services (Wirtz and Bateson, 1995). It would therefore likely also occur in a retail situation that are interpersonal services, such as restaurants.

While there are methods to limit the halo effect, such as evaluating individual stores with only one attribute at a time (Wirtz and Bateson, 1995), it may not be realistic to think that consumers evaluate attributes of their experiences individually or that they compare individual attributes one at a time to their comparison standard. Avoiding the halo effect in consumer evaluations must be difficult if at all possible when attempting to uncover expectations, which can be related to multiple-dimension evaluations such as satisfaction and quality (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman, et al. 1988).

### ***Consumer Personality and Store Image Congruence as Related to Expectations***

Image construal does not occur just as a result of interactions with environmental or service cues, it can also be shaped by consumer expectations. Consumer expectations are key determinants of consumer evaluations and can have direct influences on consumers' assessments of congruency and their resulting evaluations (Morales, Kahn, McAlister, Broniarczyk, 2005). Expectations can be measured as dependent variables or used as moderators if they are known ahead of time (Ofir and Simonson, 2007; Shiv,

Carmon and Ariely, 2005). Unlike predictive expectations which are variable, desired expectations “can only remain unchanged or increase, as they capture what consumers think they deserve” (Devlin, Gwynne and Ennew, 2002, p.120). The stability of desired expectation is linked to higher level values and shaped by individual factors such as personality traits (Baron and Kenny, 1986) and personal needs (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1993).

Personality can be a predictive variable of behaviour and differences in personality are linked to differences in consumption. The definition of the personality concept relies in part on the environment and within the social setting in which it is conceived (Rogers, 1961). The self-concept is “the organized set of characteristics that the individual perceives as peculiar to himself/herself” (Ryckmann, 1993, p.106), and the self is an agglomeration of personality traits that are somewhat publicly moulded. Human personality measures are oriented around the Big-Five, or five generally agreed upon dimensions, although the quality and the traits per dimension will vary depending on the human personality research paradigm (Goldberg, 1990). While the number of traits in the catalogues defined in the psychology literature varies from 20 to 100 and can be used in bi-polar scales or unipolar scales, the most robust is shown to be an inventory of 100 traits measured in unipolar format (Goldberg, 1992).

Consumption choices are extensions of the self, meant to represent possession via contact and engagement with products/services (Belk, 1988). Consumers also make product choices that reflect their ideal self-concept and that are congruent with their personality (Malhotra, 1988). In concordance with the psychology literature, it is not surprising that most marketing scales (Aaker, 1997; d’Astous and Levesque, 2003)

seeking to uncover brand and store personality respectively, are also oriented around five dimensions.

Personality may be a relevant means for measuring holistic store image for interpersonal retail settings because the use of independent physical attributes does not to capture the full scope of consumer perceptions (Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975) and just like people, products and services can have personality images, which can be described using terms such as friendly, modern or traditional (Sirgy, 1985). Personality traits are perceived to be an appropriate measure for consumption experiences because personality has foundations in the environment and because personality definition occurs as a function of interactions (Belk, 1988). Furthermore, consumer personality can interact with brand personality and store induced affect (Orth, Limon and Rose, 2010) and consumer perceptions of brand image can lead to brand personality development (Plumer, 1985).

Aaker (1997) uses personality as means to measure consumer perceptions with a five-factor Brand Personality Scale (BPS). Since the creation of the BPS, numerous extensions of it have been developed, demonstrating the applicability of personality trait-based measures across a variety of domains in marketing. The BPS is appropriate for such categories as tangible products (Govers and Schoormans, 2005), for national versus store brands (Beldona and Wysong, 2007), and for branded quick-service foodservice (Wee, 2004). The BPS is also the base upon which the Store Personality Scale (SPS) was developed (d'Astous and Levesque, 2003). However, while the BPS is used across numerous product categories, it has not been used for service heavy brands or for interpersonal services.

### *Hedonic/Utilitarian Aspects of Store Image and Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes*

Current metrics for store image and service quality, such as SERQUAL (Parasuraman, et al. 1988) consider the centrality of expectations in consumers evaluations, but do not go into detail as to why specifically these personality traits and features are outlined as most relevant in consumer evaluations or most appropriate for evaluative purposes. If personality traits are socially shaped and individual to each consumer, they may represent complex consumer expectations. Essay 1 demonstrated that for interpersonal retail servicescapes in particular, the evaluative criteria in these settings were complex and that both tangible and intangible features were assessed when consumers evaluate such service settings. Thus the question remains: which evaluative criteria do consumers use and upon which bases do they do so when establishing image in interpersonal retail servicescapes?

The classification of products and services, particularly into dyads like hedonic/utilitarian or fun/functional is well chronicled in the literature (Babin, Darden, Griffin, 1994; Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982). “Hedonic goods provide more experiential consumption, fun, pleasure, and excitement (designer clothes, sports cars, luxury watches, etc.), whereas utilitarian goods are primarily instrumental and functional (microwaves, minivans, personal computers, etc.)” (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000, p. 60). It is also possible that an experience can contain both hedonic and utilitarian features. For example, consuming food serves a functional purpose (nutrition) but can also be hedonic (tasty). Alternatively, financial services are more utilitarian (transactional) yet consumers may feel a sense of fun when augmenting their personal wealth. There is a contextual impact associated to the importance of hedonic and utilitarian products, as consumers

will actually preference utilitarian goods in acquisition choices but favour hedonic goods in forfeiture scenarios (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000).

Within servicescapes in particular, utilitarian features in store environments are important in gauging retail image perceptions (Foxall and Greenley, 1999). Social features such as atmosphere are successfully measured using hedonic/utilitarian measures (Darden and Babin, 1994). The overall atmosphere of a store can induce behaviours from consumers based on functional and hedonic qualities (Babin, et al. 1994). The hedonic/utilitarian approach to measuring consumption is appropriate to explain consumer expectations of both tangibles (Voss, Spangenberg, Grohmann, 2003) and services (Babin, et al. 1994). Thus personality traits attributed to brands/stores/servicescapes may be established using value-based expectations that are context specific.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In interpersonal retail servicescapes, contact with a service provider occurs within a physical environment and a context that is specific to that type of interaction. Context is essential to personality definition (Belk, 1988). Context should be considered when measuring perceived quality (Tse and Ho, 2009) and is important when gauging a wide range of service interactions (Alden, He, Chen, 2010). Many of the personality scales are applications of the original BPS within a context, but not many are tailored to the context. Regarding physical settings, d'Astous and Levesque's (2003) SPS evaluates the physical layout of a store but uses the items of the BPS which may not be suited to the particularities of the physical retail environment alone. Unsuccessful use of personality

measures when not conceived in context is apparent when the BPS is used within different restaurant categories as “the framework does not generalize to research situations in which personality is measured at the individual brand level and/or situations in which consumers, rather than product categories, represent a facet of differentiation” (Austin, Siguaw, Mattila, 2003, p.88-89).

The BPS does not apply to all forms of servicescapes (Siguaw, Mattila, Austin, 1999) because there is little distinction between the dimensions it includes when used for restaurants. Furthermore, the meanings of words and shifts in understanding of adjectives can have a significant influence on interpretation of the items on a scale, thus influencing outcomes (Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Guido, 2001), and the BPS may not be tailored to retail settings that are service-heavy. The comprehension of one measure within one context does not necessarily represent the same thing in another context. Additionally, for services, the BPS is not effective in contexts other than those that are self-service (Wee, 2004).

For services, the BPS is a measure thought to define the image consumers use in order to make the assessment of congruency between expectations and outcomes (Harris and Fleming, 2005), which then helps them establish satisfaction. Yet when the BPS is used to gauge services, the BPS benefits from being supplemented by the five-factor human personality model (Goldberg, 1993) and together can then lead to SERVPERF evaluations.

There are differences between the BPS and other measures of services. Measures such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, et al. 1988) and SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) are based on evaluating the outcome of the interaction between customers and

services and purport that satisfaction leads to purchases. SERVPERF models satisfaction as an attitude leading to service quality perceptions and not expectations leading to perceptions (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

Alternatively, the SPS (d'Astous and Levesque, 2003), which measures the physical layout of the store also has some limitations in terms of use for interpersonal retail servicescapes. The scale takes into consideration the physical layout and measures it using store-specific personality traits. However, by asking consumers to evaluate department stores by name (e.g. Wal-Mart) on various personality traits, it inevitably measures the brand personality of these branded stores, and not the independent store personality.

The nature of this research is to develop a personality-based scale to gauge the image of interpersonal servicescape that takes into account the intricacies of this type of retail setting. It seeks to understand which features, as measured by traits, are essential to retail settings that are service heavy. It seeks to uncover and account for the dynamic nature of the service brand and the causality between image perceptions by the consumer and the subsequent behavioural outcomes. Numerous measures review service evaluations (SERVQUAL and SERVPERF), or measure the interpersonal experience as a brand rather than as a dynamic service (BPS). Use of these measures in contexts other than what they were designed for, particularly when used to measure services, is shown to be inadequate (Austin et al. 2003; Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Cronin and Taylor, 1992) and thus there is a need for an alternative and new measurement tool for interpersonal services specifically.

Based on research it seems that alternative evaluative approaches, such as those that are hedonic/utilitarian based, could be proposed to understand what value consumers associate to their personality motivated evaluations. Subjective attributes of a retail environment such as atmosphere and services, have been successfully measured using hedonic/utilitarian measures (Darden and Babin, 1994) making this avenue interesting to explore for a store image measure in interpersonal retail servicescapes. For example, retail atmospheres capable of guiding behaviours can be described based on the relative amounts of functional and affective qualities (Babin, et al. 1994). Thus:

*H1: Measuring interpersonal retail servicescapes with personality traits represents the hedonic and utilitarian value that consumers associate to these sorts of settings.*

The first set of studies (1-3) will seek to develop a personality-based scale for interpersonal servicescape that takes into account the intricacies of this type of retail setting by understanding which features, as measured by traits, are “essential” to brands that are service heavy. It will seek to uncover and account for the dynamic nature of the service brand, and show the causality between consumer expectations and outcomes. A final study will use the results of the first study and seek to explain the value that drives consumer outcomes within interpersonal retail servicescapes.

## **Methodology**

### ***Study 1: Determining the traits common to the retail experience***

For the development of an interpersonal service personality scale, restaurants are selected as a prototypical experience. These are deemed the most representative interpersonal retail setting because they respect the definition of having an elaborate physical complexity and customer and employee involvement (Bitner, 1992). Furthermore, in terms of accessibility, restaurants are retail locations that most individuals are likely to frequent often compared to hotels, airlines, and health clinics. The broad range of retail services (being both lean and elaborate) and the various types of retail settings (i.e. fast food, casual, fine dining, ethnic, breakfast, lunch, dinner, thematic, etc.) restaurants regroup are features of this industry that also makes it appealing for measurement development as the resulting scale can be said to account for more variability.

Rather than using previously established personality traits, an exploratory approach was taken to generate items. Human personality scales are wide in scope but the limited consensus regarding the number of possible traits to use (Goldberg, 1990) as well as the wide catalogue of human traits (Goldberg, 1992) which does not consider the specificity of the consumption context was a deterrent. Research has shown that in service contexts, pure human personality traits must be concurrently evaluated with service features (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), thus uncovering only the service related personality traits was deemed to be a more appropriate approach. The BPS and by default the SPS both have validity issues regarding the items they contain, because they are either not personality traits (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003) or not adapted to the context

being researched because brands are not being researched specifically (Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Guido, 2001). Finally, the BPS is not adapted to all types of servicescapes (Siguaw, et al. 1999; Wee, 2004), thus an entirely new inventory may be warranted.

A free-association questionnaire as per Richins (1997) was created and distributed to graduate students in a large North American city and emailed to those working the restaurant industry via a local culinary web site mailing list. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to state traits they would associate with five restaurants they had patronized and liked, and five restaurants they had patronized and disliked. The sample (n=48 or 40% of the surveys distributed) consisted of one-third industry workers and two-thirds restaurant patrons in order to account for all perspectives – service providers and consumers. Respondents were on average between the ages of 35-39 and 54% were male. Restaurant habits were also surveyed and results showed that the average number of outings in restaurants per month was 3.25 with 55% of the sample eating out at least once a week. Albeit small, the sample generated enough mentions that the sample is acceptable due to the large amount of repetition in the mentions.

*Analysis.* The total number of unfiltered mentions was 1,820, and was recorded for a total of 426 restaurants. Initially all mentions that did not relate to personality were removed. These included all references to physical attributes (e.g., great wine list, good food). All cultural and socio-economic references were removed (e.g., Mediterranean, European, Retro, not Italian, middle-aged, motherly, high culture). Mentions that were associated to intellectual abilities, gender or social class were also removed in order to respect the validity principle (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003). A list of 308 traits were

retained and these were reviewed by three expert judges (one psychologist, one marketing professor, one doctoral student in psychology) to verify that there were no non-personality traits lingering on the list. Inter-judge agreement was 93% and in consequence, an additional 23 traits were removed. The final list of purified traits was 285.

Another study was conducted to reduce the number of traits, in order to make the final list of traits more manageable, and to remove what may otherwise be artefacts or irrelevant items with the potential to cloud future analyses (Aaker, 1997; Richins, 1997). For this study, the 285 traits were randomized and featured in an online survey where subjects (another pool of graduate students, n=32, 41% male, 72% between the ages of 25 and 39 years old, 66% eating out at least once a week or more) rated them on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all descriptive; 7 = very descriptive). The summary ratings for all the traits were computed and a cut-off point of 4.5 on the 7 point scale was used<sup>1</sup> leaving 84 traits to describe restaurants.

