Changing the servicescape
The influence of music, self-disclosure and eye gaze on service encounter experience and approach-avoidance behavior

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Doctoral Dissertation: Changing the servicescape. The influence of music, self-disclosure and eye gaze on service encounter experience and approach-avoidance behavior

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and understand the effect that a servicescape’s ambient and social conditions has on consumers’ service encounter experience and their approach/avoidance behavior in a retail context. In three papers, with a total sample of over 1600 participants (including 550 actual consumers), the author investigated the effect that music (ambient stimuli), employees’ self-disclosure (verbal social stimuli) and employees’ gazing behavior (nonverbal social stimuli) have on consumers’ service encounter experience and approach/avoidance behavior in a retail store. Paper I comprised two experiments. Experiment 1 investigated the influence of the independent variable no music/music. Similarly, Experiment 2 studied the influence of the independent variable no music/slow-tempo music/fast-tempo music. The dependent variables in both experiments were consumer emotions and the resulting approach/avoidance behavior. Paper II also comprised two experiments. Experiment 1 investigated the influence of the independent variable no self-disclosure/social self-disclosure, while Experiment 2 investigated the influence of various forms of self-disclosure. The dependent variables in both experiments were approach/avoidance behavior, measured by reciprocity; and service encounter experience, measured by encounter satisfaction and social impression of the frontline employee. Paper III comprised three experiments, all of which investigated the influence of the independent variable employee’s direct eye gaze/ averted eye gaze in different purchase situations. The dependent variables in all three experiments were consumers’ service encounter experience, measured by social impression of the frontline employee, consumer emotions, and encounter satisfaction. The results presented in this thesis show that music affects consumers in both positive and negative ways.
(Paper I). Self-disclosure affects consumers negatively in that it decreases encounter satisfaction (Paper II), and eye gaze affects consumers by regulating both positively – and in some cases also negatively – consumers’ social impression of the frontline employee and their encounter satisfaction (Paper III). The conclusions of this thesis are that ambient and social stimuli in a servicescape both affect consumers’ internal responses, which in turn affect their behavior. Internal and behavioral responses will vary depending on the purchase situation (for example, knowing what to buy or buying an embarrassing product), retail (such as bank, supermarket, hotel reception, or electronic retail store), and stimuli (ambient or social).

**Keywords:** Servicescape, Approach/Avoidance, Emotions, Social impression, Consumer behavior, Encounter experience, Music, Self-disclosure, Eye gaze, Retail
Doktorsavhandling: Att förändra butikens servicelandskap. Påverkan av musik, självutlämnande information och ögonkontakt på kunders butikupplevelse och beteende
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Sammanfattning
Syftet med denna avhandling är att undersöka och förstå effekten av ett servicelandskaps fysiska (musik) och sociala stimuli (frontpersonals verbala och ickeverbala beteende) på kunders serviceupplevelse och närmande/ undvikande beteende. I tre studier, med ett totalt urval av mer än 1600 deltagare (inklusive 550 faktiska kunder), undersöker författaren effekten av musik i butik, frontpersonal som delger personlig information och frontpersonals ögonkontakt på kunders serviceupplevelse och närmande/undvikande beteende i en butik. Den första studien (Paper I) består av två experiment. Experiment 1 undersökte påverkan av oberoende variabeln musik/ej musik och experiment 2 undersökte påverkan av oberoende variabeln ej musik/lågt tempo på musiken/högt tempo på musiken på kunders närmande/undvikande beteende och serviceupplevelse. Studie II (Paper II) omfattar två experiment. Experiment 1 undersökte hur kunders närmande/undvikande beteende (måts via reciprocitet) och serviceupplevelse (måts via sociala intrycket och nöjdhet) påverkas av att frontpersonal delger personlig information eller inte. Experiment 2 undersökte hur olika varianter av självutlämnade information påverkar kunders närmande/undvikande beteende och serviceupplevelse. Studie III (Paper III) består av tre experiment. Alla tre experiment undersökte, i olika köpsituationer, hur kunders känslor och serviceupplevelse påverkas av att frontpersonal ger dem ögonkontakt eller undviker ögonkontakt. Resultatet i denna avhandling visar att kunder påverkas både negativt och positivt av musik (Paper I). Att delge självutlämnande information har en negativ effekt på kunders nöjdhet med servicemötet (Paper II). Slutligen visar resultatet att ögonkontakt ibland har en positiv, men ibland även en negativ effekt på kunders känslor och
serviceupplevelse (Paper III). Slutsatserna av denna avhandling är att både fysiska och sociala stimuli i ett servicelanskap påverkar kunders inre responser (t.ex. känslor), vilket i sin tur påverkar deras beteende. Vidare så är både inre (känslor) och yttre (beteende) responser olika beroende på typ av köpsituation (t.ex. veta vad man ska köpa eller köpa pinsamma produkter), typ av köpkontext (bank, hotellreception, matvarubutik eller elektronikbutik) och typ av stimuli (fysisk eller social).

Nyckelord: Servicelandskap, Närmande/Undvikande, Emotioner, Socialt intryck, Konsumentbeteende, Serviceupplevelse, Musik, Självutlämnande, Ögonkontakt, Detaljhandeln
This thesis is based on the following three papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:


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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION .............................................................. 11
   1.1 Background .......................................................... 11
   1.2 Servicescape ......................................................... 12
   1.3 The stimuli-organism-response (S-O-R) model .......... 15
   1.4 Independent variables ........................................... 17
   1.4.1 The influence of music on emotions and approach or
         avoidance behavior ............................................. 17
   1.4.2 The influence of self-disclosure on service encounter
         experience and approach or avoidance behavior ........ 21
   1.4.3 The influence of eye gaze on emotions and service encounter
         experience ......................................................... 27
   1.5 Dependent variables .............................................. 31
   1.5.1 Emotions ........................................................ 31
   1.5.2 Satisfaction .................................................... 33
   1.5.3 Social Impression ............................................ 35
   1.5.4 Approach–avoidance behavior ......................... 37
   1.7 Aim of the thesis .................................................. 38
   1.8 Methodological considerations .............................. 40
   1.9 Ethical considerations .......................................... 41
2. THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION ................................. 43
   2.1 Introduction ....................................................... 43
   2.2 Paper I – Let the music play ... or not: The influence
         of background music on consumer behavior ............ 43
      2.2.1 General aim ................................................. 43
      2.2.2 Experiment 1 ............................................... 44
      2.2.3 Experiment 2 ............................................... 46
   2.3 Paper II – The effect of frontline employees’ personal self-
         disclosure on consumers’ encounter experience ....... 48
2.3.1 General aim .......................................................................................... 48
2.3.2 Experiment 1 ....................................................................................... 48
2.3.3 Experiment 2 ....................................................................................... 52

2.4 Paper III – The effect of gaze on consumers’ encounter evaluation............................................................... 55
2.4.1 General aim .......................................................................................... 55
2.4.2 Experiment 1 ....................................................................................... 55
2.4.3 Experiment 2 ....................................................................................... 58
2.4.4 Experiment 3 ....................................................................................... 60

3. DISCUSSION ...................................................................................................... 63
3.1 Introduction to conclusion ...................................................................... 63
3.2 Discussion of main results ..................................................................... 64
  3.2.1 The influence of music on emotions and approach/avoidance behavior ......................................................... 64
  3.2.2 The influence of self-disclosure on encounter experience and approach/avoidance behavior ......................... 66
  3.2.3 The influence of eye gaze on emotions and encounter experience ........................................................................ 69
  3.2.3 Conclusions .......................................................................................... 70

4. REFERENCES ................................................................................................... 74
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The notion that the service environment affects consumer behavior is widely accepted in the academic literature (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Yinghua & SooCheong, 2009). The retail store represents a service environment in which consumers’ psychological experience is of the utmost importance. The service environment within retail stores is academically referred to as the servicescape. Bitner (1992) coined the term “servicescape” to denote a physical setting in which a marketplace exchange is performed, delivered, and consumed within a service organization. A servicescape is considered to contain atmospherics (physical factors) that can influence consumers’ and employees’ approach or avoidance behavior related to a retail store. Today, many retail marketers consider the store environment to be increasingly important in terms of satisfying consumers by providing a positive total shopping experience and by positioning the store in the consumer’s mind. Over the past three decades, researchers have recognized the influence of atmospherics as tangible cues in consumer evaluations of service quality and repeat purchases in a variety of service settings (Bitner, 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Kotler, 1973) Although Bitner’s servicescape model is considered solely in terms of physical factors, Baker, Lewy, and Grewal (1992) suggested including social factors such as density, appearance, and behavior of other consumers and sales personnel as part of the servicescape. Given the existence of retail environments, such as Apple’s concept stores and Abercrombie & Fitch in the U.S., and Swedish examples such as IKEA and Stadium, the extension from Baker et al. (1992) seems valid. Today, consumers are bombarded with stimuli when entering a store. For example, the Mood mall in Stockholm uses music, scents, and light to stimulate consumers, and Stadium uses an employee training program to increase and improve interaction with consumers, all with the intention of having the consumer approach the offerings within the store more closely.
This thesis uses the servicescape concept as its starting point and aims to understand the effect of physical and social environments on consumers’ service encounter experience and their approach/avoidance behavior in a retail context. Specifically, this thesis addresses the effects that music, employee’s verbal behavior (self-disclosure) and employee’s nonverbal behavior (eye gaze) have on consumers’ service encounter experience and approach or avoidance behavior.

The following section presents an overview of research into servicescapes and the stimulus-organism-response model. Subsequently, three influencing independent variables (music, self-disclosure and eye gaze) and four measured dependent variables (emotions, satisfaction, social impression, and approach-avoidance behavior, are presented). Finally, empirical studies are summarized and discussed.