As a way to ensure that the exploratory data-driven methodology was appropriate and did not replicate previously defined measures, a review of the traits in comparison to those included in the BPS (15 traits), the Store Personality (20 traits) and Goldberg's 100-item unipolar clusters was conducted. The results in Table 6 show that the traits generated are more specific to the interpersonal context and have little in common with the previous measures.

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<sup>1</sup> A cut-off point of 5 retained only 41 traits was perceived to be not large enough to ensure content validity

**Table 6: Comparing Trait Catalogues**

	Catalogues of Traits Generated	
	Initial 285 traits inventory	Reduced 84 trait inventory
<i>Traits appearing in:</i>		
<b>Brand Personality Scale</b>	7 (2.5%)	4 (4.8%)
<b>Store Personality Scale</b>	6 (2.1%)	4 (4.8%)
<b>Goldberg clusters</b>	34 (11.9%)	10 (11.9%)
<b>In both BPS and SPS</b>	2 (0.7%)	2 (2.3%)
<b>In both Goldberg and SPS</b>	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)
<b>None of the previous scales</b>	235 (84.5%)	64 (76.2%)

***Study 2: Uncovering the Dimensions of Interpersonal Servicescape Personality***

Using the 84 traits retained post the purification and reduction exercises, an online survey was created to uncover the psychometric dimensions of interpersonal servicescape personality. An online survey was deemed appropriate because it not only allowed for more efficient data collection but also allowed for more geographic coverage, thus for more potential external validity in the results (Bhattacharjee, 2002). At the beginning of the survey, subjects were asked to state the name of a restaurant they had patronized in the past 30 days and the location where this restaurant was found. Subjects were then asked to keep this restaurant in mind and rate (1=not at all descriptive; 5=very descriptive) each trait in light of their experience at the stated establishment. The survey was diffused to general and food/wine centric consumer panels via consumer interest web sites (blogs, forums) across three major North American cities. The online survey resulted in 239 questionnaires with a total of 202 usable surveys (85% completion rate). The sample was 46% male, 54% female, with 16% working in the industry. Seventy eight

percent of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54 years old, and 67% of respondents ate out at least once a week, if not more.

*Exploratory Factor Analysis:* Only 2.5% of the data was missing therefore imputation is the best course of action, allowing for retention of the full sample. The resulting sample reported a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic of 0.907, showing that the data was appropriate for exploratory factor analysis, particularly as this is an ad hoc measure (Conway and Huffcutt, 2003). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p < 0.00$ ) showing that the items are related and thus suitable to be regrouped into factors.

Principal components analysis with a varimax rotation was used. The initial solution resulted in 13 factors with an eigenvalue of one or more, accounting for 72% of the total variance explained. An overview of the Scree-plot showed that the optimal number of factors was about four. Since the literature regarding experiential consumption scenarios made mention of four evaluative features (one social and three environmental according to Bitner (1992)) and most previously developed measures incorporating personality accounted for five factors, an analysis of four and five factor solutions was conducted. In all of the aforementioned solutions, two traits consistently exhibited low loadings, below  $|0.4|$  (Churchill, 1979). These were removed from subsequent analyses comparing the retained four and five factor model, in order to help purify the data. Comparing the two 82-trait models and reviewing the loadings on the dimensions showed that the number of indicators that either loaded on more than one factor or had low loadings on all factors, was almost identical between the four and five factor solutions. However, incorporating the fifth factor, which accounted for 7% of the total variance, was deemed more appropriate for construct validity purposes and thus a five-factor

solution was retained. This approach was also coherent with Goldberg's research demonstrating that five factor solutions for personality measures were the most promising and representative (Goldberg, 1993).

An iterative purification process of items in the scale took place, where careful consideration was taken to review not just the data but the content as well of the items being removed. Removing 28 low loading or multiple-dimension loading traits from the model showed increased total variance explained while the trait relationships continued to define themselves more clearly across the five dimensions. The remaining five-factor solution is comprised of 54 traits with 62% of the total variance explained and all of the indicators loading on only one dimension, and with a minimum of three traits on each dimension (Nunnally, 1978).

In order to make the scale more parsimonious, three dimensions of the scale were independently factored using principal component analysis and a varimax rotation, as per Aaker (1997). After the facets within the three largest dimensions were regrouped, a factor analysis of the remaining 42-trait structure was run to gauge how this purification step led to a better overall model as compared to the original 54-trait five-factor model. The total variance explained for the 42 trait model remained stable at 62% revealing that the 42-trait model explains similar levels of variance. Table 7 outlines the resulting framework, including the names of each dimension based on the traits included in them. Table 8 outlines the more parsimonious factor structure.

**Table 7: Comparing the 42 Trait Structure to the 54 Trait Structure**

	42-trait model		54-trait model	
	Number of indicators	Variance per factor	Number of indicators	Variance per factor
<b>Reputable</b>	16	14.9%	22	20.4%
<b>Distinct</b>	12	18.1%	16	19.0%
<b>Encouraging</b>	7	12.9%	9	11.1%
<b>Considerate</b>	4	7.6%	4	6.2%
<b>Dynamic</b>	3	8.9%	3	5.0%
<b>Total var. exp.</b>		62.2%		61.7%

**Table 8: Parsimonious 42-trait EFA Factor Structure for Interpersonal Services**

	Reputable	Distinct	Encouraging	Dynamic	Considerate
Creative	<b>.837</b>	.033	.014	.098	.116
Daring	<b>.885</b>	-.002	.015	.079	.020
Experiential	<b>.812</b>	.029	-.016	.087	.083
Innovative	<b>.906</b>	.021	-.059	.049	.124
Inventive	<b>.819</b>	.031	-.078	.065	.170
Interesting	<b>.647</b>	.333	.143	.257	.037
Original	<b>.811</b>	.097	.087	.224	.005
Refreshing	<b>.621</b>	.255	.129	.283	.031
Unique	<b>.713</b>	.103	.291	.216	.030
Ambitious	<b>.608</b>	.221	-.217	.027	.324
Impressive	<b>.667</b>	.273	-.083	.180	.281
Passionate	<b>.471</b>	.204	-.083	.350	.449
Accommodating	.034	<b>.500</b>	.253	.420	.334
Eager to please	.232	<b>.609</b>	.109	.314	.324
Friendly	.134	<b>.437</b>	.420	.406	.278
Hospitable	.103	<b>.601</b>	.299	.443	.225
Welcoming	.108	<b>.468</b>	.385	.488	.238
Dedicated	.333	<b>.569</b>	.108	.268	.043

Authentic	.328	<b>.323</b>	.318	.359	.029
Genuine	.271	<b>.401</b>	.390	.196	.161
Well-intentioned	.124	<b>.511</b>	.155	.391	.127
Neat	.152	<b>.674</b>	-.080	.016	.146
Proper	.105	<b>.527</b>	-.203	-.264	.352
Polite	-.024	<b>.720</b>	.032	-.020	.309
Respectful	.098	<b>.722</b>	.132	-.033	.356
Consistent	.070	<b>.656</b>	.340	.160	-.169
Dependable	.068	<b>.703</b>	.283	.101	-.060
Reliable	.068	<b>.725</b>	.246	.255	.025
Approachable	-.008	.118	<b>.625</b>	.164	.303
Easy going	.110	.112	<b>.842</b>	.201	-.004
Laid back	.097	-.071	<b>.771</b>	.188	.074
Low key	-.203	.065	<b>.760</b>	-.162	-.045
Modest	.029	.293	<b>.705</b>	-.064	.076
Reasonable	-.062	.225	<b>.662</b>	.073	-.051
Relaxed	.017	.123	<b>.816</b>	.147	.147
Flexible	.115	.262	.230	.054	<b>.477</b>
Intimate	.136	.081	.125	-.073	<b>.763</b>
Romantic	.251	.263	-.077	.010	<b>.695</b>
Warm	.152	.141	.332	.285	<b>.667</b>
Animated	.291	.129	.078	<b>.766</b>	-.014
Festive	.327	.213	.040	<b>.711</b>	-.026
Lively	.325	.063	.142	<b>.719</b>	.045

*Nomological Validity Tests:* In order to assess the relevance of this new structure, and unearth its merits, the proposed scale was tested using a currently used managerial scale. The purpose was to show that the scale is a better representation of consumer expectations than alternative measures claiming to represent the same.

The Zagat Guide, a global reference for restaurants ([www.zagat.com](http://www.zagat.com)), includes over 30,000 listings for dining establishments worldwide. This publicly accessible review database evaluates restaurants using consumer ratings on three dimensions: service, food and décor. The rating scales are the same all over the world.

Of the 202 data points collected for the EFA, 77 respondents stated restaurants with ratings available in the Zagat survey. Using these 77 establishments, comparisons between groups within the sample and on the three Zagat dimensions (food, service, and décor) were run to see if there were significant differences. One comparison was between two distinct cities within the same country. The Zagat dimensions of food, service, and décor showed no significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) differences between patrons of City A and City B. Thus consumers in both cities patronized locations that did not differ in terms of the value placed on them for food, service, or décor. However the dimensions of the newly developed scale revealed that there was a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the REPUTABLE dimension, where City B patronized restaurants with higher ratings on this dimension. A closer review of the facets and traits reveals that CREATIVE, DARING, EXPERIENTIAL and INNOVATIVE were all rated significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ) in City B whereas INVENTIVE did not. AMBITIOUS and IMPRESSIVE rated significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ) but PASSIONATE was not for City B. In order to explain these differences, a review of the socio-demographics of City A and City B demonstrated that City B is almost twice as large, thus more urban, has a reputation for being a trendy hub, and it has a much higher proportion of multicultural communities. It appears that those living in City B prefer avant-garde and multicultural restaurant experiences. This consumer expectation is

uncovered using the multiple traits of the interpersonal personality scale developed but not revealed using the attribute-based three dimensional assessment provided by Zagat.

### ***Study 3: Confirming the Reliability of the Scale***

Using the 42 traits retained from the EFA, an online survey was conducted with a new sample as a means to confirm the scale items and show that the overall scale had the potential to be generalizable.

*Questionnaires:* Just as with Study 2, subjects were asked to state the name of a restaurant they had patronized in the past 30 days and the location of this restaurant. Subjects were then asked to keep this restaurant in mind and rate (1=not at all descriptive; 5=very descriptive) each trait in light of their experience within the stated establishment. The survey was diffused to a general online consumer panel in North America. The online survey resulted in 227 data points. The resulting sample was 63% female, 79% were between the ages of 18 and 49 years old, and 51% of respondents eating out in restaurants at least once a week.

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis:* With AMOS software, an analysis was conducted using the 227 data points to determine the reliability and generalizability of the interpersonal servicescape scale. To begin with, all five dimensions were tested individually in order to isolate erroneous items or problematic indicators. For each of the five dimensions, all of the parameter estimates were shown to be highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) on their respective dimensions, demonstrating that they were relevant to the dimension they were meant to represent. Once grouped together and allowed to correlate, the absolute fit statistics suggested a moderate model fit. As per Hair, et al. (2006), a few indicators were dropped, using the residual estimates and modification indices as guides

to establish which, once removed, would result in a better model fit. This purification resulted in a 37-item model indicating excellent absolute fit statistics ( $\chi^2 = 2180.71$ ;  $df = 804$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.85$ , Hair et al. 2006) and incremental fit statistics (CFI = .75; GFI = .68; NFI = .66). The complex models often yields in lower fit indexes (Hair et al., 2006) and complex models are best evaluated using multiple indicators that better demonstrate the overall quality of the results (Lohmöller, 1989). However, variance extracted measures for each of the dimensions demonstrated strong overall reliability with most of the dimensions (Reputable = .77; Distinct = .86; Encouraging = .75; Considerate = .59; Dynamic = .52). Each item had a regression weight that was highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and all of the critical ratios loaded in a highly significant fashion on the factors. Each dimension also retained a minimum of three indicators (Bollen, 1989). The fit statistics demonstrate this large model is capable of putting order in the complexity of the relationships common between the 37 items of the scale. This is further supported by the correlations of the items within factors, (alphas between 0.60 and 0.90), indicating that the items were still appropriately dispersed across their intended dimensions. For the final list of the traits, including the congruence correlations, please refer to Appendix A.

*Nomological Validity Tests.* Usability of the scale lies in its ability to be an antecedent to specific consumer behaviours in restaurants. Other than rating a particular restaurant for Study 3, subjects were also asked to state, using single items, how satisfied they were with their experience, how much value they felt they got, how worthwhile the experience was, how likely they would be to return, and how likely they would be to recommend the establishment to someone else (word-of-mouth). The results presented in Table 9 demonstrates how each dimension of the interpersonal servicescape personality

scale can be a determinant of desirable marketing behaviour by consumers, thus confirming the nomological validity of the newly developed scale. In particular, Table 9 shows how these will vary depending on the meal occasion. This shows how the scale is capable of making distinctions between various factors within the environment and the precision it can have at understanding dynamic environments.