1.2 Servicescape

The servicescape framework describes the effect of a complex mix of atmospherics, such as physical design and décor elements, which influence the internal responses and external behaviors of both consumers and employees. A review of the literature reveals that several definitions have been put forward to characterize the servicescape. A servicescape has been defined as:

“[The] design [of] buying environments to produce emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his [or her] purchase probability.” (Kotler, 1973, p 50. Text inside brackets added by me)

“All of the objective physical factors that can be controlled by the firm to enhance (or constrain) employee and customer actions.” (Bitner, 1992, p. 65)

“Consciously designed places, calculated to produce commercially significant action.” (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998, p. 90)

The above definitions are accepted as an important determinant of consumer psychology with respect to affect (such as emotion), cognition (such as satisfaction), and behavior (for example, patronage, positive word of mouth). Mehrabian and Russell (1974)
postulated that all responses made within a servicescape are considered to be approach or avoidance behaviors.

A servicescape (Bitner, 1992) is considered to be a packaging of services and consists of three components:

- Ambient conditions
- Spatial layout and functionality, and
- Signs, symbols, and artifacts.

Ambient conditions include various elements, including color, light, temperature, noise, scent, and music, all of which might have an effect on the senses that influence consumers’ perceptions and their responses to the environment. Spatial layout is the design and arrangement of buildings, equipment, and furniture according to the needs of the service delivery process. Signs, symbols, and artifacts are visual symbols used to create an appropriate atmosphere and direct consumers during the service encounter.

As mentioned, Baker et al. (1992) identified a limitation to Bitner’s (1992) framework; namely, that it does not incorporate social elements that consumers may also interpret when formulating approach decisions. Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003) addressed this gap by arguing that consumption settings feature a social servicescape, which is composed of other consumers and service providers, and that consumers respond to the displayed emotions of other individuals. Baker et al. (1992) operationalized the social factor in terms of the number and affability of retail salespeople. Zomerdijk and Voss (2010) argued that one way to influence consumers’ emotions and engage them is through the service employee. They stated that the interaction between consumers and service employees is an important factor that influences perceived quality and consumer satisfaction. Several studies have proposed that ambience, such as music (Jain & Bagdare, 2011; Turley & Milliman, 2000), and social factors, such as employees (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011), are the most influential factors within a servicescape. For instance, Ryu and Jang (2007) concluded that music and employees are the most influential factors in consumers’ approach behavior in an upscale restaurant. Research shows that music in a servicescape affects consumer behavior, emotions and satisfaction (Demoulin, 2011; Dubé, Chebat, & Morin, 1995). Studies have shown that social stimuli have the same effect as ambient stimuli.
with regard to employees', verbal (Koermer, 2005), and nonverbal (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000; Leigh & Summers, 2002) interactions with consumers. Figure 1 presents the servicescape framework, including the three environmental dimensions of music, nonverbal, and verbal interaction investigated in this thesis. These three aspects appear in bold and marked with an asterisk in the conceptual model.

Figure 1. A framework for understanding two environmental dimensions of the servicescape (Bitner, 1992, further extension by Baker et al., 1992; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003).
1.3 The stimuli-organism-response (S-O-R) model

The research literature on servicescape draws its theoretical foundations from environmental psychology theory (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Vieira, 2013) and the S-O-R paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). The S-O-R model, forwarded by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), helps explain and frame the link between the servicescape, emotions, satisfaction, encounter evaluation, and consumer behavior. According to the S-O-R model, the environmental stimuli (S) influences individuals’ processing of environmental cues that they receive and individual’s emotional states (pleasure, arousal, and dominance) (O), and individuals’ emotions then drive individuals to different responses or behaviors (R) such as approach or avoidance behavior (see Figure 2) (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Vieira, 2013). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) stressed that the S-O-R model differs from the strictly stimuli-response (S-R) approach, which does not take into account the fact that stimuli (S) elicit different effects or responses (R) depending on the state of the organism (O). In other words, the state of the organism (O) mediates the relationship between the stimuli and response. The Mehrabian-Russell theoretical model depicts what is described as a parsimonious description of environments, intervening variables and behaviors, where emotional states are posited as important mediators between servicescape stimuli and consumer behavior (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Jang & Namkung, 2009). Therefore, in order to fully understand consumers’ response to a stimulus, it is necessary to study emotional reactions (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Lin & Mattila, 2010; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Adopting the S-O-R, this thesis examines the following stimuli: music and music tempo, frontline employees’ disclosing behavior, and frontline employees’ gazing behavior. At the organism level, emotional reactions; finally, consumers’ response to social impression of the frontline employee, encounter satisfaction, reciprocal behavior intentions and approach/avoidance behavior are investigated.
Another reason to study these three influencing stimulus, apart from having adopted the S-O-R model, is the outlook of society in which these stimuli are frequently used as suggestions for how retailers can earn more money on their consumers. For example, there is a general perception that music will make customers feel better and, as a consequence, spend more time and money in the store. However, many retail owners do not know if and how music really influences consumers and therefore they play music “just because everyone else does so”. Furthermore, it is recommended that frontline employees always welcome the consumer with a nod, eye contact, and a smile, regardless of the type of services or products the retailer offers. Disclosing personal information to develop friendship is another established marketing technique.

“I don’t want the customers to see me as a salesperson; rather they should see me as their friend.” Fredrik Eklund, CEO Core Group Marketing, New York (Radio podcast, 2011)

“...make it personal, reveal something about yourself [...] and you’re more likely to make a purchase from that salesperson and feel good about it.” Lourdes Martin-Rosa, American Express OPEN Adviser, Entrepreneur.com (2011)

As the above quotes show, the idea that self-disclosure leads to friendship, which leads to favorable returns, is becoming increasingly widespread, without any consideration of the time, place, or duration of relationship.

The frequent use of these stimuli, with limited knowledge of the psychological processes they generate, and with the sole objective of making money, is somewhat unconscionable. Therefore, one objective of this thesis is to show and understand that the reality is more complex than the direct link between these stimuli and positive outcomes, such as increased sales.
1.4 Independent variables

1.4.1 The influence of music on emotions and approach or avoidance behavior

Psychological research is beginning to reveal the enormous power that music can exert upon people. The psychological functions of music can be summarized in three main domains; namely, its cognitive, emotional and social functions (Hargreaves & North, 1999). To date, research has mainly focused on the emotional (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008) and cognitive functions (Olsen, 1997). It has been recognized that music can induce emotions (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). For example, music has been shown to affect subjective feelings where listeners report that they experience emotions while listening to music (Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Furthermore, music listening may give rise to physiological reactions similar to those shown to other emotional stimuli, such as changes in heart rate and skin temperature (Krumhansl, 1997). Additionally, music is used in several applications in society, such as films (Cohen, 2001), marketing (Bruner, 1990), and therapy (Bunt & Hoskyns, 2002), with the hope of generating desired emotional states.

The use of background music to influence consumer behavior in modern retail stores is widely recognized (Garlin & Owen, 2006; Jain & Bagdare, 2011). Music has been observed as a powerful stimulus in shaping the retail experience; it is used for attention, identification, association, and remembrance in many more settings than just retailing. A meta-study by Turley and Milliman (2000) analyzed 60 published empirical studies involving the influence of atmospheric variables on consumers, and revealed that music is the most commonly studied general interior cue and is seen as a key ambient factor in retail environments. Music has been – and remains – a much studied subject within retail stores (Jain & Bagdare, 2011). The results of studies that have used music as an independent variable have shown that music played in different settings appears to have a significant effect on a variety of dependent variables such as affective (mood, arousal, pleasure, emotion), financial returns (value of sales, quantity purchased, gross margins), attitudes and perception (liking,
brand loyalty, service quality), temporal (duration perceived/actual, time to consume), and behavioral (patronage frequency, store choice, in-store traffic flow) (Garlin & Owen, 2006; Turley & Milliman, 2000).

In line with the M-R model, research shows that music influences both pleasure and arousal, which, in turn, affects consumers’ approach or avoidance behavior (Ryu and Jang, 2007). For example, Hui, Dubé, and Chebat (1997) found that music ameliorated the emotional evaluation of the environment for consumers waiting for a service, and that this amelioration led to approach behavior toward the banking service. Thus, music played in retail environments can alter the affect, behavior, and cognition for consumers. Furthermore, music with positive valence also triggered a more positive emotional response to waiting for services. Similarly, Vida, Obadia, and Kunz (2007) found that music that is perceived to positively fit the store image affected the length of shopping time, which indirectly influenced consumers’ expenditure. Areni and Kim (1993) showed that classical music influenced an important part of approach behavior (namely purchase) and consumers selected more expensive merchandise rather than increasing the volume of merchandise purchased. Mattila and Wirtz’s (2001) findings suggest that matching ambient stimuli that are highly arousing, such as by playing highly arousing music (that is, fast-tempo music) with a highly arousing scent (in this case, grapefruit), increases consumers’ pleasure and approach behavior in a retail outlet.

In summarizing the research carried out on how music impact consumers’ emotions and approach (or avoidance) behavior, it becomes clear that there is a causal relationship between the two variables (that is, music and consumer behavior). Thus, music influences consumers’ emotions (pleasure and arousal) which in turn affects consumers’ approaching (or avoidance) behavior, such as time and money spent in-store, patronage, communicating with others, and exploring the store (Areni & Kim, 1993; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Ryu & Jang, 2007).

Although a number of studies have shown a direct relationship between music and approach (avoidance behavior), studies have also reported that the effect of music is influenced by intervening factors,
such as gender (Kellaris & Altsech, 1992) and music tempo (Caldwell & Hibbert, 2002; Eroglu, Machleit, & Chebat, 2005).

Regarding gender, several studies have indicated that gender has a moderating and/or mediating effect on the influence that music has on consumer behavior. Grewal, Baker, Levy, and Voss (2003) found that gender moderated the effect that store atmosphere (for example, the presence or absence of classical music) had on consumers’ wait expectations and store atmosphere evaluations. Their results suggest that males have more negative expectations than females regarding waiting time and that males evaluated store atmosphere less positively than females. Kellaris and Rice (1993) found a gender difference in hearing sensitivities, which was used to explain why females respond more positively than males to music at lower volumes. Further, Kellaris and Altsech (1992) examined the influence that music and gender have on the time experience and discovered that gender moderated the effect of loudness on perceived duration in a store. Another study by Kellaris and Mantel (1994) suggested that gender and its interaction with mood (induced by music) could influence consumers’ time perceptions. Their results showed that female participants were affected by their mood state more than their male counterparts and that mood had no influence on time perceptions independent of gender. Research also shows that females prefer slower, softer music and that males prefer louder, faster music, regardless of the genre (Stipp, 1990). In line with this finding, Sweeney and Wyber (2002) found that females preferred slow, top-40 music, which was also related to a higher perception of service quality and pleasure.