**Table 9: Dimensions as Determinants of Key Marketing Behaviours**

		Dependent Variables Coefficient Standardized Betas				
Dimensions		Satisfaction	Value	Worth	WOM	Repatronage
<b>Meal Occasion: LUNCH</b>	<i>Reputable</i>	.543 <sup>b</sup> t=3.23			.582 <sup>a</sup> t=4.35	.556 <sup>a</sup> t=4.91
	<i>Distinct</i>					
	<i>Encouraging</i>		.474 <sup>b</sup> t=3.28			
	<i>Considerate</i>			.471 <sup>b</sup> t=3.25		
	<i>Dynamic</i>	-.365 <sup>c</sup> t=-2.17				
<b>Dimensions</b>		<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Worth</b>	<b>WOM</b>	<b>Repatronage</b>
<b>Meal Occasion: DINNER</b>	<i>Reputable</i>	.637 <sup>a</sup> t=9.43	.38 <sup>a</sup> t=4.00	.497 <sup>a</sup> t=6.14	.407 <sup>a</sup> t=4.92	.404 <sup>a</sup> t=4.67
	<i>Distinct</i>			.170 <sup>c</sup> t=2.10	.254 <sup>c</sup> t=3.07	.181 <sup>c</sup> t=2.10
	<i>Encouraging</i>		.225 <sup>c</sup> t=2.36			
	<i>Considerate</i>					
	<i>Dynamic</i>					

<sup>a</sup> p-value < 0.001; <sup>b</sup> p-value < 0.01; <sup>c</sup> p-value < 0.05

#### ***Study 4: Uncovering the Value of Personality Traits for Interpersonal Retail***

##### ***Servicescapes***

Using the proposed personality traits uncovered in the first study another empirical study was conducted. While personality traits were demonstrated to account for some of the subjectivity and the interactive nature of interpersonal retail servicescapes, it remains unclear as to why and what sort of value these items might represent and why they mirror consumer expectations. It was postulated that functional and hedonic values underlie the use of personality traits for many reasons. Notably, consumers are not likely to willingly submit themselves to negative experiences or to evaluate themselves negatively as personality is based on image enhancement (Malhotra, 1988). As such, one could consider that subjective measures are not valenced in a positive/negative domain but in an alternative domain and so the hedonic and utilitarian domain was tested.

*Questionnaire:* For the study (n = 150), the 37 trait catalogue that was retained after the confirmatory factor analysis from the first study of this essay was used in a survey. The study was conducted online with a consumer panel sourced in a large North American city. Respondents read following definitions:

- *Hedonism can be described as the pursuit of pleasure and striving for happiness. People can be hedonic and act or engage with people and/or things without necessarily having an end objective to accomplish but rather just for the fun of it.*
- *Being utilitarian means that a person acts with the intention of a consequence and an outcome. They always act with a function in mind and tasks are justified as a means*

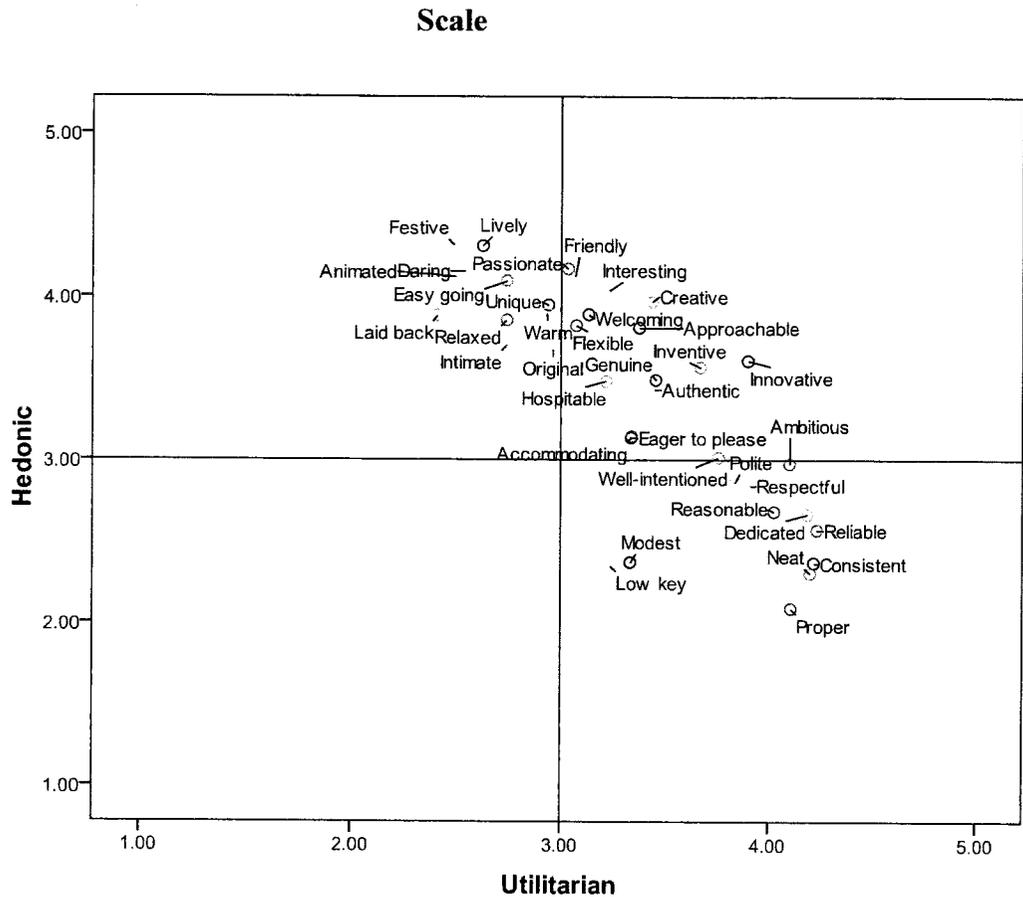
*to an end. There is an objective and a goal for every act and/or interaction with people and with things.*

- Personality is defined via traits. Personality traits are psychological characteristics that a person is born with and leads them to behave in a certain way. They are stable and consistent over time, regardless of the situation or event. For each trait listed, please rate how hedonic (fun) and utilitarian (functional) you perceive each personality trait to be.*

The questionnaire listed all of the 37 traits and respondents gave a score for hedonic value and another score for utilitarian value using five-point Likert scales (1-not at all; 5 – very much so; n/a or I don't know what this means). In order to calculate means, the two scores were then recoded into one so that hedonic traits had a positive score, utilitarian traits had a negative score, and neutral traits had a score close to zero.

*Results:* The sample was 71% female, 81% between the ages of 18-49 years old and 43% ate out in restaurants at least once a week. A review of the 37 traits in the catalogue demonstrates that the traits vary in their hedonic and utilitarian value – they are not all homogenous. The scores of the traits were placed in a cluster in order to see where they resided in the hedonic-utilitarian quadrant. The results in Figure 3 show how all traits have at least one high value – either utilitarian or hedonic. None of the traits reside in the low-utilitarian-low hedonic quadrant. This suggests that consumers indeed have a personal image construal that is in a self-enhancing domain and that image of the consumption scenarios they participate in, such as interpersonal retail servicescapes, have value, confirming H1.

**Figure 3: Orientation of Personality Traits in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes**



The mean of the all 37 of the retained traits included in the structure of the interpersonal retail servicescapes measure had a mean = 0.0841 – demonstrating that the interpersonal scale represents a balance between hedonic and utilitarian value. There is an equal amount of both values that consumers perceive to be relevant in interpersonal retail servicescapes. The individual traits tell a story but when regrouped according to the structure proposed in the interpersonal retail servicescapes scale, the complexity of the image construal is better explained.

In order to understand the intricacy of the factors of the scale, each of the traits within each of the dimensions was regrouped and averaged to give a general score for

each of the dimensions. Using a t-test, the average score of each dimension was tested against the average for the overall catalogue in order to see if there were significant differences, or different values associated to each of the dimensions. A closer look at each of the individual dimensions of the scale instrument developed demonstrates that there are differences between each of the dimensions where some are either significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) more hedonic or utilitarian than the average mean of the traits included in the main structure – see Table 10.

**Table 10: Means and Significance Tests Per Dimension of Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err. Mean	t-value	Sig.	Mean Diff.
<b>Diverse</b>	.4756	.93594	.07642	5.122	.000 <sup>a</sup>	.39146
<b>Reputable</b>	-.6702	.84813	.06925	-10.893	.000 <sup>b</sup>	-.75432
<b>Encouraging</b>	.1600	.76241	.06225	1.219	.225	.07590
<b>Considerate</b>	.8889	1.12571	.09191	8.756	.000 <sup>a</sup>	.80479
<b>Dynamic</b>	1.7000	1.31970	.10775	14.996	.000 <sup>a</sup>	1.61590

<sup>a</sup> Significantly more hedonic dimension, <sup>b</sup> Significantly more utilitarian dimension

These results suggest that for the two most important dimensions (most variance explained) of interpersonal retail servicescapes, consumers associate a hedonic and a utilitarian value. Additionally, each of the dimensions accounts for a different level of hedonic and utilitarian value. These results confirm H1 – consumers seek a blend of both fun and functionality in interpersonal retail servicescapes, values that may shape their expectations.

When coupled, the results of the studies of this essay also suggest that there may be different values associated to consumer outcomes when they construct images for

interpersonal retail servicescapes. Not all dimensions are associated with the same amount of value, and every dimension has been shown to relate to certain outcome behaviours. In particular, while some dimensions are significantly more hedonic (DIVERSE, CONSIDERATE, and DYNAMIC), one dimension is significantly more functional (REPUTABLE) and one remains a balance of both (ENCOURAGING). It is interesting to note that CONSIDERATE, DIVERSE, and REPUTABLE are also the dimensions that were found to be significantly related to WOM behaviours in interpersonal retail settings. Here, rather than the positive-negative duality that is usually ascribed to WOM, there appears to be the potential for both hedonic and utilitarian dimensions. WOM may be used to relay both fun and functional information/expectations.

## **Discussion**

The use of personality traits in order to measure store image construal in interpersonal retail servicescapes shows promise as a measure for two main reasons: it mirrors how consumers perceive themselves because the measures are based on self-image construal, and it highlights why consumers wish to engage in these sorts of settings – because they have value for the consumer.

The scale sheds light on the depth and quality of the evaluations by consumers when they are engaging in interpersonal retail experiences. As Bolton, Grewal, and Levy (2007) emphasize, much remains to be uncovered in terms of consumer's holistic image impressions in servicescapes, yet this scale is a step towards explaining the multiple dimensions and clarifying the mechanisms behind these evaluations.

The link between personality and projected self in interpersonal retail experiences is stable and constant, as demonstrated in the reliability of the scale developed. Across multiple samples, the weights of the dimensions and the overall variance do not fluctuate significantly. This is essential as the premise of the research is to account for variations at individual brand levels (Austin et al. 2003) and account for the dynamic nature of the setting. Consumers use personality traits to evaluate congruency with expectations and these are evaluative criteria that are stable and thus is useful even in changeable contexts, which are common to interpersonal retail servicescapes where service quality can vary.

A close review of the dimensions showcases how interdependent the environment, the interactions within the environment, and the offer truly are, further clarifying the nature of interpersonal retail scenarios. Bitner (1992) points out that all three of the aforementioned elements interact in highly interpersonal settings to create a servicescape image; this is made obvious within the dimensions of the proposed scale as each dimension contains at least two of these features within the definition. For example, a restaurant can be distinct via its cuisine, its décor and its service, be reputable with its service and the meals it promotes, and be an encouraging environment where the staff puts diners at ease. The influence of the service encounter permeates each dimension, substantiating its centrality to the consumption experience. This illustrates the theoretical standpoint that many servicescapes and the social interactions within them cannot be separated.

The applications of this scale are numerous. The first is that the use of personality traits is an appropriate measurement methodology beyond what was previously done for the interpersonal retail setting. Personality traits take into consideration not just the

physical features inherent to retail spaces but also the service interactions within this space, which is demonstrated in the scale by the scope of the dimensions. The five factors offer a better understanding of consumer evaluation and thus the scale is appropriate for use as an antecedent measure for such behaviours as satisfaction (Oliver, 1980), repatronage (Kumar and Shah, 2004) and word-of-mouth (Reichheld, 2003), as the nomological validity tests of the confirmatory study shows.

Consumers seek out value in consumption because these are based on their expectation regarding services (Babin, et al. 1994) and regarding products (Voss, et al. 2003). As interpersonal retail servicescapes are a blend of both products and services, it comes as no surprise that the same hedonic and utilitarian values are uncovered. The research in this essay confirms that interpersonal retail servicescapes are hedonic because they include experiential/intangible features and tangibles (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000), but these settings are also filled with utilitarian features that are relevant (Foxall and Greenley, 1999) when consumers construct image perceptions within and regarding these settings.

### **Managerial Implications**

The comparison between the *Zagat Guide* and the interpersonal servicescape scale begins to shed light on the premise that the dynamic nature of the retail setting, even across geography and cultures, can indeed be captured and evaluated, and this when stable measures such as personality traits are used. The variability attributed to consumers is actually reflected in the retail location patronized rather than at the

individual level – making the image of the location easier to interpret from a managerial point-of-view.

Because the restaurant setting is selected to represent interpersonal retail consumption scenarios, the resulting scale is useful for restaurateurs. In the hospitality industry, the one-dimensional models (a star system) or three-dimensional attribute-based systems (food/service/décor) do not necessarily offer customers enough diagnostic information in order for them to properly gauge the experience they should expect to have (Skowronski and Carlston, 1987). However, restaurateurs can use the specific traits the interpersonal servicescape scale outlines within their promotional materials. This action would offer consumers more coherent points of comparison and evaluation as these traits represent consumer expectations. This action would also potentially allow consumers to make more accurate judgments of restaurant experiences prior to engaging, and thus increase the potential for a more positive experience should they decide to frequent the establishment (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). When researching the domain of food, and in order to avoid respondent bias, distinguishing between ethnicity versus experience of a cuisine is important. The scale accounts for this, and is more valid as a result. Case in point, the distinct dimension of the scale includes traits like interesting, original, unique, all of which relate to trying something novel, and not to cultural or ethnic references. The scale also performs better than current commercial alternatives when evaluating consumer perceptions.

As this scale is an elaborate measure (with its numerous items) of a restaurant experience, practitioners will be able to delve deeper into understanding how consumers assess restaurants. First and foremost, the halo effect is reduced (Wirtz and Bateson,

1995). Furthermore, image construal is not limited to actual purchases but can also be applied to brands and to stores that consumers have yet to interact with (Oxenfeldt, 1974-1975). By using this scale, restaurants can see how they are perceived by their consumers as well as by those who have yet to patronize their establishments. They can determine the features that are more desirable as well as those that can be minimized, depending on what the restaurant wants the consumers to experience. They can also position themselves more clearly versus other establishments.

The scale outlines all the potential expectations that consumers are likely to have within this sort of servicescape. In consequence, the proposed scale can be used to gauge expectations congruency pre and post experience by the retailer, especially since the disconfirmation paradigm is ideal when focusing on one brand (Cadotte, Woodruff and Jenkins, 1987). The scale can also be used to reveal desires (Spreng, MacKenzie, Olshavsky, 1996) at the individual consumer level. By having consumers outline which of the expectations from the trait list they feel they should be getting, retailers can better understand how their establishment is different from others, or how likely consumers are to approach their establishment versus others.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The exploratory and data-driven nature of this project means that more replication should be conducted to ensure the construct validity of the measure. The proposed scale was developed within one retail setting meant to represent the category of interpersonal retail servicescapes. However, additional research in other interpersonal servicescape settings would allow for a better understanding of how the results presented in this paper

might be generalized to other interpersonal retail settings. While it appears that the confirmatory factor analysis fit indexes for the restaurant scale were moderate, it is important to note the size of the model and take into account its complexity. Nonetheless, additional studies to substantiate and even refine the number of variables in this scale might be wise. Additional research could be conducted in order to see if income level as well as allocentrism may also be moderating variables.

### **Contributions**

This research proposes a new measure for interpersonal retail servicescapes that begins to explain image construal in these sorts of environments. With the development of this exploratory structure, the value of the measure is demonstrated with the nomological validity tests that showcase the scope of the measurement tool. This tool is also demonstrated to be useful in explaining the likelihood of consumer behaviours. Previous to this scale, there were no other measurement tools that completely considered the intricacies of the interpersonal servicescape and accounted for all of the features that were inherent to them. Interpersonal services are different than others due to the high level of interaction between the service provider and the customer. This makes the idea of a personality based approach more relevant.

Additionally, this essay explains why consumer expectations can be represented with personality traits, and also why these personality traits are appropriate for understanding the value attributed to the various aspects of interpersonal retail servicescapes. Hedonic and utilitarian value explains the diversity of consumer expectations as represented by personality. Value is also a reason why some personality

traits are regrouped as they are and can be regrouped to show overall types of consumer expectations in interpersonal retail servicescapes.

Furthermore, the results of the study are in line with previous research that outlines how retail atmospheres that are viewed as having hedonic and utilitarian features can explain consumer reactions to these environments (Babin, et al. 1994). While each dimension of the interpersonal servicescape scale had a varying level of hedonic and utilitarian value; it was also found that each of these dimensions also related back to certain consumer outcome behaviours. This leads to interrogations regarding the value that motivates consumers to engage in behaviours, especially when the experience that they had was not necessarily positive or negative. Are consumers more willing to engage in certain behaviours because they perceive the image of the interpersonal servicescape to be more hedonic; are they also more likely to engage in other behaviours because they perceive the image to also include utilitarian features?

This research shows that interpersonal retail servicescapes are different from other servicescapes and thus warrant a different measurement approach. The issue of how to measure perceptions of a servicescape is important, as well as understanding what motivates consumers to use specific evaluative criteria and to have specific expectations. Using these expectations, consumers establish the success of an experience via disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980). How satisfied or not consumers are can be what they communicate to others, using WOM.

As shown in this research, WOM is an outcome behaviour associated to certain dimensions of interpersonal servicescape personality. Using evaluative criteria established as being relevant to motivate WOM behaviour, it may be possible to

understand the impact of value-driven WOM for interpersonal retail servicescapes, and specifically which type of value is most powerful in WOM – more hedonic, more utilitarian, or a combination of the two values.

**ESSAY 3**  
**WOM FOR INTERPERSONAL SERVICES: THE INFLUENCE OF VALUE FRAMES**

**Introduction**

A recent restaurant reviewer stated: “Restaurants are culture as sure as music or paintings. They say something about who we are” (Sifton, 2009). In modern day settings, the expression of the self often occurs via consumption and consumers seek to validate themselves via their choices of products and services (Malhotra, 1988). Post-experience consumers may communicate about experiences to each other using word-of-mouth (WOM). The flurry of product and service assessments both from professional and peer-to-peer sources (e.g. online forums) brings about a few questions about the quality of reviews. Is the influence of WOM solely dependent on the quality of the source as well as the context being described? How does the frame of WOM, in terms of positive/negative evaluations versus value-based evaluations, interact with who corresponds and what the WOM describes?

Whether it is from personal sources or from anonymous product reviewers, about limited service or about full-service settings, consumers use WOM communication for numerous reasons. Particularly for services, the use of WOM may have numerous benefits. Not only does WOM help consumers alleviate risk perceptions, but it may also allow them to evaluate experiences prior to having them (File, Judd, Prince, 1992). WOM can help consumers accumulate information as well as establish expectations (Patti and Chen, 2009). However, not all services are alike since not all servicescapes provide the same benefits. Services may vary depending on the physical layout and the service levels that they include (Bitner, 1992). As such, the value of WOM as well as the extent to

which it is relevant to a consumer should fluctuate depending on the service being described.

WOM serves the function of communicating information not just about a context but also about the quality of that context. An elaborate servicescape just as a lean servicescape incorporates numerous features that may serve either hedonic and/or functional purposes capable of guiding expectations (Babin, et al. 1994). What consumers will and should get in a five-star hotel is different than what they will and should get in a motel (Devlin, Gwynne, Ennew, 2002). Thus WOM can help define expectations by dispensing information regarding a context.

The source of the WOM will likely influence how valuable WOM is within a described context as well as speak to expectations. For example, a restaurant reviewer impresses by his experience but a close friend knows what is personally relevant. Yet the words that are used by a source can also shape expectations by communicating a certain value. Maybe the reviewer finds the full-service restaurant good, but that doesn't tell a consumer what value the context contains – is it more hedonic or is it more utilitarian? Does a “good” review help consumers define what they will get and encourage satisfaction, or what they should get and align their service quality expectations?

This research tests the boundaries of WOM by considering how the context, the source, and the frame of WOM impact consumer outcome behaviours. Using a full-factorial design, recommendations regarding different restaurant settings are tested. While source and servicetype together are found not to influence service perceptions, the frame of WOM does. The results show that depending on the context, value WOM is more influential than valence WOM, and also more powerful than the source effect at

increasing service perceptions. Particularly for interpersonal retail servicescapes, the influence of value is more pronounced and the consumer outcomes more positive than when valence WOM is used, and this above who communicates. In contrast to previous research demonstrating source or context specific results, this research demonstrates that the power of WOM comes from a combination of the source, the context, and the quality of WOM.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Consumer Expectations and Word-of-Mouth***

“Expectations are beliefs about the likelihood that a product is associated with certain attributes, benefits, or outcomes” (Spreng, et al. 1996, p.17). When consumers establish expectations, they do so in light of a context, a product (or service), and their own personal characteristics (Oliver, 1980). Expectations are key determinants of approach behaviours as well as determinants of consumer evaluations, and thus can be measured as dependent variables or used as moderators if they are known ahead of time (Ofir and Simonson, 2007; Shiv, et al. 2005). There are differences between what consumers think they “will get” and “should get”, particularly for services (Devlin, et al. 2002). Expectations offer a frame of reference, or a comparison standard (Oliver, 1980), and this benchmark is used to gauge satisfaction and service features such as service quality (Parasuraman, et al. 1988).

Consumers use their perceptions to assess for congruency versus expectations, and these comparisons result in evaluations of a specific servicescape (Morales et al. 2005). The phenomenon occurs for every aspect of a servicescape, including the physical

and service features. For example, “the degree of congruence with [the] learned pattern or “script” by both the service provider and customer is an important determinant of satisfaction in the encounter” (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, Gutman, 1985, p.100). Social interactions in servicescapes can alter the evaluation of future interactions (Fazio, Effrein, Falendar, 1981) just as physical variables in a servicescape may alter perceptions and expectations (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Predictive expectations are modeled as what consumers “will get” and are related to satisfaction (Devlin, et al. 2002). The impact of predictive expectations in WOM is apparent because satisfaction is possible in scenarios when sufficient information is present (Wirtz, 1993). For example, if the experience between a sender and a receiver of WOM is homogeneous then both parties know very well what to expect. The sender is more likely to find that the information given by the receiver matches his eventual experience.

In contrast, when outcomes are modeled as what consumers “should get” these are desired expectations that are related to service quality (Devlin, et al. 2002). Consumers have preconceived ideas, and desired expectations are the standards with which they evaluate an experience – regardless of whether these expectations are realistic. Desired expectations are fundamental in the assessment of quality because they are “the fulfilment of all the customer’s expectations concerning what they would like to receive” (Devlin, et al. 2002, p.120). Unlike predictive expectations that vary based on experience, desired expectations remain constant and stable because they are related to consumer values (Spreng, MacKenzie, Olshavsky, 1996). Desired expectations regarding services are shaped by stable individual factors and needs (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1988).

For services in particular, predictive and desired expectations are not interdependent.

Consumers can be satisfied with an experience even if they do not judge it to be of high quality (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, Zeithaml, 1993).

Expectations can be about actual experiences, about previous experiences where consumers have assumed an ideal, or about experiences of which consumers have limited knowledge (Cadotte, et al. 1987). Prior to consumption, consumers may find it difficult to accurately judge what they are likely to get, and they may also find it hard to know what they should expect. Particularly if there is limited information or if an experience must be judged discretely, consumers are likely to use subjective evaluation to establish expectations (Oliver, 1980). Subjective evaluation of an experience is reliant on experience, which in WOM can be transmitted from the source (Silverman, 2001).

WOM is an antecedent to desired expectations (Zeithaml, et al. 1993). When consumers anticipate a service, they form desired expectations, and the fulfillment of these should result in WOM, especially if the experience is positive. When consumers get what they think they should, they will likely want to share the experience, and this more so if the experience exceeds expectations. Customer use of WOM is dependent on personal relevance, which is shaped by self-image (Malhotra, 1988). Alternatively, if a consumer anticipates and gets poor service then he will likely not share his experience as there is no self-enhancing benefit to be had in promoting a poor experience.

WOM is also an antecedent to predictive expectations (Zeithaml, et al. 1993). Ideal performance evaluations are likely in situations where the information regarding the experience comes from WOM (Liechty and Churchill, 1979). Overall satisfaction will

depend not just on the experience described, but also on the quality of the information the consumer had about the experience before engaging in it (Spreng, et al. 1996).

Expectations and values are highly correlated as consumers are careful to select in light of their personal goals (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). Expectations, often modeled as high-end value goals (Peter and Olson, 1987), shape perceptions of a consumption experience. Thus depending on the content of WOM regarding services, the source may augment or attenuate expectations and lead to stronger (dis)confirmation. Communication that speaks to person's values may be most powerful in shaping expectations.

### ***Definition, uses, and types of Word-of-Mouth in servicescapes***

“WOM is a process of personal influence, in which interpersonal communications between a sender and a receiver can change the receiver's behaviour or attitudes” (Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol, 2008, p.354).

WOM is used in contexts where the offering is hard to evaluate tangibly (File et al. 1992) or where subjectivity and variability between other evaluations are likely, such as with services (Bitner, 1992). The reasons for using and giving WOM include reduced risk, improved perceptions, improved psychological perceptions, and increased purchase intent (Sweeney, et al. 2008). Research shows that WOM is important when services are perceived as highly intangible and/or having high perceived risk (Zeithaml, 1981). The more complex a scenario is and the more there is to evaluate, the more consumers may seek out additional information before making choices (Celsi and Olson, 1988).

Source is an important factor in the transmission of WOM. However variable the source-person relaying WOM information is, consumers can find this to be a “safer” alternative to having a direct experience (File et al. 1992). Additionally, the more

congruent WOM information from a sender to a receiver's own self-image is, the more likely a receiver is to feel alleviated risk, ranging from functional to social risk (Von Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004). However, the power of the source in WOM can depend on the quality of the source. Silverman (2001) shows that WOM is perceived as highly credible particularly when the sender is not perceived to gain any benefit from transmitting the WOM. For more involved purchases, expert advice becomes more important (Allsop, Bassett, Hoskins, 2007).