Regarding music tempo, studies have shown that music tempo influences traffic pace and sales volume, with slow-tempo music leading to increased sales volume (Milliman, 1982); and that music tempo has a moderating effect on attention level, mood, and time estimation (Chebat, Gelinas-Chebat, & Filiatrault, 1993). Music tempo has also been shown to lead to behavioral responses such as approach or avoidance tendencies (Eroglu, Machleit, & Chebat, 2005). Studies that used tempo as a variable have indicated that slow-tempo music slows consumers down, which causes them to spend more time in a store and buy more than they do when fast-tempo music is being played. Milliman (1986) found significant differences between slow-
and fast-tempo music in terms of the time that a consumer spends in a restaurant and making purchases; slow-tempo music increased the amount of time and money that consumers spent. Another interesting finding from Milliman’s (1986) study was that slow-tempo music increased service time; in other words, the tempo of the music also affected employees.

In summary, music seems to be moderated by gender (Kellaris & Altsech, 1992) and mediated by music tempo (Caldwell & Hibbert, 2002; Eroglu, Machleit, & Chebat, 2005). Therefore, when addressing the effect of music on consumer emotions and the resulting approach/avoidance behavior in retail stores, this thesis, considers pleasure, arousal, approach/avoidance behavior, gender and music tempo (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Relationship between the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), Bitner’s servicescape (Bitner, 1992), and the independent variable and measured dependent variables in Paper I.](image)

An interesting feature of studies on the effect that music has on consumers is that they have been conducted in experimental settings.
A common methodological approach in psychology is to conduct such studies at a university department using undergraduate students as the empirical subjects, in exchange for course credits. Evidently, an important argument is that such a method strengthens the internal validity of the study. However, the negative aspect – that it also involves a trade-off that implies sacrificing external validity – is seldom mentioned. Because the majority of studies are conducted only in laboratories, an implicit argument can be made for studies that investigate the effect of music on consumers in real-life settings. Therefore, when addressing the effect of music on consumer behavior, the present thesis considers field experiments in natural settings with real consumers.

1.4.2 The influence of self-disclosure on service encounter experience and approach or avoidance behavior

A servicescape influences consumers’ experience and behavior through ambient conditions (such as music), but also through frontline employees; the employee and his/her specific behavior (in this case, the verbal behavior, in terms of self-disclosure) is considered stimuli in the social dimension of the servicescape (see Figure 1).

Few areas of psychological investigation have attracted people from as many different disciplines as the study of self-disclosure. Clinical and counseling psychologists, social psychologists, and specialists in interpersonal communications, among others, have been drawn to this topic, to some extent. Self-disclosure concerns a situation in which friends or acquaintances are expected to share personal information with one another (Cozby, 1973; Grayson, 2007). A theme that has run through the field of self-disclosure research is the role of self-disclosure in the development, maintenance, and dissolution of relationships (Derlaga & Berg, 2013). One of the most consistent findings regarding the interpersonal effects of self-disclosure is disclosure reciprocity. This concerns the increased likelihood that recipients of a self-disclosure input will respond by disclosing information about themselves at a comparable level of intimacy (Cosby, 1973; Derlaga & Berg, 2013; Derlaga, Harris, & Chaikin, 1973; Kleinke, 1979). Three different explanations have been
proposed to explain this finding. The first explanation holds that disclosure reciprocity is the result of modeling, with the recipient of disclosure imitating the initial speaker. The second explanation is based on the trust–liking approach and holds that receiving intimate disclosure increases trust and liking for the disclosure. The recipient is then expected to return intimate disclosure in order to demonstrate these feelings (Derlaga & Berg, 2013). The third explanation emphasizes the influence of social norms, where people who receive intimate disclosure feel social pressure to respond with a personal disclosure of equal intimacy (Collins & Miller, 1994).

Another interpersonal consequence of self-disclosure, although that is not nearly as consistent as the reciprocity effect, is that self-disclosure can result in increased liking for the discloser (Derlaga & Berg, 2013). Collins and Miller (1994) presented three significant disclosure–liking relations in their meta-analytic review of self-disclosure and liking. Firstly, people who engage in intimate disclosure tend to be liked more than people who disclose at lower levels. Secondly, people disclose more to those whom they initially like. Thirdly, people like others as a result of having disclosed to them. Although Collins and Miller (1994) found support for all three disclosure–liking effects in their meta-analysis, they also found that the relation between disclosure and liking was moderated by a number of variables, such as the type of disclosure, the gender of the discloser, attribution for the disclosure, and social norms.

Various theoretical models have been proposed to explain the effect of receiving disclosure on liking. From an information-processing perspective, one may predict that the disclosed information from others, particularly positive disclosed information, can lead to positive beliefs or social impression of the discloser (Collins & Miller, 1994). According to the social exchange perspective, disclosure is viewed as a rewarding or positive outcome for the recipient because it communicates the disclosure’s liking towards the recipient (Taylor, 1979). From an uncertainty reduction theory perspective (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), for example, receiving disclosure from someone else may lead to liking based on the degree to which uncertainty about the other decreases throughout the interaction.
The interaction between consumers and service employees is an important factor that influences consumers’ service encounter experience and approach or avoidance behavior in retail contexts. The service management literature (e.g., Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006) has recognized frontline employees and the social impression of the employee as an important element in the creation of favorable consumer perceptions of service performance. Moreover, frontline employees are a valuable resource for establishing a connection with consumers (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010). Research on service suggests that certain service encounters are more similar to a meeting between friends, rather than reflecting an economic transaction (Price & Arnould, 1999). Therefore, unsurprisingly, cultivating friendships as a business strategy is not an entirely new approach in marketing (Grayson, 2007). For example, friendship may be used to increase feelings of doing something in return, such as reciprocity in terms of increased likelihood of purchase or spreading positive word-of-mouth. To define friendship, the psychological literature suggests self-disclosure as a critical property. Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) suggested that an important factor in friendship formation in a service encounter is reciprocal self-disclosure, which can contribute to creating future sales opportunities. Interestingly, in a study on female undergraduates, Burger, Soroka, Gonzago, Murphy, and Somervell (2001) showed that self-disclosure from one person increased a liking for the other, and this liking led to automatic responses in terms of requests from individuals in which they shared something in common or with whom they spoke briefly. In line with this, Sprecher, Treger, and Wondra (2013) showed that receiving self-disclosure increases liking for the other person and also increases other positive interpersonal impressions such as closeness, enjoyment of interaction, and perceived similarity.

Liking is an emotional connection, between one person and another, that can be viewed as affection, which is a feeling that goes beyond the mere acceptance of a competent employee (Nicholson, Compeau, & Sethi, 2001). Research shows that liking yields results such as satisfaction with the encounter, where satisfaction with a frontline employee represents a consumer’s attitude about a service interaction that he or she has just experienced (Jacobs, Hyman, & McQuitty, 2001; Lee & Dubinsky, 2003; Oliver, 1993). Ganesh,
Arnould, and Reynolds (2000) suggested that if frontline employee contact with the consumer is positive, the consumer is likely to develop positive feelings that are directed toward both the employee and the company. These feelings then have an effect on encounter satisfaction. Furthermore, Macintosh (2009) described the importance of enjoyable interactions, where liking for the other party plays an important role in the bonding process, similar to gift-giving and social support in commercial friendship. Applied to a retail perspective, frontline employees who share personal information about themselves may yield advantageous behavior in the form of increased liking of a store or even facilitating future sales. In line with these results, Jiang, Hoegg, Dahl, and Chattopadhyay (2010) found that incidental similarity (revealed by self-disclosure) between the consumer and the salesperson resulted in a more favorable attitude toward the salesperson and a higher intention to purchase.

Although presented studies show a positive relation between self-disclosure and liking (Burger et al., 2001; Collins & Miller, 1994; Crosby et al., 1990; Derlaga & Berg, 2013), the question arises as to whether this positive relation between self-disclosure and liking holds in other interaction contexts. For example, does self-disclosure yield liking in contexts that is not about creating and building relationships between friends or partners, such as in one-time encounters between a consumer and a frontline employee? There are indications that the relationship between self-disclosure and liking is not always positive (Collins & Miller, 1994). Derlaga and Berg (2013) suggested, for example, that if the disclosure is perceived as personalistic (that is, intended only for the disclosure recipient), it would lead to increased liking.

One reason why frontline employees talk about themselves when they meet a consumer could be (as mentioned above) to gain advantages such as increasing the chances of selling the company’s products or services. Another possible reason is that it is intrinsically rewarding to disclose information about oneself. Tamir and Mitchell (2012) investigated what motivates individuals to reveal information about themselves, and found that when individuals communicate their thoughts and feelings to others, it activates neural and cognitive mechanisms associated with reward. Tamir and Mitchell (2012) suggested that the human tendency to convey information about
personal experience may arise from the intrinsic value associated with self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure has been studied with respect to breadth (quantity), which refers to the amount of information disclosed, and depth (quality), which refers to the intimacy of the information and the duration or time spent describing the information (Cozby, 1973). A common method of operationalizing self-disclosure is to manipulate or measure its level of intimacy, where intimate topics (such as one’s feelings about marriage) are considered higher levels of disclosure than less intimate topics (for example, one’s favorite musical group) (Collins & Miller, 1994). In an early review of self-disclosure, Cozby (1973) found that liking increases when the topic disclosed is on a medium level of intimacy. Jacobs et al. (2001b) argued that it does not suffice to only include breadth and depth in a self-disclosure construct and expanded the construct with exchange-specific self-disclosure and social disclosure. Exchange-specific disclosure (described in Jacobs, Evans, Klein, and Landry (2001) as task-specific disclosure) facilitates interactions about the product or service that could affect the social impression of the employee being competent and skilled. Competence has often been noted as an attribute of a frontline employee (Crosby et al., 1990). Price, Arnould, and Deibler (1995) suggested that the perception of a frontline employee being competent can contribute to positive feelings about the service encounter, and the absence of competent service can contribute to negative feelings about the service encounter. Social disclosure is personal information communicated beyond that required to complete the immediate task, which facilitates the psychological bond between the consumer and the frontline employee. For example, frontline employees may disclose social information about their personal interests or experiences in an attempt to establish friendship and be seen as more likeable (Jacobs et al., 2001b). Gilliam and Zablah’s (2013) findings suggest that disclosure regarding the product, compared to personal disclosure, is more efficient in terms of enhancing consumers’ purchase intentions in one-time encounters.

In summary, these findings suggest that self-disclosure increases liking and promotes favorable attitudes and compliance behavior. Therefore, when addressing the effect of self-disclosure on consumer’s
service encounter experience and their approach/avoidance behavior, the present thesis considers social impression, satisfaction, and reciprocity (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Relationship between the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), Bitner's servicescape (Bitner, 1992), and the independent variable and measured dependent variables in Paper II.

Studies of self-disclosure in social psychology have shown that self-disclosure increases liking for the person, even if the person is a stranger, and this has been demonstrated in lab studies as well in field studies (Collins & Miller, 1994). However, other research indicates that the relationship between self-disclosure and liking is not always positive. This avenue of research suggests that liking is affected temporally if intimate and damaging information is disclosed early or late in the encounter, where liking of the person disclosing the information is reduced if damaging disclosure occurs early in the interaction. Archer and Burleson (1980) showed that negative disclosure has a negative effect on liking when it is disclosed late in the interaction. Jones and Gordon (1972) showed that liking decreases when positive information is disclosed early in the relationship. In line with this, Norton, Frost, and Ariely (2007) concluded their study with a “less is more” hypothesis, implying that,
in a majority of initial interactions, receiving too much information about another person leads to perceptions of dissimilarity and decreases liking toward the discloser.

Most research in this area has been conducted from the perspective of the role that self-disclosure plays in the development and maintenance of relationships, such as between friends (Miller & Kenny, 1986), in therapy contexts (Knox, Hess, Petersen, & Hill, 1997), with consumers who self-disclose to companies (White, 2004), and how self-disclosure promotes long-term relationships between salespeople and consumers (Jacobs et al., 2001b). Additionally, research on the effects of self-disclosure has covered several different contexts, primarily those concerning long-term relationships and other types of non-business situations. As a result, the studies regarding self-disclosure are inconclusive in terms of informing about how frontline employees’ in short-term relationships (that is, where encounters occur only once) will affect consumers’ behavior. Therefore, when addressing the effect of self-disclosure on consumers’ encounter experience and their behavior, the present thesis consider frontline employee’s self-disclosure in one-time encounters.

1.4.3 The influence of eye gaze on emotions and service encounter experience

Another important part of the interaction between the employee and the consumer regards nonverbal interaction. Underlying the evaluation process of any human exchange is a complex language of behaviors that communicate meaning and provide a message upon which evaluations are based (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000). This language is nonverbal and part of everyday social behavior. Whenever one person sees another, he or she typically sees body-posture, eye-gaze, facial-expressions, and other nonverbal cues (Patterson, 1982).

Gazing behavior is one example of nonverbal behavior that has been shown to influence social impression and inferences about others’ personality traits and lead to effects such as likeability, attractiveness and credibility (Gabbott and Hogg, 2000; Kleinke, 1986). Gaze typically signals interest, and people are highly adept at using gaze cues to decode others’ behavioral intentions (Mason, Tatkow, & Macrae, 2005; Wirth, Sacco, Hugenberg, & Williams,
A person’s eyes provide considerable information, and when we look at others’ faces, we tend to look first and most frequently at their eyes (Frischen, Bayliss, & Tipper, 2007). Looking at others’ eyes appears to be a hardwired human trait and has a function in developing social cognition (Striano & Reid, 2006) and regulating social interactions (Kleinke, 1986). Overall, gaze serves several important functions in complex social interactions, such as making interactions work fluently, facilitating communicational goals, and expressing intimacy and social control (Kleinke, 1986).

Being gazed at by others influences feelings of affirmation and social inclusion, while an averted gaze influences negative feelings of ostracism and social exclusion (Wirth et al., 2010). Recent research has shown that direct and averted gaze can signal the sender’s motivational tendencies of approach and avoidance, respectively (Adams & Kleck, 2005). There is also a growing body of evidence that receiving direct gaze affects physical arousal responses (for example, increased galvanic skin responses, higher heart rates), and activates a relative left-sided frontal EEG asymmetry and autonomic arousal (indicative of tendency to approach); averted gaze, on the other hand, activates relative right-sided asymmetry (indicative of tendency of avoidance) (Hietanen, Leppänen, Peltola, Linna-aho, & Ruuhiala, 2008; Kuzmanovic et al., 2009; Pönkänen, Peltola, & Hietanen, 2011). Hietanen et al. (2008) found that gaze direction affects not only brain activity, but also participants’ subjective ratings of emotional arousal and pleasure. In sum, direct or averted gaze can be interpreted as the sender’s motivation to either approach or avoid the receiver, which in turn affects the receiver’s motivation to approach or avoid the sender. Ganesh et al. (2000) suggested that if a frontline employee’s contact with the consumer is positive, the consumer is likely to develop positive feelings toward both the employee and the company. For instance, positive encounter experiences may result in feelings of happiness while negative encounter experiences may result in unhappiness. Therefore, if a direct gaze creates a feeling of affirmation, and an averted gaze creates a feeling of disregard, we can assume that eye contact affects emotions, which impacts encounter satisfaction (Price et al., 1995; Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002) and consumer behavior (Ganesh et al., 2000).
Emotions elicited by gaze not only affect the evaluation of a service encounter, but also the impression and evaluation of the person whose gaze caused the emotions. Research has shown that people who make eye contact with others are viewed as more attentive during social encounters (Kleinke, 1986), and judged as more likable and attractive (Ewing; Rhodes, & Pellicano, 2010). Mason et al. (2005) found that participants liked those people who gazed at them more than those who gazed away. In addition, Leigh and Summers (2002) examined the impact of nonverbal communication on social impressions in a sales context. Using videotaped sales encounters, they found that steady eye gaze (the eye gaze treatments were manipulated by the amount of direct eye contact, and then divided into high/low eye gaze) positively affected the believability of the sales presentation. They also found that steady eye gaze had a positive effect on the customers’ perceptions of the salesperson’s job-specific empathy and tactfulness. Finally, they found that steady eye gaze had a positive effect on customers’ perceptions of the sales presentation being personal and emotional. It is worth noting that no negative effects of gaze were reported in this research. Overall, gaze has an important function in social interactions, influencing inferences about emotions, social impressions, and psychological states (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Manusov, 2011; Leigh & Summers, 2002; Patterson, 1982), where gaze affects individuals’ emotional responses, the social impressions they obtain, and the overall satisfaction they experience.

Although research has shown that non-verbal behavior such as eye gaze influences encounter evaluation, there is a lack of studies investigating the mediating variables of eye gaze to encounter satisfaction. In a research review, Kleinke (1986) suggested that “we should learn more about the effects of preinteraction mediators on gazing behavior and reactions to gaze from others” (p. 92). Therefore, mediation analysis was conducted primarily in order to understand the underlying psychological mechanisms that may explain the effect of eye gaze on encounter satisfaction (in Paper III).

Despite robust research findings showing that eye gaze have positive effects on individuals, there are several plausible situations in a consumer setting where eye gaze could be perceived as negative. Consider, for example, a situation of buying something that you feel is embarrassing, such as a condom, or a situation of being in a negative
mood, or just simply knowing what to buy and doing what you have to do as quickly as possible. Does eye gaze still have the same overwhelmingly positive effect?

To summarize, gaze influences both social impressions (Ewing et al., 2010; Leigh & Summers, 2002; Mason et al., 2005) and emotions (Hietanen et al., 2008; Wirth et al., 2010), where consumers in positive moods evaluate their shopping experiences more favorably than those in negative moods, which increases satisfaction (Swinyard, 1993). In the present thesis, an aim of Paper III was to investigate whether the influence of eye gaze on satisfaction is mediated by emotions and social impression. Therefore, when addressing the effect of eye gaze on consumers’ service encounter experience, this thesis considers emotions, social impression, and encounter satisfaction (see Figure 5).

![Figure 5](image-url) **Figure 5.** Relationship between the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), Bitner’s servicescape (Bitner, 1992), and the independent variable and measured dependent variables in Paper III.
1.5 Dependent variables

This section describes the dependent variables used in this thesis. The measured dependent variables have been used to different extents in the three papers described in this thesis. The dependent variable emotion was used in Paper I and III, while satisfaction and social impression were used in Papers II and III, and approach/avoidance were used in Papers I and II.

1.5.1 Emotions

Consumption emotions are the affective responses that consumers perceive from the servicescape; Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) affirmed that the servicescape is important because it can enhance or suppress emotions. An important starting point for the servicescape was established by environmental psychologists Mehrabian and Russell (1974). They developed a theoretical model (hereafter, the M-R model) that suggests that environmental stimuli (S) lead to an emotional reaction (O) that, in turn, drives a consumer’s behavioral response (R) in line with the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm. Mehrabian and Russell’s (1974) scale offers a bipolar framework for emotional response to environmental stimuli and the application of the model facilitates prediction and an understanding of the effects that the environment has on human behavior. The model posits that consumers have three emotional states in response to environmental stimuli: pleasure, arousal, and dominance (or PAD dimensions). Pleasure is assessed in terms of consumers’ verbal assessments of their responses of the servicescape; these include: happy as opposed to unhappy, pleased as opposed to annoyed, or satisfied as opposed to dissatisfied. Arousal is verbally assessed as the extent to which consumers feel stimulated as opposed to relaxed, excited as opposed to calm, or frenzied as opposed to sluggish. Finally, dominance is the degree to which an individual feels influential, in control, or important. Since its introduction, the M-R model has been used extensively in environmental research, such as within the consumer behavior field. Over the years, empirical studies that have tested the model have found that the dimensions of pleasure (P) and arousal (A) underlie the affective response to any
environment, whereas dominance (D) did not have a significant effect on approach or avoidance behavior (Russell & Pratt, 1980; Ward & Russell, 1981). Thus, dominance, in relation to consumer’s behavioral response, such as approach or avoidance behavior, has not been given the same treatment in recent studies (for exceptions, see Foxall & Yani-de-Soriano, 2005; and Yani-de-Soriano & Foxall, 2006). In Paper I, emotion is operationalized as the affective evaluation of the store visit, where consumers were asked to evaluate their store experience on affective appraisals drawing upon the PA(D) dimensions, using Västfjäll, Friman, Gärling, and Kleiner’s (2002) Swedish Core Affect Scale (or SCAS), which measures the amount of pleasure (valence) and arousal (activation) respondents feel.