The service type will have an influence on the efficacy of WOM. Credence-based services relate to experiences that consumers have not previously had and with which consumers have little experience (Frieden and Goldsmith, 1989). Particularly for credence-based services, consumers may have difficulty evaluating these post-experiences as there are few benchmarks or bases for judgement. Therefore consumers must rely more on personal expectations, and their reactions to credence-based services are likely founded more on (dis)confirmed expectations (Oliver, 1980). For credence-based services WOM is an effective means of communication, particularly when consumers are seeking information. For these types of services WOM reduces functional and perceived risk (Patti and Chen, 2009). Yet, research has so far not uncovered how WOM effects vary between various types of credence-based service.

The quality of a service encounter will influence the likelihood of WOM. Much of the literature on WOM for services focuses on complaining behaviour – that is, the transfer of negative WOM. Critical service incidents and breaches of justice are likely to be due to incongruence between expectations and outcomes (Solomon, et al. 1985). One of the key ways in which consumers will make a breach in service known is via the use of

voice (Brockner et al. 2001). While some customers may voice their discontent in situ to the service provider, other consumers may choose to voice their discontent to other consumers post-consumption.

The interpersonal relation in services will either augment or attenuate justice perceptions. Justice theory is based on two aspects: equity theory and social exchange (Smith, Bolton, and Wagner, 1999). The main pillars of this theory are fairness and preference, both of which will increase as inequity decreases (Oliver and Swan, 1989). Interactional justice references the concept of fairness in terms of how the individual involved personally encountered a sense of fairness but not how the outcomes are evaluated as being fair. Interactional justice can be defined as sentiments of honesty, empathy, and politeness (Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekran, 1998). While there is little research on this topic, it is possible that justice can be perceived regarding a service encounter and therefore encourages positive WOM.

Two recent research studies have attempted to isolate the antecedents to WOM. Sweeney, et al. (2008) discuss the impact of personal factors, interpersonal factors, message characteristics, and situation characteristics. They conclude that the factors influencing recipients to act on a WOM sender's message, and how the sender's message can change perceptions toward a service, are still unidentified and that "no research has conducted an empirical investigation on the impact of the nature of the WOM message and the message delivery" (p.359). WOM is relevant to a context, regarding a specific situation, and pertaining to an occasion. As such, what motivates people to respond to WOM includes factors such as: the credibility of the source, what the message is about,

how actively individuals transmit WOM, how relevant the message is, and the tone of the message (Allsop, et al. 2007).

***Word-of-Mouth: Valence or Value?***

The effects of positive WOM (PWOM) and negative WOM (NWOM) remain ambiguous. Positive or negative information can be important in creating approach/avoidance towards the discussed service/product. This information can also be used to determine if certain products/services are a match to the receiver's self-image (Malhotra, 1988). PWOM is linked to satisfaction as well as to repeat purchases within services contexts (Mangold et al. 1999) and NWOM has more impact on shaping beliefs and attitudes (Fiske, 1980). Negative information leads to higher levels of processing (Herr, Kardes and Kim, 1991) since negative information is perceived as more useful for categorization into evaluative subsets. Yet Skowronski and Carlston (1987) find that if information, even when negative, does not serve a diagnostic purpose, then its impact is weak and does not lead to a negativity effect. Establishing what information serves a diagnostic purpose requires a certain level of judgment from consumers. As such, for negativity effect to occur negatively-valenced information must be relevant to the aspirations of the individual and only then should it lead to attention (Ahluwalia, 2002).

The influence of PWOM and NWOM on satisfaction and loyalty is not equivalent, and outcome behaviours will vary based on WOM valence. "Negative and positive WOM are differentially associated with key marketing variables" (de Matos and Rossi, 2008, p.592). However, research also shows that the impact of NWOM can be as influential as PWOM (East, 2005), that NWOM does not necessarily change perceptions (Alhuwalia, 2002), and that numerous factors will encourage consumers to spread both NWOM and

PWOM (Naylor and Kleiser, 2000). East (2005) reveals that for categories where alternatives are plenty and loyalty is low, such as in restaurants, consumers are receptive to both types of WOM. Anderson (1998) reveals a u-shaped relationship between WOM and satisfaction: both those who are highly satisfied and those who are highly dissatisfied transmit WOM with the same intensity. The potential reasons for the apparent incongruence in results regarding when positive/negative WOM is likely is summarized by three categories: frequency of WOM, (dis/en)couraging factors for WOM, and risk with the product/service (Ladhari, 2007). Overall, research shows that both from a receiver and by a sender, it is not clearly established as to when PWOM and NWOM are impactful. It is not possible to state that NWOM will necessarily have a negative influence or be perceived as negative just as PWOM will not necessarily lead to positive outcomes.

Value-heavy appeals are often more persuasive and appealing in WOM (Allsop, et al. 2007). The more relevant WOM is, the more it will speak to goals and correspond to expectations (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). Emotional appeals are found to strongly influence service and product perceptions (Allsop, et al. 2007). Much research discusses the value of WOM (e.g. Dwyer, 2006), however, there is little research discussing value-based WOM as opposed to the widely researched valence-based WOM.

### **Conceptual Framework**

There is limited research that has looked at the influence of the frame of WOM by type of service and the source as a moderator. This research project suggests an

examination of these three factors in an effort to better understand the boundaries of WOM.

WOM is a primary means of social influence. It is informal, occurs between individuals, and is based on opinions and perspectives regarding products and services (Helm, 2000). WOM is considered more credible than “marketer-initiated communications because it is perceived as having passed through the unbiased filter of “people like me”” (Allsop, et al. p. 398). The credibility of WOM is often associated to the source (Allsop, et al. 2007, Silverman, 2001) thus should vary between personal (more credible) and anonymous (less credible) sources. However, in most WOM situations the motivations and behaviours of the source remain undefined (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry and Raman, 2004) and in light of this ambiguity, consumers may question the credibility of the WOM, even from a personal source. WOM from a personal source may help accentuate or attenuate expectations, but how strong is this influence when the service becomes more elaborate, thus when the risks (financial, social, performance) also increase? Does the perceived quality of a service setting depend on who the source is and their ability to judge service settings?

In the advertising literature, credibility is one of the evaluations leading to overall attitude formation (Yoo and MacInnis, 2005). It is thus central in establishing overall perceptions and judgments regarding an appeal. Credibility can also be defined as ‘inspiring belief’ in that it is a precursor to consumer outcomes (Yoo and MacInnis, 2005) or what consumers expect. Expectations refer to credibility because they represent what consumers would like to have as well as think they should have (Devlin, et al. 2002). In WOM, credibility can be conceptualized as a precursor to actual attitudes.

According to Bitner (1992), different servicescapes will lead to different consumer reactions, and the physical complexity as well as the level of service will lead to various consumer outcomes. Thus credibility is not just limited to the source but also to the power of the source to properly communicate the specificities of a setting, and potentially improve perceptions of a setting. In service-heavy settings, what consumers feel they should receive is dependent on the scripts they are accustomed to with service providers (Solomon, et al. 1985). Quality and relevance of an interpersonal experience may be better transmitted by a personal source that has experienced first hand the interpersonal nature of a certain servicescape.

WOM from a friend should be more impactful than WOM from an anonymous source because a friend knows what is relevant and meaningful to the receiver (von Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004), and because a friend is better able to communicate interpersonal scripts. The personal relationship between sender and receiver allows the receiver to have clearer expectation regarding what they will experience in the context described to them. If WOM from a source and about a servicetype is relevant to the receiver, then the receiver should be more willing to engage in the experience and should have heightened expectations about the quality of the experience. Thus, this research asks: How does WOM source influence credibility perception as the service becomes more interpersonal? The relationship between service type and credibility perceptions of the experience may be moderated by WOM source such that for a personal (anonymous) source, higher (lower) credibility is expected in interpersonal retail servicescapes than in self-service servicescapes. More formally:

*H1a: WOM from a personal source will yield higher credibility perceptions of the experience for interpersonal service encounters than in self service encounters.*

*H1b: WOM from an anonymous source will yield lower credibility perceptions of the experience for interpersonal service encounters than in self service encounters.*

If not all servicescapes are the same in terms of their quality, the description of them using WOM should lead to different consumer interpretations and expectations. Using wording that appropriately frames consumer's expectations in WOM should lead to more impactful WOM. Previous research in WOM has modeled WOM as positive or negative, yet the results have been variable. Furthermore, very little research exists contrasting how different framing of WOM such as value frames versus valence frames can impact consumer behaviour.

The quality of WOM will influence the way the WOM is interpreted and the repercussions it is likely to have on consumer behaviours (de Matos and Rossi, 2008). WOM is relevant when consumers are seeking out information about more complex or harder to evaluate credence-type services (Patti and Chen, 2009). Specifically, the relationship between the frame of WOM and information seeking, purchase intent and service perceptions is likely moderated by the type of service being described, due in part to the risk more complex servicescapes might imply (Bitner, 1992; Sweeney, et al. 2008). Consumers will be more likely to respond to WOM that corresponds to their desired expectations (Devlin, et al. 2002), and WOM that is in tune with their values. Furthermore, when benefits communicated by WOM are more closely tied to personal relevance of the receiver (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983), value may become more

important than valence. Value (valence) framed WOM should produce higher means in interpersonal (self-service) settings. More formally:

*H2a: WOM using value descriptors will have higher patronage intent, information seeking, and perceptions of the service for interpersonal services than for self-services.*

*H2b: WOM using valence descriptors in WOM will have higher patronage intent, information seeking, and perceptions of the service for self-service contexts than for interpersonal contexts.*

*H2c: For interpersonal services in particular, valenced (value) WOM will have lower (higher) patronage intentions, information seeking, and service perceptions.*

Consumers seek out hedonic/utilitarian value when shopping (Babin, et al. 1994). Simultaneously, products and services can be classified as hedonic/utilitarian (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982), as can consumer attitudes towards products and services (Voss, et al. 2003). Consumers may seek out certain levels of hedonic/utilitarian value and establish value-based expectations regarding services, as well as the products within these specific servicescapes. Value-based appeals are more diagnostic in WOM (Allsop, et al. 2007) and speak to desired expectations, because what consumers feel they should get is related to their values (Spreng, et al. 1996). Particularly as interpersonal retail servicescapes are more complex, value may be most important in these particular scapes.

If consumers orient their expectations towards value, then value-based statements containing hedonic/utilitarian content should reverberate more than if the content is

valenced and this regardless of the source. However, anonymous sources as compared to personal sources may be perceived as transmitting expert advice because it is less personally biased (Allsop, et al. 2007). Expert advice that is value heavy may have more of an influence than valence WOM because the sender is perceived as better able to evaluate more complex services (Patti and Chen, 2009). More formally:

*H3a: For interpersonal services, WOM containing value descriptors and described by a personal source will lead to higher service perceptions than WOM containing value descriptors by an anonymous source.*

*H3b: For interpersonal services, WOM from an anonymous source will result in higher service perceptions when it is framed in value terms rather than in valence terms.*

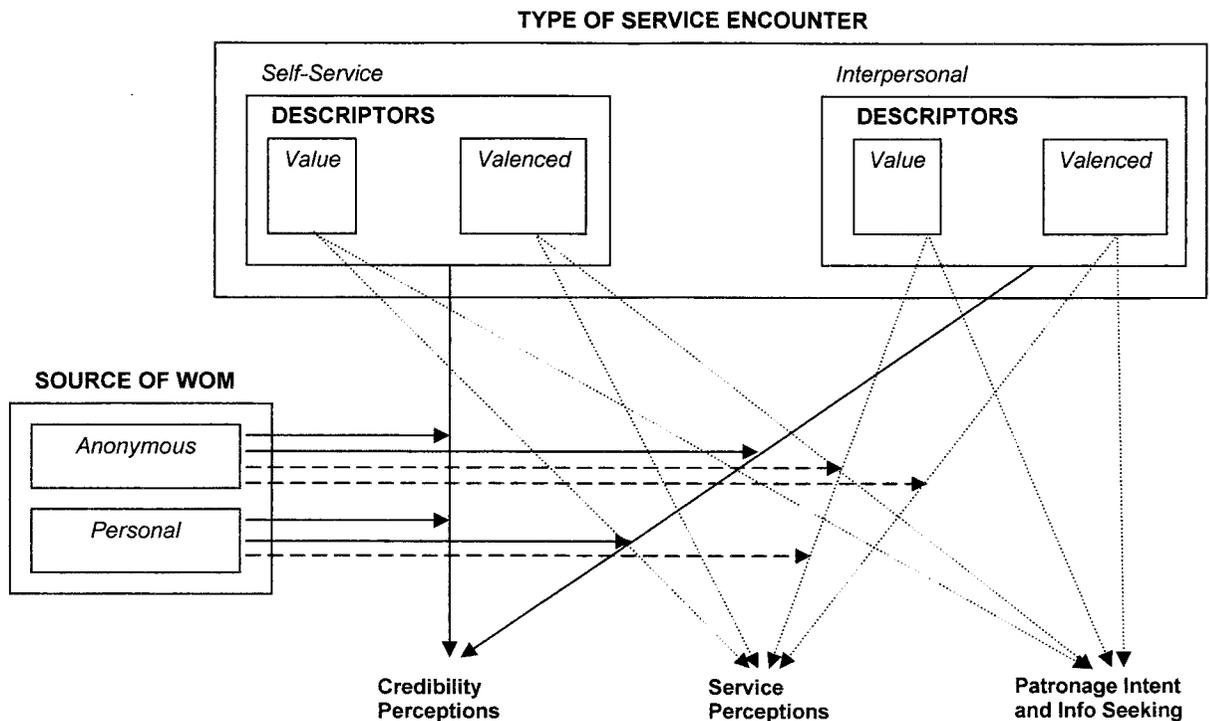
How consumers are influenced by value statements is undefined. A personal source is more apt to understand and respect the values of the receiver (Allsop, et al. 2007) and as the service becomes more elaborate, a personal source might be the best to communicate values sought out. For interpersonal services, are personal recommendations with highly hedonic bases or with high levels of functionality more or less impactful? If consumers seek to optimize their desired expectations (Devlin, et al. 2002), which are related to consumer values (Spreng, et al. 1996), then they will likely seek out experiences that maximize both the hedonic and utilitarian value. While consumers seek to accomplish tasks via consumption, thus expect utilitarian value, they also seek out gratification in consumption (Babin, et al. 1994). More formally:

*H3c: For interpersonal services, WOM from a personal source using high hedonic/high utilitarian value descriptors will result in higher service perceptions than when high hedonic/low utilitarian or low hedonic/high utilitarian descriptors are used.*

This research proposes to look at two relationships that have yet to be specified within the marketing literature on WOM: the impact of the service context described and the influence of value-based frames. While servicescapes are often discussed in terms of eliciting affective and cognitive outcomes during and after consumption (Bitner, 1992), very little is known about how lean and complex settings can influence consumer perceptions before consumption. While valenced WOM is researched extensively, the results are varied and no consensus exists as to when, in which contexts specifically and why consumers do or do not react to it. Finally, virtually no research is available on the use of value descriptors in WOM and consumer reactions to these. Thus this research is a first attempt at unravelling these relationships, and is somewhat exploratory as a result.

The conceptual framework for Essay 3 is summarized in the diagram presented below, in Figure 4. Please note that the full lines refer to H1a and H1b. The dotted lines refer to H2a, H2b, and H2c. The dashed lines refer to H3a, and H3b. H3c is not modeled in this diagram.

**Figure 4: Conceptual Model for WOM Effects in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes**



## Methodology

### *Manipulations*

In order to measure the influence of frames in shaping WOM quality and consumer outcomes, depending on the type of service encounter, a 2 x 2 x 4 full factorial design was devised that incorporated the following three factors: type of sender (personal or anonymous), type of service (interpersonal, self-service), and type of frame (high hedonic/low utilitarian value, low hedonic/high utilitarian value, high hedonic/high utilitarian value, positive/negative).

The interpersonal service encounter was operationalized as having a meal in a sit-down full service dining restaurant whereas the self-service encounter was operationalized as a self-service buffet-type restaurant. Numerous studies have

demonstrated that dining and food are amongst the most discussed topics between consumers (Allsop et al. 2007; Keller, 2007). “More of us talk about restaurants (94 percent) and computers (94 percent) than about personal care services (65 percent) or athletic shoes (45 percent)” (Allsop et al. 2007, p. 401). The source factor was manipulated with the anonymous source as a restaurant reviewer and the personal source as a best friend.

In the final study of Essay 2, respondents were asked to rate traits used to measure interpersonal retail servicescapes as how hedonic as well as how utilitarian they were perceived to be on a five-point scale. These were then classified within three potential categories: low hedonic/high utilitarian, or high hedonic/low utilitarian, or high hedonic/high utilitarian. For this final study, the traits that scored highest in their quadrant were selected. The traits were also selected by prioritizing those that relate to WOM behaviours, as per Essay 2. The five traits selected for each of the three value categories were grouped and their means were averaged. The means were then tested using independent t-tests to ensure that each category of traits was significantly different from the others. See Table 11 for the traits used per value category.

**Table 11: Traits per value category**

<b>Low Utilitarian &amp; High Hedonic</b>	Festive, lively, animated, daring, laidback
<b>High Utilitarian &amp; High Hedonic</b>	Accommodating, inventive, authentic, genuine, hospitable
<b>High Utilitarian &amp; Low Hedonic</b>	Proper, neat, consistent, reliable, dedicated

The valenced frames were regrouped together (positive and negative) since the restaurant scenario was used, and results from East (2005) clearly demonstrate that consumers are receptive to both PWOM and NWOM in this setting. Furthermore, the

outcomes of PWOM or NWOM are inconsistent (de Matos and Rossi, 2008), and in both PWOM and NWOM scenarios, when consumers are very satisfied or very dissatisfied, they are likely to transmit WOM (Anderson, 1998). PWOM and NWOM influence also varies in pre-usage scenarios in that both can be impactful (Fitzgerald Bone, 1995). Finally, the purpose of this research was to outline the effect of overall valenced WOM to overall value WOM and then to dissect value WOM. It is not the research intention to uncover and contrast when PWOM or NWOM is effective.

**Figure 5: Full Factorial Design of WOM in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes**

**Study**

		Personal		Anonymous	
		Interpersonal	Self-Service	Interpersonal	Self-Service
<b>Frame</b>	<b>Valenced</b>	1	2	3	4
	<b>HHLU</b>	5	6	7	8
	<b>HHHU</b>	9	10	11	12
	<b>LHHU</b>	13	14	15	16

**Sample**

An online questionnaire was distributed to a web-based consumer panel maintained by a marketing researcher in the United States. Subjects were encouraged to participate by invitation and were offered a chance to win \$100 gift certificate to an online book retailer for their participation. The questionnaire link was emailed to 2,500 potential respondents and 476 questionnaires were completed (19% completion rate). The sample was 76% female, 77% between the ages of 18-49 years old, with 92% eating out in restaurants at least once a month.

### ***Procedure***

Respondents were asked to access the questionnaire online. At the beginning of the survey, they read a brief recommendation regarding a restaurant that combined all three proposed factors. Below is an example for the interpersonal servicescape, described by a personal source, using high-hedonic/low utilitarian descriptors:

*A new full-service restaurant has just opened in town and your best friend who knows you very well decided to check it out. She eats out in restaurants about once a week. At this full-service restaurant, she discussed the daily menu with the waiter and then ordered a three-course meal from him. She also asked for some guidance from the wine steward in order to find the perfect pairing with her meal. She settled her bill with her waiter. Afterward, your best friend described her experience to you as follows:*

*“I thought the restaurant was lively. The décor and food preparation were laid-back. The service was daring and animated, and I would summarize it as festive.”*

*Before hearing this recommendation, you were planning on going for dinner to this restaurant with your favourite dining companion.*

Respondents were then asked to write down a few thoughts regarding the recommendation, in order to involve them before they answered the dependent variables.

### ***Measures***

For credibility, several variables were tested in order to understand the sort of beliefs the combination of source and service type inspired. Particularly as credibility is said to moderate numerous antecedents to WOM such as personal characteristics and

contextual features (Sweeney, et al. 2008), it was deemed important to test a variety of variables to understand credibility in WOM. The credibility variables were: value, satisfaction, experience quality, authenticity, hedonic attitude, utilitarian attitude, recommendation quality, source credibility, and confidence. Patronage intention and information were also measured. Service perceptions were measured by gauging justice perceptions, and service quality.

Value was measured using four statements with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: “I would get value out of going to this restaurant”, “Going to this restaurant seems worthwhile”, “This restaurant represents a good value”, and “This restaurant seems worth the experience”.

Satisfaction was measured using three statements with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, as per Babin, Lee, Kim, Griffin (2005): “I would be satisfied with my decision to partake in this experience”, “I would feel very good about having this sort of experience”, and “I would be very satisfied with this sort of experience”.

Authenticity was measured using five items with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: “Authentic”, “Original”, “Unique”, “Genuine”, and “Scarce”.

Restaurant quality (experience quality) was a modified version of Kirk and Barnes (1996). Respondents were asked to evaluate what they estimated the overall quality of the restaurant to be by answering on a seven-point differential: “Great – terrible”, “Much better than others – much worse than others”, “Just what it should be – not at all what it should be”, and “Very high quality – very low quality”.

Hedonic and utilitarian attitude towards the experience was measured using the items by Voss, et al. (2003) on a seven-point differential. These were the following for hedonic attitude: “Not fun – fun”, “Dull – exciting”, “Not delightful – delightful”, “Not thrilling – thrilling”, and “Enjoyable – not enjoyable”. For utilitarian attitude, they were: “Effective – ineffective”, “Helpful – unhelpful”, “Functional – not functional”, “Necessary – unnecessary”, and “Practical – impractical”.

Recommendation quality was measured on a seven-point differential using the measure by Andrews, Burton, Netermeyer (2000). Respondents were asked what they thought in general of the recommendation they were given, and answered using these three items: “Believable - unbelievable”, “Trustworthy – untrustworthy”, “Credible - not credible”.

Source credibility was measured on a seven-point differential using the Bobinski, Cox, Cox, (1996) measure, using the following items to measure perceptions of the source: “Sincere - insincere”, “Honest – dishonest”, “Dependable - not dependable”, “Trustworthy - not trustworthy”, “Credible - not credible”.

Confidence in the recommendation was measured using the items developed by Urbany, Bearden, Kaicker, and Smith-de Borrero (1997). Respondents demonstrated the level of confidence they had in the recommendation using the following items on a seven-point differential: “Uncertain – certain”, “Not sure – sure”, and “Not confident – confident”.

Patronage intention was measured using the items developed by Kukar-Kinney and Walters (2003) on a seven-point differential. The items asked respondents how likely

they would be to go to the recommended restaurant using: “Probable–improbable”, “Likely–unlikely”, and “Possible–impossible”.

Information seeking was measured using a seven-point differential by Netemeyer and Bearden, (1992) and included the following statements to measure how likely consumers would be to find out additional information about the recommended restaurant: “Likely-unlikely”, “Probable- improbable”, and “Possible – impossible”.

Justice was measured using a shortened version of Blodgett, Hill, Tax (1997), using a seven-point Likert scale, with a range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items were: “Taking everything into consideration, the restaurant seems to have a fair offer”, “I would think that the customer would be treated as they should in this establishment”, “Customer complaints are resolved as quickly as they should be in a place like this”.

Service quality was measured using items by Spreng and Mackroy (1996) with a seven-point differential. The items to gauge what overall service quality consumers would anticipate at the recommended restaurant were: “Extremely poor – extremely good”, “Awful – excellent”, “Very low – very high”.

## **Results**

Manipulation checks at the end of the questionnaire asked respondents to confirm who had recommended the restaurant to them (personal or anonymous source) and to confirm which type of restaurant they had been recommended (self-service or full-service). Removing those who did not qualify (i.e. had not gone to a restaurant or cafeteria in the past 6 months) as well as those who never go to restaurants (n=5), yielded

a usable sample of 390 respondents, or 80% of the collected sample. Manipulation checks also tested if the value-based WOM was perceived as valenced (either more positive or negative). These manipulation checks showed that valence conditions were not significantly more positive or negative than value conditions ( $X_{\text{valence}} = 3.18$ ,  $X_{\text{value}} = 2.97$ ;  $p=.250$ ,  $t=1.154$ )

Reliability of the dependent variable measures is presented in Table 12. No items were dropped in any of the measures.

**Table 12: Reliability of Dependent Variable Measures**

Variable	Alpha coefficient
Value	.966
Satisfaction	.966
Experience quality	.955
Authenticity	.911
Hedonic attitude	.962
Utilitarian attitude	.933
Recommendation quality	.971
Source credibility	.978
Confidence	.987
Information seeking	.974
Patronage intention	.977
Justice	.920
Service quality	.979

Interaction between source and service type on credibility

It was suggested that the relationship between the service type and the perceptions of credibility is moderated by the source of WOM. In particular, it was expected that

WOM from a personal source would result in higher credibility perceptions in interpersonal scenarios than in self-service servicescapes and that an anonymous source would result in lower credibility perceptions in interpersonal conditions than in self-service servicescapes. Univariate analysis of variances (ANOVA) showed that there were no significant interactions between source and service type on any of the dependent variables. Tables 13 and 14 show the results of the ANOVAs.

**Table 13: The Effects of Source of WOM and Type of Servicescape on Value, Satisfaction, Experience quality, and Authenticity Perceptions**

	d.f.	Value	Satisfaction	Experience quality	Authenticity
<b>Main effects</b>					
<b>Source</b>	1	9.47 (.002*)	4.51 (.034)	6.05 (.014*)	5.22 (.023*)
<b>Type</b>	1	2.11 (.148)	.00 (.959)	4.05 (.045*)	.27 (.605)
<b>Interaction</b>					
<b>S x T</b>	1	.16 (.688)	.408 (.523)	1.73 (.189)	.00 (.970)

*Note:* p-values are presented in parentheses, \* p-value significance at  $p < 0.05$

**Table 14: The Effects of Source of WOM and Type of Servicescape on Hedonic Attitude, Utilitarian Attitude, Recommendation Quality, Source Credibility, and Confidence**

	d.f.	Hedonic Attitude	Utilitarian Attitude	Recomm. quality	Source credibility	Confidence
<b>Main effects</b>						
<b>Source</b>	1	11.22 (.001*)	8.36 (.004*)	14.34 (.000*)	26.46 (.000*)	19.15 (.000*)
<b>Type</b>	1	6.33 (.012*)	.04 (.834)	.26 (.610)	.09 (.764)	.05 (.830)
<b>Interaction</b>						
<b>S x T</b>	1	1.05 (.306)	.07 (.792)	.41 (.522)	.19 (.659)	1.36 (.244)

*Note:* p-values are presented in parentheses, \* p-value significance at  $p < 0.05$

The results demonstrate that the type of servicescape does not moderate the relationship between the source of WOM and credibility perceptions. As such, H1a and H1b are not confirmed.