Russell (1980) conceptualized consumption emotions as a limited number of basic dimensions, such as pleasure, arousal, or positive–negative affect. These basic dimensions are called core affects, which are cognitively accessible elements of a current mood, an emotional reaction, or an anticipated emotional reaction (Russell, 1980). A core affect is defined as a neurophysiological state that is consciously accessible as a simple, non-reflective feeling that is an integral blend of hedonic (pleasure–displeasure) and arousal (sleepy–activated) values (Russell, 2003). The circumplex model of affect contains two main affect dimensions that reflect the degree of unpleasantness–pleasantness and deactivation–activation. The unpleasant–pleasant dimension reflects the extent to which a person feels happy and pleased, while the deactivation–activation dimension is a combination of activity (excited versus calm) and alertness (awake versus sleepy). Russell (1979) suggested that these main affect dimensions could capture the emotional reactions that consumers have toward stimuli. For instance, positive encounter experiences may result in feelings of happiness, while negative encounter experiences may result in unhappiness. However, the unpleasantness–pleasantness dimension alone may not capture the intensity and complexity of encounter experiences. For example, one can be happily activated (excited, elated, etc.) or unhappily activated (tense, stressed, etc.), happily deactivated (e.g., calm, relaxed) or unhappily deactivated (e.g., tired, bored) (see Figure 6).

Although the major structural dimension of affective experience is often found to be the omnipresent bipolar continuum of
pleasantness–unpleasantness (Russell, 1980), some limitations have been identified in terms of its application to consumption-related emotion studies (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000). For example, Westbrook (1987) noted that the unipolar view for investigating consumption experiences appears more suitable because the bipolar conceptualization allows for ambivalence or joint occurrence of pleasant and unpleasant states, as well as indifference or the occurrence of neither pleasant nor unpleasant states.

In Paper III, emotion is operationalized as the affective evaluation of the encounter. Consumers were asked to evaluate their encounter experience on affective appraisals drawing upon the circumplex model of affect, using the SCAS (Västfjäll & Gärling, 2007).

![Figure 6. The circumplex model of affect. The vertical axis is the arousal level, and the horizontal level is pleasantness. Various emotions can be organized around the circle based on combinations of these two axes (adapted from Yik, Russell, & Feldman Barrett, 1999).](image)

1.5.2 Satisfaction

Since the 1970s, academicians and practitioners have recognized the importance of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Westbrook &
Customer satisfaction can be described as having both a cognitive and affective process, where the consumers consider whether their product, service, and process needs are addressed (Oliver, 2010; Westbrook, 1987). The cognitive system performs the higher mental processes of understanding (Oliver, 2010), which may consist of consumers’ perception and evaluation of frontline employee characteristics or behavior (Crosby et al., 1990). Affect refers to the feeling responses; research shows that satisfaction is partially determined by the consumer’s emotional reactions (Price et al., 1995; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991).

Previous research into satisfaction (e.g. Bitner & Hubbert, 1994; Söderlund & Rosengren, 2008; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991) has underlined the importance of distinguishing between overall satisfaction and transaction-specific satisfaction. Transaction-specific satisfaction refers to satisfaction with single transactions or encounters with a product or a service, whereas overall satisfaction refers to consumers’ accumulative satisfaction with the organization; that is, satisfaction based on all encounters and experiences with that particular organization (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994). The present thesis focuses on transaction-specific satisfaction (Söderlund and Rosengren, 2008), rather than accumulated satisfaction resulting from an ongoing service relationship (Lee and Dubinsky, 2003).

This thesis aims to understand how frontline employees’ verbal and nonverbal behavior affect consumers’ encounter satisfaction. The behavior of a frontline employee during interactions with consumers has been the subject of considerable research (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000; Leigh & Summers, 2002), where the behavior of the frontline employee is critical to encounter satisfaction (Crosby et al., 1990; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005).

In this thesis (Papers II and III), customer satisfaction is operationalized as an attitude-like construct that comprises both cognitive and emotional components, where the consumers were asked to report their satisfaction with the service and the frontline employee in one-time encounters.
1.5.3 Social Impression

The study of impression formation has a long history in social psychology, starting with Asch’s (1946) seminal work. Impression formation refers to the process by which information about another person is integrated to form a global impression of that individual; in this case, a frontline employee (Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009). There is evidence that individuals form impressions of others rather quickly (Zajonc, 1980), and with a small amount of information cues (Todorov, Pakrashi, & Oosterhof, 2009). Nauman et al. (2009) used full-body photographs to examine the role of physical appearance in forming a first impression. Their results indicate that peoples’ judgment of others’ personalities is manifested through physical appearance (for example, clothing style, body posture, and facial expression), and observers use this information to form (accurate) judgments for a variety of traits (such as extraversion, openness, likability, and self-esteem). The information basis for forming the impression is typically a list of traits, and the measure of the impression is usually a judgment of credibility, likeability, and attractiveness (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000; Kleinke, 1986; Park, 1986), or a listing of traits that are also seen as characteristics of the person being judged. The most common type of stimulus information used in the study of frontline employee perception is trait adjectives, such as competence, warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick 2006), and trustworthiness (Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2014). Perceived competence is considered one of the core dimensions in formation and the judgment of others (Chen et al. 2014; Fiske et al. 2006). There is consensus about the role of competence in the general evaluation of others and its effect on important outcomes, such as encounter satisfaction, where perception of a frontline employee as competent can contribute to positive feelings about the service encounter, and the absence of competent service can contribute to negative feelings about the service encounter (Price et al. 1995). Another important trait for individuals’ general evaluation of others is trustworthiness. Compared to competence, perceived trustworthiness is a more primary dimension in global impression formation (Chen et al., 2014). Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, and Cherubini (2011) showed that people are very interested in gathering information about traits related to
trustworthiness (for example, sincere, honest, and trustworthy) when forming impressions of a person. Perceived trustworthiness has also been shown to affect approach and avoidance responses to a person and reflect the valence of evaluation of others (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008). Many studies have shown that we form social impressions of others based on their behavior; for example, the impression of a stranger (Chen et al., 2014; Wirth et al. 2010) or of a frontline employee (Darian, Tucci, & Wiman, 2001; Gabbott & Hogg, 2000). Studies have examined consumers’ social impression of the frontline employee, where the impression of a frontline employee is based on that employee’s behavior in interaction with the consumer. Koermer et al. (2000) investigated how service providers’ sociality (which includes characteristics such as being friendly, polite, personal, talkative, or supportive) influence customer satisfaction. Price et al. (1995) investigated how service provider performance (which includes characteristics such as authenticity, competence, and civility) affect consumers’ emotional responses to service encounters.

Based on the above discussion, this thesis operationalizes social impression as the evaluation of the frontline employee’s characteristics (see Table 1 for how social impression is operationalized in Papers II and Paper III).

### Table 1.

**How social impression is operationalized in Paper II and III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics in Paper II</th>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Informative</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Polite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Unserious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boastful</td>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics in Paper III</th>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Empathic</th>
<th>Genuine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nice</td>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>Warm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Likeable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5.4 Approach–avoidance behavior

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) showed that the underlying theory of the influence of ambient and social conditions is that the environment will influence an individual’s emotional reactions. This influence, in turn, affects an individual’s behavioral responses to either approaching or avoiding the environment.

Approach or avoidance behavior is considered to have four aspects. The first is a desire to physically stay in (approach) or get out of (avoid) the environment. The second is a desire or willingness to look around and explore the environment (approach) versus a tendency to avoid moving through or interacting with the environment (avoidance). The third is a desire to communicate with others in the environment (approach) as opposed to a tendency to avoid interacting with others (avoidance). The fourth is the degree of improvement (approach) or interruption of performance (avoidance) and satisfaction with task performance (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). These four aspects are viewed as appropriate for describing behavior in a retail environment, which is related to store patronage intentions, repeat-shopping frequency, and positive communication with others, such as positive word-of-mouth (hereafter, WOM) (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Ryu & Jang, 2007).

Studies have shown that the retail environment affects consumers’ emotions, which in turn affects consumers’ approach/avoidance behavior. Donovan and Rossiter (1982, 1994) used the M-R model to examine consumers’ emotions during their shopping experience. Their findings confirmed that pleasure predicted consumer behavior in terms of extra time spent in-store and unplanned purchasing (approach), and that arousal could predict lower spending in unpleasant retail environments (avoidance). Baker et al. (1992) found that pleasure and arousal, produced by music, lightning, and amount/friendliness of frontline employee, were both positively related to a willingness to buy (approach). Dubé et al. (1995) found, in a bank setting, that higher levels of pleasure and arousal, induced by music, increased the desire to affiliate (approach) with frontline employees. Furthermore, Saboite and Román (2009) found that frontline employees’ social regard toward the consumer was positively related to WOM (approach). Since Donovan and
Rossiter (1982) first applied the M-R model in consumer settings, it has been validated in various settings related to consumer behavior, such as retail settings (Li, Kim, & Lee, 2009; Rompay, Galetzka, Pruyn, & Garcia, 2008), bank settings (Dubé et al., 1995), travel agencies (Bitner, 1990), and restaurants (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Yinghua & SooCheong, 2009).

The research papers in this thesis (Papers I and II) operationalize this variable in different ways. In Paper I approach/avoidance is operationalized as: degree of enjoyment being in the store, time spent in store, degree of contact with other consumers and frontline employees, and purchase experience (see Paper I for a more detailed description). Paper II operationalizes approach/avoidance as reciprocal behavior in the form of positive WOM and repatronage intentions. These operationalizations are aligned with previous research (Baker et al., 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996).

1.7 Aim of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and understand the effect that a servicescape’s physical and social dimensions have on consumers’ service encounter experience and approach/avoidance behavior in a retail context. More specifically, this thesis investigates the effect that music (physical dimension), employees’ self-disclosure, and employees’ gazing behavior (social dimension) have on consumers’ service encounter experience and their approach/avoidance behavior in a retail store.

Paper I aimed to investigate how music influences consumer emotions and consumers’ approach or avoidance behavior. Paper I comprised two experiments. Experiment 1 investigated the influence of the independent variable no music/music. Likewise, Experiment 2 studied the influence of the independent variable no music/slow-tempo music/fast-tempo music. The dependent variables in both experiments were pleasure, arousal, and the resulting approach/avoidance behavior. However, empirical research suggests that men and women tend to have different attitudinal and behavioral orientations in their buying behavior (Homburg & Giering, 2001). It
has also been suggested that there are gender differences in hearing sensitivities and that males and females process auditory stimuli differently, where females respond more positively to music at lower volumes (Kellaris & Rice, 1993). Therefore gender was included as a moderating variable in both experiments. Because both experiments were conducted in real retail settings with actual consumers, these two experiments used a quasi-experimental design.

Paper II aimed to investigate how the independent variable self-disclosure affects consumers’ approach/avoidance behavior (measured by reciprocity) and service encounter experience (measured by encounter satisfaction and social impression of the frontline employee in one-time encounters). To investigate this, two experiments were conducted. Experiment 1 hypothesized that frontline employees’ self-disclosure would affect consumers’ reciprocal behavior through the mediating variables, social impression of the frontline employee, and encounter satisfaction. The second experiment hypothesized that different types of self-disclosure (social- and exchange-specific disclosure) and consumer disclosure reciprocity would affect consumers’ reciprocal behavior through the mediating variables, social impression, and satisfaction. The research concept in Paper II assumed that front-line employees’ self-disclosure affects consumers’ encounter experience, which is assumed to affect consumers’ approach/avoidance behavior. In Paper II, a role-play design with text-based scenarios was used, where participants were asked to imagine that they are consumers visiting a service firm and interacting with one of the firm’s service employees.

Paper III aimed to investigate how the independent variable of direct versus averted eye gaze affects consumers’ emotions, social impression of a frontline employee, and encounter satisfaction. Paper III comprised three experiments. Experiment 1 investigated the effect of direct versus averted eye gaze on encounter satisfaction, consumer emotions, and social impression of a frontline employee in a service context where the consumer must interact with the frontline employee to fulfil a purchase goal and therefore become highly dependent on the service provider. Experiment 2 investigated whether the effects of direct versus averted eye gaze were dependent on consumers’ need for assistance from the service provider. Finally, experiment 3 investigated whether the effects of direct versus averted
eye gaze were dependent on consumers’ specific purchase situation (buying an embarrassing product or seeking assistance from a frontline employee). In Paper III, a text-based scenario was used involving a picture of a male person who either directed or averted his gaze. The participants were asked to imagine that they were consumers visiting a service firm where they encountered one of the firm’s employees.

1.8 Methodological considerations

In order to investigate the overarching purpose of this thesis, two different methods were chosen: a quasi-experimental method and a text-based scenario method. These methods each have advantages and disadvantages.

To understand how music affects actual consumers in real retail settings, a quasi-experiment method was employed. Quasi-experimental designs are used when randomization is impractical and/or unethical, and are typically easier to set up than true experimental designs that require random assignment of subjects (Smith, 2009). The disadvantage of a quasi-experimental design is the lack of randomization, which makes it more difficult to rule out confounding variables that threaten internal validity. Given the lack of randomization, some knowledge of the data can be approximated, but conclusions on causal relationships are difficult to determine given the variety of confounding variables that exist in a social environment (West, Biesanz, & Pitts, 2000). In contrast, a quasi-experimental design minimizes threats to external and ecological validity because the natural environment does not suffer the same problem of artificiality, unlike in a well-controlled laboratory setting (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Quasi-experiments were used in Paper I.

Understanding the effects of frontline employee’s verbal and nonverbal behavior presents a methodological dilemma. Service encounters in real-life settings are problematic because interactions may be performed and perceived differently depending on when they are experienced and by whom (Bateson and Hui, 1992), and gaze is particularly difficult to keep constant and under control. Therefore, text-based scenarios were employed in both Papers II and III. Text-based scenarios are frequently used in service research (Burns &
Neisner, 2006; Estelami & De Maeyer, 2002; Söderlund, 2002) and this method was chosen for several reasons. First, this method allows for systematic manipulation of variables and contexts that are sometimes difficult to manipulate or study in a real-life setting (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2008). Second, this method enables the researcher to inject sufficient variance into the independent variables, and it reduces issues involving individual differences in responses and personal circumstances to the research context (Havlena & Holbrook, 1986; Mattila & Wirtz, 2006). Another reason for using text-based scenarios is that retailers are not always inclined to allow investigations to be conducted with their real consumers if the manipulations are liable to affect their consumers negatively; for example, if consumer satisfaction might decrease. A disadvantage of text-based scenarios is that they can negatively affect the external validity because such a method cannot be fully replaced with real situations in which the effect of the treatment is expected to be stronger. However, Bateson and Hui (1992) tested the same theoretical model with data obtained from a field quasi-experimental study and with data from a laboratory study that used photographic slides and videotapes to simulate the service setting. Their results showed that scenarios offer similar reactions to those in real-life settings.

1.9 Ethical considerations

Research is important for the development of individuals and society. Therefore, society and its members have a legitimate requirement for the research to focus on essential issues and be of high quality. This is known as the research requirement, which means that the available knowledge is developed and deepened and that methods are improved. At the same time, this research requirement must be weighed against the potential risks to research participants (Hermerén, 2011). The ethical treatment of human participants in psychological research is regulated by rules and concepts from the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki (2002) and the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002).

There are five general principles for research ethics. Informed consent and distress are two important principals that the researcher
must consider in order to protect human participation. The informed consent principle demands that before someone agrees to participate in research, he or she should be informed about the study’s purpose, the study’s potential benefits, potential risks to participants, the right to decline participation and withdraw at any time without penalty, and how the participants’ confidentiality will be safeguarded. Strict compliance with these principles can sometimes be problematic, as was the case for the quasi-experiments (Paper I) in this thesis. It is mainly the informed consent that has been the subject of discussions in psychological research (Ilgen & Bell, 2001a). The discussions are mainly about the fact that, despite researchers’ attempts to carefully consider the ethical treatment of participants, participants sometimes face little or no risk, and informed consent is difficult or even impossible to obtain. It becomes even more difficult to fulfill the informed consent principle when conducting quasi-experiments, such as the field experiments in Paper I, where the participants did not even know they were participating in an experiment (Ilgen & Bell, 2001b). Thus, APA standards allow for exceptions to informed consent. Informed consent can be waived when the following requirements are met and considered, as was the case for the field experiments in Paper I (APA, 2002).

1. The research involves no more than a minimal risk to the subjects
2. The treatment will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of subjects
3. The research could not practically be carried out without the treatment
4. Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with adequate information of the study after participation.

Before conducting the field experiments (Paper I), the risk and design of study was discussed within our research collegium in order to minimize the risk to violate the ethical principles. The research college concluded that the harm and risk were minimal because the phenomena under study – music in stores – represented a situation that many consumers already face when visiting a store. In order to retain the manipulation free from confounding variables, such as extra attention to the store environment, it was considered difficult to inform the consumers before entering the store about the purpose of and the treatments in the study. Therefore, participants were informed about the study after they had completed the questionnaire.
Regarding Paper III, there was discussion in the research group about how harmful the condition that would produce embarrassment was, and we concluded that it was an experience that would not render a greater risk of harm to participants than that to which an ordinary person is exposed to in their daily lives.

Based on the above arguments, it can be assumed that the experiments and the treatments in this thesis have not affected the participants in a way that could be harmful to them. However, one should always be aware that not everyone is affected equally, which means that one should not rule out the possibility that the treatment could elicit stressful reactions.

2. THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

2.1 Introduction

In the following three papers, 1637 participants took part in three experimental studies. Paper I described two experiments, using a final sample of 550 participants, and addressed the influence that background music has on consumers' approach/avoidance behavior. Paper II described two experiments using a final sample of 475 participants, and addressed the influence that self-disclosure has on service encounter experience and consumers' reciprocal behavior. Paper III described three experiments, using a final sample of 612 participants, and addressed the influence that direct versus averted eye gaze has on consumers' service encounter experience, satisfaction, and social impression.

2.2 Paper I – Let the music play ... or not: The influence of background music on consumer behavior

2.2.1 General aim

The aim of this paper was to investigate the influence that the independent variable no music/music had on the dependent variables
pleasure, arousal, approach/avoidance behavior, and whether gender would have a moderating role.

2.2.2 Experiment 1

Design

In order explore whether music affects consumers’ buying behavior and to evaluate the shopping environment in a real-life setting, Experiment 1 was conducted in a Swedish home electronics retail store. The independent variable music/no music were varied during four days between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. in mid-December. Four weekdays, (Thursday with no music, Friday with music, Monday with music, and Tuesday with no music), were chosen to avoid possible differences in purchase behavior during weekdays and weekends. Popular music adapted to the Christmas period was used, having been selected by a company that specializes in designing music for these types of store settings. The volume of the music was constant during the two days that the music played. When exiting the store, shoppers were asked if they would like to fill out a questionnaire regarding their store visit experience. The sample consisted of 85 males and 65 females, with a mean age of 44 years (SD = 16.12).

Instruments

The first part of the questionnaire contained demographic questions such as age and gender. Next part consisted of statements measuring approach or avoidance behavior (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). The approach or avoidance measures contained four subscales. The first subscale measures enjoyment, which contains two items (for example, “the experience was positive”). The second subscale measures time experience, which contains two items (for example, “I took extra time exploring the store”). The third subscale measures contact, which contains two items (for example, “the contact with the staff was positive”). Finally, the fourth subscale measures purchase experience, which contains three items (for example, “I made an impulsive purchase today”). Each group of these subscales was calculated into a
composite index, which was then calculated into a *general approach or avoidance* category. All items used a 10-point scale, on which participants indicated the degree to which they agreed or did not agree with a statement (1 = do not agree, 10 = agree). Finally, *actual time spent* and *actual spending* was measured.