There are some interesting main effects to note. Source of WOM has a strong influence on all credibility perceptions. In all of these cases, a personal source has more influence than an anonymous source. Service type has a strong effect on experience quality, and hedonic attitude. Interpersonal retail servicescapes are perceived to have higher quality, and result in more hedonic attitudes in these types of establishments. Table 15 shows the means of the credibility variables influenced by source and Table 16 shows the means of the credibility variables influenced by service type.

**Table 15: Overall Credibility Means by Source Experimental Condition**

	Source		Total
	Anonymous	Personal	
<b>Value</b>	4.46 (1.58)	4.95 (1.55)	4.72 (1.58)
<b>Satisfaction</b>	4.70 (1.61)	5.04 (1.64)	4.88 (1.63)
<b>Experience quality</b>	4.59 (1.35)	4.92 (1.47)	4.76 (1.42)
<b>Authenticity</b>	4.17 (1.41)	4.50 (1.49)	4.34 (1.46)
<b>Hedonic attitude</b>	4.25 (1.48)	4.73 (1.43)	4.50 (1.47)
<b>Utilitarian attitude<sup>2</sup></b>	3.42 (1.45)	3.00 (1.35)	3.20 (1.42)
<b>Recommendation quality</b>	4.99 (1.53)	5.58 (1.48)	5.30 (1.53)
<b>Source credibility</b>	4.97 (1.43)	5.71 (1.38)	5.36 (1.45)
<b>Confidence</b>	4.29 (1.76)	5.08 (1.77)	4.71 (1.80)

*Note:* standard deviations shown in parentheses

**Table 16: Overall Credibility Means by Service Type Experimental Condition**

	Service Type		Total
	Self-Service	Interpersonal	
<b>Value</b>	4.83 (1.54)	4.60 (1.62)	4.72 (1.58)
<b>Satisfaction</b>	4.88 (1.61)	4.89 (1.67)	4.88 (1.63)
<b>Experience quality</b>	4.63 (1.29)	4.92 (1.55)	4.76 (1.42)
<b>Authenticity</b>	4.38 (1.44)	4.30 (1.49)	4.34 (1.46)
<b>Hedonic attitude</b>	4.33 (1.40)	4.70 (1.52)	4.50 (1.47)
<b>Utilitarian attitude</b>	3.21 (1.41)	3.18 (1.42)	3.20 (1.42)
<b>Recommendation quality</b>	5.27 (1.55)	5.33 (1.51)	5.30 (1.53)
<b>Source credibility</b>	5.38 (1.47)	5.33 (1.43)	5.36 (1.45)
<b>Confidence</b>	4.70 (1.80)	4.72 (1.81)	4.71 (1.80)

*Note:* standard deviations shown in parentheses

<sup>2</sup> The utilitarian scale is reversed. Higher values indicate that the experience is perceived as encouraging a less utilitarian attitude.

In general, as shown by the direction of the means, a personal source is more likely to positively influence credibility perceptions than an anonymous source. A personal source is more likely to encourage both a more hedonic as well as a more utilitarian attitude towards the overall experience.

Service-light servicescapes are more likely to communicate higher levels of value, authenticity, and to reinforce source credibility as compared to service-heavy servicescapes. In contrast, interpersonal retail servicescapes result in higher perceptions of an experience quality, augment the quality of the recommendation, and heightened hedonic attitude.

#### Interaction between frame and service type on intentions and service perceptions

The second set of hypothesis proposed a relationship between the frame of WOM and the type of service setting. Specifically, it was stated that the relationship between the type of frame and information seeking, patronage intention, and service perceptions is moderated by the type of service. In particular, value frames produce higher perceptions (as measured by the means) in interpersonal settings whereas valence frames produce higher means in the self-service context. It was also proposed that in interpersonal settings specifically, value WOM would encourage higher levels of information seeking, patronage intention, and service perceptions whereas valence WOM would have lower levels of information seeking, patronage intention, and service perceptions.

ANOVAs were conducted in order to understand the relationship between the two factors. The results are presented in Table 17, where one significant and one marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ) interaction between WOM frame and servicescape type on all tested dependent variables can be observed.

**Table 17: The Effects of Frame of WOM and Type of Servicescape on Information Seeking, Patronage Intention, Justice, and Service Quality.**

	d.f.	Information seeking	Patronage intention	Justice	Service quality
<b>Main effects</b>					
<b>Frame</b>	1	2.29 (.131)	13.25 (.000*)	15.36 (.000*)	22.24 (.000*)
<b>Type</b>	1	.568 (.445)	.16 (.686)	4.82 (.029*)	46.82 (.000*)
<b>Interaction</b>					
<b>F x T</b>	1	1.845 (.175)	2.38 (.123)	2.91 (.089)	4.251 (.040*)

*Note:* p-values are presented in parentheses, \* p-value significance at  $p < 0.05$

There is a significant interaction ( $p = .04$ ) between frame and service type on service quality. The means demonstrate that for value frames, the service quality perceptions are significantly higher for interpersonal services than they are for self-services. For valence frames, the service quality perceptions are significantly lower for self-service than they are for interpersonal settings.

There is a marginally significant interaction ( $p < .10$ ) between frame and service type on justice perceptions. The means demonstrate that for value frames, the justice perceptions are marginally significantly higher for interpersonal services than they are self-services. For valence frames, the justice perceptions are significantly lower for self-service than they are for interpersonal settings. The means are presented by experimental condition in Tables 18 and 19.

**Table 18: Overall Information Seeking, Patronage Intention, and Service Perception**

**Means by Frame Experimental Condition**

	Frame		Total
	Value	Valence	
<b>Information seeking</b>	5.54 (1.54)	5.30 (1.74)	5.45 (1.62)
<b>Patronage intention</b>	5.31 (1.56)	4.65 (2.06)	5.07 (1.78)
<b>Justice</b>	5.06 (1.33)	4.48 (1.77)	4.86 (1.53)
<b>Service quality</b>	5.10 (1.34)	4.45 (1.85)	4.87 (1.57)

*Note:* standard deviations shown in parentheses

**Table 19: Overall Information Seeking, Patronage Intention, and Service Perception**

**Means by Type Experimental Condition**

	Service Type		Total
	Self-Service	Interpersonal	
<b>Information seeking</b>	5.36 (1.67)	5.55 (1.56)	5.45 (1.62)
<b>Patronage intention</b>	5.09 (1.79)	5.06 (1.77)	5.07 (1.78)
<b>Justice</b>	4.67 (1.51)	5.07 (1.53)	4.86 (1.53)
<b>Service quality</b>	4.36 (1.41)	5.45 (1.54)	4.87 (1.57)

*Note:* standard deviations shown in parentheses

While there are no interactions between frame and type on information seeking, and patronage intention, there are some interesting main effects to note. The frame of WOM impacts patronage intention. In particular, value frames increase the desire to go to the recommended service

Planned comparisons were conducted in order to test the hypotheses. The descriptive statistics show that between the valence groups, there are some differences between the means, as seen in Table 20.

**Table 20: Means for Information Seeking, Patronage Intention, and Service Perception Means by Group**

	<b>Self-Service Value</b>	<b>Self-Service Valence</b>	<b>Interpersonal Value</b>	<b>Interpersonal Valence</b>
<b>Information seeking</b>	5.37 (1.71)	5.35 (1.60)	5.74 (1.29)	5.25 (1.88)
<b>Patronage Intention</b>	5.22 (1.71)	4.83 (1.93)	5.43 (1.34)	4.46 (2.18)
<b>Justice</b>	4.79 (1.41)	4.44 (1.67)	5.40 (1.15)	4.52 (1.88)
<b>Service Quality</b>	4.49 (1.28)	4.09 (1.61)	5.84 (0.99)	4.82 (2.01)

*Note: standard deviations in parentheses*

Levene's test for homogeneity shows that the variances are not equal ( $p < 0.05$ ), thus results where the variance not assumed were used.

In order to test H2a, comparisons of WOM using value statements in the self-service condition and WOM using value statements in the interpersonal condition were conducted. The results, as presented in Table 21 show that consumers are significantly more likely to seek information, perceive higher justice and perceive higher service quality for interpersonal retail servicescapes than for self-service situations when value-WOM is used. Although the mean is higher for purchase intent in interpersonal retail servicescapes rather than self-servicescapes, it is not significant. Thus H2a is partially supported.

**Table 21: The Influence of Value-WOM Between Self-Service and Interpersonal Settings Information Seeking, Patronage Intention, Justice, and Service Quality**

	<b>Information seeking</b>	<b>Patronage intention</b>	<b>Justice</b>	<b>Service quality</b>
<b>Value of Contrast</b>	.363	.212	.615	1.35
<b>Std. Error</b>	.189	.193	.161	.143
<b>t</b>	1.92	1.10	3.81	9.44
<b>d.f.</b>	248.74	249.67	250.00	249.49
<b>Sig (1-tailed)</b>	.028*	.136	.000*	.000*

\* Significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

Similarly to H2a, the hypothesis H2b was tested using planned contrasts. When valence WOM is used for self-service settings, information seeking and patronage intention is higher than it is in interpersonal services, although not significantly. Even when valence WOM is used, interpersonal retail servicescapes encourage higher expectations of justice and service quality, but not significantly. Service quality is still perceived as being significantly higher in interpersonal than in self-service environments, even when valence WOM is used. H2b is not supported, as shown in Table 22.

**Table 22: The Influence of Valence-WOM Between Self-Service and Interpersonal Settings Information Seeking, Patronage Intention, Justice, Service Quality.**

	Information seeking	Patronage intention	Justice	Service quality
Value of Contrast	-.101	.362	-.077	-.725
Std. Error	.297	.351	.303	.311
t	.341	1.03	-.255	-2.33
d.f.	135.50	133.99	134.05	129.86
Sig (1-tailed)	.367	.152	.400	.011*

\* Significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level

To test H2c, one-way ANOVA was used to test the influence of value frames versus valence frames in interpersonal settings specifically. The results demonstrate that for interpersonal retail servicescapes, value frames are significantly more likely than valence frames to encourage information seeking ( $M_{\text{value}} = 5.74$  and  $M_{\text{valence}} = 5.25$ ;  $F_{(1, 182)} = 4.35$ ;  $p = .038$ ), patronage intention ( $M_{\text{value}} = 5.43$  and  $M_{\text{valence}} = 4.46$ ;  $F_{(1, 182)} = 13.62$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ), justice perceptions ( $M_{\text{value}} = 5.40$  and  $M_{\text{valence}} = 4.52$ ;  $F_{(1, 182)} = 15.64$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ), and service quality perceptions ( $M_{\text{value}} = 5.84$  and  $M_{\text{valence}} = 4.81$ ;  $F_{(1, 182)} = 21.11$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ). These results support H2c.

#### Interaction between source and frame on service perceptions

The final set of hypotheses proposed relationships within the interpersonal servicescape context in particular. The interaction between source and frame, as well as a more detailed review of various value frames was tested.

The first relationship, how value WOM for interpersonal servicescape depends on the source in influencing service perceptions, was tested using independent t-tests. Justice

and service quality were the dependent variables. The results show that there is no significant impact on service perceptions when value-WOM regarding interpersonal retail servicescapes is communicated by a personal source or when it is communicated by an anonymous source. The results are presented in Table 23. For all three variables, the means of the personal recommendation are higher, albeit not significantly. H3a is therefore not confirmed.

**Table 23: The Effects of Value-based WOM and Source in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes.**

	t	p-value	df	Mean Personal	Mean Anonymous
<b>Justice</b>	.146	.884	111	5.42	5.39
<b>Service quality</b>	1.090	.278	111	5.94	5.74

The results disconfirming hypothesis H3a demonstrate that the impact of source does not moderate the influence of value WOM in interpersonal retail servicescapes. Hypothesis H3b proposes that WOM regarding an interpersonal servicescape that is value based rather than valence based has more impact on service perceptions, because an anonymous source has expertise, thus augmenting the quality of the recommendation. The results of independent t-tests confirm this relationship exists. Value-based WOM from an anonymous source is significantly more impactful than valence-based WOM on justice perceptions ( $M_{\text{value}} = 5.39$  and  $M_{\text{valence}} = 4.02$ ;  $t = 3.82$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ) and on service quality ( $M_{\text{value}} = 5.74$  and  $M_{\text{valence}} = 4.27$ ;  $t = 3.95$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ). H3b is confirmed.