The last part of the questionnaire contained questions regarding PA (pleasure–arousal), measured using the SCAS (see Västfjäll et al., 2002, for a more detailed description). This scale was used to measure the amount of affect that respondents felt. Ratings consisted of *pleasure (valence)* and *arousal (activation)* on a scale from −4 to 4 (for example, for the *arousal* dimension, one adjective pair was sleepy −4, awake 4). Three scales with adjective pairs (translated from Swedish) were used to capture pleasure: sad–glad, depressed–happy, and displeased–pleased. Three scales with adjective pairs were used to capture arousal: sleepy–awake, dull–peppy, and quiet–energetic. The data were calculated into composite indexes (comprised of the mean of the three items relevant to the scale) of *pleasure* and *arousal* and used in the subsequent analysis.

**Statistics**

A 2 (music: no music, music) x 2 (gender: male, female) analysis between subject of variance (ANOVA, p<0.05) was used to test for differences in the means of the dependent variables *pleasure, arousal, actual time spent* and *actual spending, general approach/avoidance behavior* and its subscales of *enjoyment, time experience, contact, and purchase experience*. A multiple regression analysis was used to test whether *pleasure/arousal* could predict *approach/avoidance behavior*.

**Results**

The main results of this experiment are as follows. Firstly, music has no significant effects on *pleasure* or *arousal*, but a music and gender interaction regarding *arousal* was discovered, whereby females reported higher levels of arousal during the no-music condition than males. During the music condition, females’ arousal levels decrease
and males’ arousal levels increase and, overall, women and men ended up on almost the same level. Secondly, there was a significant difference regarding actual time and actual spending, where more time and money were spent in a store under the music condition. Thirdly, there were four significant music and gender interactions regarding general approach/avoidance behavior and for the subscales of enjoyment, contact, and purchase experience; where females reported higher levels of approach behavior in the no-music condition than males. Males reported higher levels of approach behavior in the music condition than females. This indicates that gender has a moderating role for these factors. Fourthly, arousal was a significant predictor of approach/avoidance behavior. The results also showed that the explained variance increased under the music condition.

2.2.3 Experiment 2

Design

Experiment 2 investigated the effect of music on consumer behavior and whether gender is a moderator. Experiment 2 was conducted during a regular shopping season in a large supermarket store, and used two different music tempos and no music. The independent variable was no music/slow-tempo music (60 beats per minute) and fast-tempo music (96 beats per minute). The musical pieces were selected by a company that specializes in designing music for these types of store settings. In both the fast and slow music conditions, the genre (familiar adult contemporary favorites) and volume were the same. After consultation with the retail store owner, three days of the week between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. (Monday with no music, Tuesday with slow-tempo music, and Wednesday with fast-tempo music), were selected because they were considered as similar as possible in terms of sales and consumer groups. The sample consisted of 174 males and 226 females, with a mean age 49 years (SD = 17.03).
Instruments

The same questionnaire was used as in Experiment 1, adjusted for the new retail store.

Statistics

A 3 (music: no-music, slow-tempo, high-tempo) x 2 (gender: male, female) analysis between subject of variance (ANOVA, p<0.05) was used to test for differences in the means of the dependent variables pleasure, arousal, actual time spent and actual spending, general approach/avoidance behavior, and its subscales of enjoyment, time experience, contact, and purchase experience, followed by post-hoc analysis using the LSD test (p<0.05). A multiple regression analysis was used to test whether pleasure/arousal could predict approach/avoidance behavior.

Results

The main results of this experiment are as follows. Firstly, music has no significant effect on pleasure or arousal, but a music and gender interaction regarding arousal was discovered. Inspection of the cell means reveals that the main gender difference stems from male responses during the slow-tempo condition, indicating that gender has a moderating effect on arousal. Secondly, there was a significant difference regarding actual spending. A follow-up LSD post-hoc test showed that spending was significantly lower in the no-music condition than in the two-music conditions. Thirdly, music has the following effects: (i) on general approach/avoidance behavior, where approach behavior was significant higher in the no-music condition than in the slow-tempo condition; (ii) on enjoyment, where enjoyment was significantly lower in the two music conditions than in the no-music condition; and (iii) on time experience, where time experience was significant higher in the no-music condition than in the two-music condition. No music gender interaction was discovered, which indicates that gender does not have a moderating role for approach/avoidance behavior. Fourthly, pleasure was a significant predictor for approach/avoidance behavior, to a greater
degree than *arousal*. Additionally, the result showed that the explained variance increased in the fast-tempo condition.

2.3 Paper II – The effect of frontline employees’ personal self-disclosure on consumers’ encounter experience

2.3.1 General aim

This paper has two main aims. The first was to investigate the effect of frontline employees’ personal self-disclosure on consumers’ reciprocal behavior, and the second was to investigate whether this effect is mediated by social impression of the frontline employee and encounter satisfaction.

2.3.2 Experiment 1

*Design*

A text-based scenario methodology was employed. Before the scenarios were developed, a one-question survey was conducted with the aim of determining how commonly frontline employees disclose personal information to a consumer in a sales encounter, and in which retail contexts this might occur. The participants were asked to answer the following question: *Have you purchased a product or a service from a seller who was personal by disclosing personal information? If so write this down.* One hundred and seventy-nine questionnaires were distributed to consumers in a medium-sized city in Sweden. Of these, 149 provided examples. Fifty-four percent indicated that they had bought products (such as clothes, shoes, groceries, makeup, automobiles, and white goods) from a seller who disclosed personal information. The remaining 46 percent indicated that they had bought a service (insurance, banking, travel agency, subscriptions, restaurant visits, hairdressing, etc.) from a seller who disclosed personal information. From this result, it seems that frontline employees are disclosing personal information to their
consumers, and doing so in different sales contexts, whereas the
encounters between consumers and frontline employees occurred
only once or regularly over a longer period of time.

For Experiment 1, a bank context was chosen because banks
offer several different types of services, for which the consumer meets
the same bank employee regularly over a long period of time (for
example, meeting with a personal banker regarding housing loans), or
where the consumer meets different bank employees only once or less
frequently (for example, meeting a teller to deposit/withdraw funds,
open an account), or where the consumer rarely or never meets an
employee because they handle their transactions through Internet
banking. The scenario involved a bank teller discussing a common
investment opportunity. Two scenarios were developed: one with self-
disclosure (experimental condition) and one without self-disclosure
(control condition). Both texts contained a description of an
encounter with a bank teller. In the experimental condition, the bank
teller revealed a personal experience (self-disclosure) to guide the
consumer in choosing an investment opportunity.

A manipulation check was used to control whether consumers
perceived the bank teller as being personal in the self-disclosure
scenario. This perception was measured on a 10-point scale (1 = do
not agree, 10 = agree), where participants were instructed to indicate
whether they agreed with the statement, “I found the employee to be
personal”. The manipulation check showed a significant difference
between the two scenarios ($t(356) = 15.284, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .40$). This
indicates that the experimental group judged the bank teller as being
more personal ($M_{\text{experiment}} = 8.05, S_{\text{experiment}} = 2.38$) than was the case
for the control group ($M_{\text{control}} = 3.89, S_{\text{control}} = 2.69$). A total of 369
local residents participated in the experiment (35 percent male and 65
percent female), with 165 in the control group and 204 in the
experimental group, and with a mean age of 33.8 years (SD = 15.19).

Instruments

A questionnaire was developed to measure the dependent variables.
The first part of the questionnaire contained demographic questions
regarding age and gender.
The second part of the questionnaire contained three groups of dependent measures: social impression, encounter satisfaction, and reciprocity. The first group of items measures the impression of the bank teller, labeled social impression: “I perceived the bank teller as ...”. This scale contains four items (the bank teller was kind/polite/competent/unserious). This scale was adapted from Koermer, Zabava Ford, and Brant’s Service Provider Sociality Scale (SPSS) (2000), Price et al. (1995), and Wood, Boles, Johnston, and Bellenger (2008). The second group used four items to measure satisfaction with the service encounter (I am very pleased/satisfied/contented/dissatisfied with the encounter). This scale was adapted from Oliver and Swan (1989). The measure taps into transaction-specific satisfaction (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2008), rather than accumulated satisfaction that results from an ongoing service relationship (Lee & Dubinsky, 2003). The third group measured reciprocity in the form of positive WOM and repatronage intentions. This scale contains three items (I would recommend this this bank teller to my friends/I would recommend this bank to my friends/ I would not return to this bank). This scale was adapted from Zeithaml et al.’s. (1996) behavioral-intensions battery. Each of the abovementioned measures uses one reversed item with a negative statement (for example, I am very dissatisfied with the encounter). All items were measured on a 10-point scale and participants were instructed to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the statement (1 = do not agree, 10 = agree). Reliability was calculated for all measures: social impression $\alpha = .76$, satisfaction $\alpha = .94$, and reciprocity $\alpha = .82$. With the reliability results in mind, each group of measures was then calculated into a composite index used in the subsequent analysis.

Procedure

Thirty-two undergraduate students who had enrolled in an introductory-level social psychology course were recruited to collect data for this investigation and, the students were instructed to administer surveys to 10 non-students. The students were randomly divided into two groups with 16 students in each group. When the students left the lecture, they took an envelope with questionnaires
that had been arranged in a random order. This procedure was conducted in order to balance out possible biases due to homogeneity among students’ friends. One group was administered a questionnaire using a scenario without self-disclosure and the other group was administered a questionnaire using a scenario with self-disclosure. This procedure has been used by Koermer (2005) in similar research contexts. Before the students administered the survey, they were instructed (during a four-hour lecture) about the research and hypotheses of the present study. Students assigned to collect data were not allowed to complete surveys themselves and they did not receive any extra credit for their recruitment. All instructions were aligned to create equality between conditions.