The final hypothesis tested the relationship between the various types of value-statements by comparing various levels of hedonic and functional content. It was

proposed that WOM that contained high hedonic and high functional content, thus presenting an optimized experience, would result in higher service perceptions than WOM that was either high utilitarian and low hedonic or low utilitarian and high hedonic. Independent t-tests revealed that this was not the case. Table 24 and Table 25 show that highly hedonic/highly utilitarian WOM transmitted by a personal source regarding interpersonal retail servicescapes is not significantly more impactful on service perceptions than either highly hedonic/low utilitarian WOM or low hedonic/high utilitarian WOM. H3c is not confirmed.

**Table 24: HHHU WOM from a Personal Source in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes Versus HHLU WOM.**

	t	p-value	df	HHHU WOM	HHLU WOM
Justice	-.815	.420	38	5.31	5.64
Service quality	-.750	.458	38	5.67	5.94

**Table 25: HHHU WOM from a Personal Source in Interpersonal Retail Servicescapes Versus LHHU WOM.**

	t	p-value	df	HHHU WOM	LHHU WOM
Justice	.125	.901	34	5.31	5.26
Service quality	-1.82	.078	34	5.67	6.22

The means of the hypothesis tests reveal between the HHHU and HHLU conditions, the HHLU, thus more hedonic WOM augments the justice and service quality perceptions, although not significantly. Between the HHHU and the LHHU conditions, the optimized HHHU condition augments justice perceptions but the LHHU conditions, which contains more utilitarian content increases service quality perceptions. None of these relationships are significant.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study present interesting findings regarding the interaction between service type, source, and frame of WOM. As a first attempt to uncover the types of relationships possible between these factors, the results begin to shed some light on the scope and appropriateness of WOM depending on context and sender characteristics. While not all proposed hypotheses are confirmed, they do eliminate some research directions and in turn allow for more targeted and specific future research.

### ***Interaction between source and service type on credibility***

The anticipated relationship that was proposed between source and service type on credibility perceptions was not supported. There are numerous potential reasons for these results. Primarily, the main effects of source and service type are both relatively strong. The combination of these effects may have been subtle and the experimental manipulation may not have been powerful enough to capture them. It may also be that when the frame of WOM is not considered, the source trumps the service type. If WOM is efficient in situations where services are hard to evaluate tangibly (File et al. 1992), then the source is the only non-ambiguous means that consumers have to gauge an

experience. Consumers will seek to gather information from the source rather than attempt to dissect the setting.

The combination of source and service in WOM uncovers the potential these two factors have in influencing predictive expectations, which are related to satisfaction (Devlin, et al. 2002). It appears that it is not the combination of these two factors, but rather the source alone which is most likely to create predictive expectations. Specifically, a personal source gives a stronger recommendation than an anonymous source, and impacts the expectations such as satisfaction, authenticity, confidence, and hedonic as well as utilitarian attitude.

The service type, albeit not as impactful on shaping predictive expectations, does none the less influence experience quality and hedonic attitude. Interpersonal retail servicescapes are perceived to have better quality and are approached by consumers in a more hedonic fashion. Interestingly, the self-service environment is not associated with higher utilitarian attitude, as both the self-service and interpersonal settings are associated with more hedonic attitude. This may be due to the fact that consumers perceive the simple act of eating out to be a treat.

A personal source, more so than an anonymous source, was perceived to augment worthiness of an experience (significantly). For credence-based services, efficacy of WOM will depend on perceived risk (Patti and Chen, 2009), and these results show that a more personal source may alleviate functional risks.

WOM did not influence value perceptions between service types. This may be explained by the category of servicescapes used, restaurants, as these are settings that are perceived as easy to conceptualize (Zeithaml, 1981). Since the sample had a lot of

experience in restaurants, the WOM was not necessary in order to help consumers establish new predictive expectations, since these were already in place. As postulated by Wirtz (1993), the predictive expectations were related to the source since the sender and the receiver were homogenous in their experience. Alternatively, the results may confirm that consumers can be satisfied without feeling that a particular quality standard has been achieved (Boulding, et al. 1993).

***Interaction between frame and service type on intentions and service perceptions***

Overall, consumers are motivated by value WOM and by interpersonal retail servicescapes independently. The interaction between frame and service type on service perceptions is present between interpersonal services and value, but not between self-service and valence. The results demonstrate that desired expectations are shaped by the interaction between the values communicated and in light of the service type. For interpersonal services, consumers are more prone to seek out value, which in turn allows them to better gauge service quality. Desired expectations are related to personal factors and as such, value WOM may allow consumers to establish congruency between what they feel they should get and what the experience as described in the WOM will offer them (Devlin, et al. 2002; Spreng, et al. 1996). Transmitting value using hedonic and utilitarian words rather than positive or negative valence is more effective. Value is more likely to be perceived for services that are more complex in general, regardless of consumer experience (Frieden and Goldsmith, 1989). This result may explain why there was no significant interaction between self-service servicescapes and valence WOM. Regardless of the servicescape, consumers will be more receptive to value rather than valence WOM.

The interaction between WOM frame and service type does not influence consumer intentions. For information seeking, there is no significant difference between the groups or interaction between the factors, yet in all four groups, the averages for this dependent variable are relatively high. Overall, WOM used in the experiment may have been successful in all the conditions, and at the same level for information seeking behaviours. This may be explained by research on credence-based services, in that WOM is effective for those who are seeking information (Patti and Chen, 2009).

WOM can result in increased purchase intent (Sweeney, et al. 2008). Yet WOM is shown to be most impactful during actual purchase situations but resulting in varied outcomes pre-purchase when the WOM is valence-based (Fitzgerald Bone, 1995). The significantly higher patronage intention due to value frames as compared to valence frames may be explained by consumers' comparison standards between their expectations and their values. Value frames may be more in line with consumers' expectations and allow them to more easily compare perceived performance to their desires, leading to more interest to patronize (Spreng and Olshavsky, 1993).

#### ***Interaction between source and frame on interpersonal service perceptions***

The interaction between source and frame reveals the impact of source depends on the quality of the WOM, particularly for interpersonal retail servicescapes. While previous research clearly shows the importance of the source in WOM (Allsop, et al. 2007; Silverman, 2001), there was no research demonstrating the relevance of the source in shaping desired expectations as servicescapes become more complex. The results show that in complex servicescapes, the impact of the source is less important than the quality of the WOM. A source may be perceived to be a safer alternative to a direct

experience (File et al. 1992), limit perceived functional risks for consumers (von Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004) and help solidify predictive expectations (as shown in this research), but it does not help consumers establish desired expectations. Consumers will establish desired expectations based on their own personal values and when they feel that the WOM transfers sufficient value-laden information that is relevant to them (von Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004). Consumer needs will take precedence and more strongly influence expectations (Parasuraman, et al., 1988). When value is transmitted in WOM for interpersonal services, the source is no longer an influencer and simply a messenger.

The results show that a personal source was no more impactful than an anonymous source in encouraging desired expectations related to service. In both cases, the means were high, because they were value driven. In order to see the scope of the impact of value based information, it is shown that even when the source is anonymous, value based information has more impact than valenced information. The effect of value in interpersonal retail servicescapes is strong enough to transmit justice perceptions, allowing consumers to gauge service quality before it even takes place. WOM about interpersonal retail servicescapes can mean a transfer of interactional justice perceptions, which are deeply related to value (Tax, et al. 1998). Value WOM thus allows consumers to better align perceptions of interpersonal services with their desired expectations.

When testing the type of value WOM for its impact in shaping consumer expectations with WOM that is either more or less hedonic and utilitarian, it was uncovered that there were no significant differences between the most hedonic and utilitarian WOM as compared to WOM that was slightly more hedonic and less utilitarian

and vice versa. While there were some interesting directions in terms of the means, none of these were significant. This is likely due in part to the small sample size.

### **Managerial Implications**

Retailers may use the results of this study in order to better understand the impact of WOM for their type of servicescape. In particular, the results are most relevant for retailers operating interpersonal retail servicescapes. Consumers in interpersonal retail servicescapes are more likely to seek congruency with their desired expectations, which are directly linked to their service quality perceptions. These results show that service quality perceptions are established by consumers sometimes even before they have an actual service experience within interpersonal retail servicescapes. Consumers may create expectations if the service is new to them, or confirm expectation using WOM information, before even engaging with a retailer. Encouraging consumers to perceive value in an experience pre, during, and post consumption would be ideal. Interpersonal retailers can do so by using personality-traits to describe their offer, rather than valenced descriptors by specific attributes. Public relations regarding interpersonal retail servicescapes should use value-based terms in order to support service quality and justice perceptions.

Additionally, those who communicate information via WOM such as service reviewers (e.g. restaurant critics) should use value-based words in order to have more of an impact. This applies to both self-service and interpersonal settings. However, and particularly in interpersonal settings, even when the sender is perceived as anonymous, value WOM is more impactful than valenced WOM. This confirms that attribute-based

evaluations of interpersonal retail servicescapes are interesting, but that in order to shape desired expectations and encourage consumers to perceive value, hedonic and utilitarian content is more potent. Rather than evaluate interpersonal services as good or bad, these should be evaluated as genuine, daring, and using other personality-based wording, such as those proposed in Essay 2.

### **Limitations**

The large scale nature of the research design and the numerous groups of 2 x 2 x 4 factorial design may have limited the quality of the results. It is possible that the effects of the relationships tested were not strong enough to be detected in light of the small sample sizes per cell. Furthermore, the complexity of the research design meant that the manipulations may have been too subtle to be detected.

The research design was created using recommendations regarding restaurants. Although these retail settings are the ones that consumers are most likely to engage in WOM (Allsop, et al. 2007), the results may be applicable only in this setting. It would be interesting to see if these results can be replicated in other servicescapes.

The recommendation used as an experimental design may have been too short, or not perceived as realistic enough by respondents. In real-life settings, restaurant reviews tend to be wordy and extend beyond 100 words. Due to the subtlety between the various value-based manipulations used for this study and in combination with the small cell sizes, respondents may not have felt they had enough information in order to make specific judgments.

It might also be possible that there is a confound with the perceived expertise of the source which would influence the power of the source effect.

### **Contribution of research**

Primarily, an understanding of who is capable of shaping as well as which settings are more likely to induce predictive and desired expectations is now made more evident. The research shows that the effect of WOM depends on the service described in addition to the source. WOM is context specific. This builds upon the current WOM research by showing that the influence of source may or may not be relevant depending on the frame of WOM. When consumers discuss servicescapes in general, the source is far more important than the servicescape. However, the frame of the WOM used by consumers is most influential. WOM that communicates value rather than just stating valence is more relevant, in particular for interpersonal retail servicescapes where service quality perceptions are augmented using value WOM.

This research addresses the limits of WOM for services in particular and dissects the effects of source, service type, and frame. By doing so, it is now easier to understand when WOM for services can be regarded more highly by consumers. As this was a preliminary study, and one of the first to combine these three factors, the results are mixed. More work should be completed in order to understand even more the intricacies of WOM for services, but this research is a step in that direction. This research is inaugural in highlighting the important differences between interpersonal and self-service settings and thus how the context can be an important feature in the power of WOM in services.

Most importantly, this research starts to explain why WOM that is valenced is not necessarily impactful in shaping consumers' desired expectations. This is particularly relevant as it is these expectations (i.e. service quality) that enable consumers to gauge services and that service marketers seek to measure. Unlike valenced WOM, value WOM is not dependent on the source. In certain cases, such as interpersonal retail servicescapes, value-based WOM is more important than the source. Rather than contributing to the often conflicting research stream reviewing the impact of PWOM and NWOM, this research opens up a new research direction: the influence of Value-WOM.

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**APPENDIX A:  
The Interpersonal Personality Scale (Means and Standard Deviations)**

	Mean	St. Dev.	Facet	Facet Name	Factor Name	Mean	St. Dev.	Reliability
Creative	3.84	1.11	1a	Creative	Diverse	3.58	1.52	0.90
Daring	2.94	1.39	1a					
Innovative	3.70	1.17	1a					
Inventive	3.43	1.27	1a					
Interesting	4.09	0.93	1b	Distinct				
Original	3.69	1.21	1b					
Unique	3.64	1.25	1b					
Ambitious	3.54	1.33	1c	Ambitious				
Passionate	3.33	1.37	1c					
Accommodating	4.30	0.99	2a	Hospitable	Reputable	4.14	1.30	0.89
Eager to please	4.15	1.09	2a					
Friendly	4.33	0.94	2a					
Hospitable	4.25	1.11	2a					
Welcoming	4.30	0.91	2a					
Authentic	3.96	1.33	2b	Honest				
Dedicated	4.05	1.22	2b					
Genuine	3.99	1.37	2b					
Well-intentioned	4.16	1.18	2b					
Neat	4.32	1.03	2c	Well-mannered				
Polite	4.39	0.95	2c					
Proper	3.79	1.28	2c					
Respectful	4.16	0.96	2c					
Consistent	3.82	1.43	2d	Consistent				
Reliable	4.11	1.17	2d					
Approachable	4.22	1.03	3	-	Encouraging	3.77	1.44	0.81
Easy going	3.86	1.14	3					
Laid back	3.61	1.37	3					
Low key	3.34	1.38	3					
Modest	3.16	1.27	3					
Reasonable	3.93	1.21	3					
Relaxed	4.29	0.94	3					
Flexible	3.66	1.19	4	-				
Intimate	3.19	1.31	4					
Warm	4.11	0.92	4					
Animated	3.37	1.47	5	-	Dynamic	3.57	1.55	0.60
Festive	3.83	1.04	5					
Lively	3.49	1.18	5					