Statistics

To investigate whether the effect of frontline employees’ self-disclosure on reciprocal behavior is mediated by social impression and encounter satisfaction, a model-testing was conducted via the component-based PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). A bootstrapping method with a sample of 5,000 was used (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Compared to co-variance-based structural equation methods (CB-SEM), the key advantage of component-based PLS (PLS-SEM) estimation is that it is non-parametric, and therefore makes no restrictive assumptions about the distributions of the data. Secondly, PLS-SEM is considered to be a more suitable method for prediction-oriented studies (such as the present study, the main objective of which was to explain and predict variance in the dependent variable reciprocal behavior), while co-variance-based SEM is better suited to testing which models best fit the data (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Chin, Marcolin, & Newstedt, 2003). The exogenous latent variable (self-disclosure) was included in the model that represented the two scenarios and was scored in terms of two values (0 = no self-disclosure, 1 = self-disclosure).
Results

The results indicated that self-disclosure affects reciprocal behavior, but is mediated through social impression and satisfaction. Further, self-disclosure has a negative effect on social impression and satisfaction. The findings also suggested that self-disclosure has a negative effect on consumers’ reciprocal behavior in terms of positive WOM and repatronage. Figure 7 shows the path model of the relationship between employee self-disclosure and consumer’s reciprocal behavior, with the path coefficients (solid arrows) and the indirect effect (dashed arrow).

\[ \text{Figure 7. Note. } *** p < .001 \]

2.3.3 Experiment 2

Design

The purpose of Experiment 2 was to broaden the measurement of social impression and to determine whether the type of profession and disclosure may elucidate how self-disclosing frontline employees are perceived. A text-based scenario was employed with a sporting goods store as the service setting. The scenarios contained a dialogue between a frontline employee and a consumer regarding which type of training shoes best match the consumer’s needs. Each participant was asked to imagine that he or she was a consumer who had visited the store. Three scenarios were developed. Scenario 1 (control) was constructed without any disclosure. Scenario 2 (Experimental Group 1) was constructed with a social- and exchange-specific disclosure. Finally, Scenario 3 (Experimental Group 2) contained the social- and exchange-specific disclosure, but was also constructed with consumer
disclosure reciprocity. A convenience sample of 106 undergraduate students participated in the experiment (36 percent male and 66 percent female) with a mean age of 24.2 years. The same manipulation check used in Experiment 1 was used to control whether the frontline employee was perceived as being more personal in the two experimental groups. The manipulation check showed a significant difference; $F(2,101) = 3.879, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .07$. A further examination, with LSD post hoc test, showed a significant difference between the control group ($M = 5.62, SD = 2.19$) and Experimental Group 1 ($M = 6.89, SD = 2.84; p < .05$), and between the control group and Experimental Group 2 ($M = 7.21, SD = 2.14; p < .05$). Because there was no significant difference between the two experimental groups, we decided to combine the two experimental groups into one experimental group for the analysis.

**Instruments**

The same questionnaire was used as in Experiment 1, with the exception of the measurement of social impression. Since one of the aims of Experiment 2 was to broaden the measurement of social impression, this measurement was extended to contain three groups of dependent measures: liking, competence, and superficiality. These measures were adapted from Wood et al.’s (2008) meta-analysis of buyers’ trust of a salesperson. The measures of liking contained two items (“I perceived the frontline employee as kind/polite”). The measures of competence contained five items (“I perceived the frontline employee as competent/credible/reliable/informative/trustworthy”). Finally, the measures of superficial contained four items (“I perceived the frontline employee as false/unserious/boastful/dishonest). The measurements of satisfaction and reciprocity were the same as in Experiment 1, but adjusted to fit the different context (sporting goods store). All of the items were measured on a 10-point scale by instructing the participants to indicate whether they agreed with the statement (1 = do not agree, 10 = agree). Reliability was calculated for all measures: liking $\alpha = .96$, competence $\alpha = .88$, superficial $\alpha = .82$, satisfaction $\alpha = .94$, and reciprocity $\alpha = .81$. With the reliability
results in mind, each group of measures was then calculated into a composite index used in the subsequent analysis.

Procedure

Data were collected on the campus during daytime. The participants were randomly divided into three groups: 36 in the control group, 39 in experimental group 1, and 31 in experimental Group 2. When a student accepted to participate in the study, he or she received a questionnaire that was arranged in a random order. Students were instructed to read the scenario and then complete the questionnaire.

Statistics

The model was tested using SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015). A bootstrapping method with a sample of 5000 was used (Hair et al., 2011). The exogenous latent variable (self-disclosure) was included in the model that represented the two groups: it was scored in terms of two values (0 = no self-disclosure, 1 = self-disclosure).

Results

The results from Experiment 2 show the same pattern as for Experiment 1, thereby validating them further. An interesting finding in Experiment 2 concerns liking. In Experiment 1, the findings revealed that self-disclosure had a negative effect on social impression (where liking was included); however, when this dimension was separated into three separate independent variables, self-disclosure did not affect liking. However, self-disclosure does affect both competence and superficiality. Therefore, when the frontline employee discloses personal information, the employee is perceived as being less competent and more superficial when disclosing personal information. Furthermore, the results show that self-disclosure affects reciprocal behavior negatively, but this effect is mediated through liking, competence, superficiality, and satisfaction. Figure 8 shows the path model of the relationship between employee
self-disclosure and consumer’s reciprocal behavior, with the path coefficients (solid arrows) and the indirect effect (dashed arrow).

![Diagram showing relationships between self-disclosure, competence, satisfaction, and reciprocal behavior.](image)

**Figure 8.** Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, ns = p > .05

### 2.4 Paper III – The effect of gaze on consumers’ encounter evaluation

#### 2.4.1 General aim

This paper had three main aims. The first was to investigate the effect of frontline employees’ averted or direct gaze on consumers’ encounter satisfaction. The second was to investigate if consumer emotions and social impression mediate the relationship between gaze and encounter satisfaction. Finally, the third aim was to investigate whether different purchase situations moderate the effect of gaze.

#### 2.4.2 Experiment 1

**Design**

Understanding the effects of frontline employee gaze presents a methodological dilemma. Service encounters in real settings are problematic because interactions may be performed and perceived differently depending on when they are experienced and by whom.
(Bateson and Hui, 1992), and gaze is particularly difficult to keep constant and under control. Therefore, a text-based scenario with a picture methodology was employed. A hotel’s reception desk provided the experimental context for Experiment 1. The scenario described an encounter with a hotel receptionist who either directed his gaze toward the consumer or averted his gaze before approaching and welcoming the consumer. A color photograph (size: 10 x 15 cm) was included that showed a male face with a neutral expression with either a direct gaze or an averted one, with the face turned 30 degrees to the left (see Appendix I for the scenarios and photographs).

A manipulation check was used to control whether participants experienced being affirmed or not. The manipulation check was measured on a 10-point scale (1 = do not agree, 10 = agree) and included the statements “I felt seen,” “I felt confirmed,” “I felt ignored,” and “I felt neglected” (the latter two were reverse-coded). Reliability was calculated α = .79 and calculated into a composite index. A one-way ANOVA on gaze (direct versus averted) revealed that participants viewing the direct gaze condition displayed significantly stronger feelings of being seen (M = 4.72, SD = 1.70) than those viewing the averted gaze condition (M = 3.06, SD = 1.92), F(1,138) = 28.521, p < .001, η²p = .17); therefore, gaze manipulation had the intended effect on participants’ experience of being affirmed. A convenience sample of 140 undergraduate students in social science participated in the experiment; their mean age was 26 (SD = 5.34) and 102 were female.

**Instruments**

A self-report questionnaire was developed to measure the dependent variables. The first part of the questionnaire contained demographic questions regarding age and gender, while the second part contained three groups of dependent measures: social impression, satisfaction, and emotions (pleasant deactivation was termed as calmness and pleasant activation was termed as excitement). The social impression measures, based on social perception items used by Wirth et al. (2010), contained 11 items (“I experienced the employee being nice/friendly/competent/happy/warm/empathic/trustworthy/reliable/genuine/social/and likeable). The satisfaction measures evaluated
the service encounter, using a scale adapted from Oliver and Swan (1989) that contained two items (I am very satisfied with the service; the quality of the service is very good). All items were measured on a 10-point scale (1 = do not agree, 10 = agree). Reliability was calculated for the two measures: social impression $\alpha = .96$, and satisfaction $\alpha = .92$. With the reliability result in mind, each group of measures was then calculated into a composite index used in the subsequent analysis.

To measure emotions, the SCAS (Västfjäll & Gärling, 2007) were used. Core affects are cognitively accessible elements of a current mood, an emotional reaction or an anticipated emotional reaction (Russell, 1980). Participants were asked to imagine the described situation, to try to feel the way they would in this situation, and to indicate their feelings using the adjective scale. The scale consisted of six items that were all rated on a nine-point, bipolar scale ranging from minus 4 to 4. A positive score coincided with a positive affective experience, while a negative score coincided with a negative experience. The first three items distinguished between positive deactivation and negative activation (termed calmness): “I felt very hurried/very relaxed,” “I felt very stressed/very calm,” and “I felt very worried/very confident.” The remaining three items distinguished between positive activation and negative deactivation (termed excitement): “I felt very tired/very alert,” “I felt very bored/very enthusiastic,” and “I felt very fed up/very engaged.” Reliability was calculated for the two measures: excitement ($\alpha = .72$) and calmness ($\alpha = .89$). The data were calculated into composite indexes (comprised of the mean of the three items relevant to the scale) of excitement and calmness and used in the subsequent analysis.

Procedure

Data were collected on the campus during daytime. The participants were randomly divided into two groups. After agreeing to participate, the students received a questionnaire and they were asked to read the scenario and subsequently complete the questionnaire. All participants participated voluntarily and no course credits were given.
To investigate whether direct or averted eye gaze influence consumers’ encounter satisfaction, and whether this effect is mediated by the social impression of the frontline employee and consumer emotions (excitement and calmness), a multiple mediating analysis was conducted, model 4, using the PROCESS computational tool (Hayes, 2013). A bootstrapping method with a sample of 5,000 was used, which is especially appropriate when the sample size is relatively small (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The antecedent variable (gaze) was scored using two values (0 = averted, 1 = direct).

Results

Firstly, the results indicated that direct eye gaze has a positive effect on consumer emotions and the social impression of the frontline employee, compared to averted eye gaze. Secondly, the results indicated that direct eye gaze has a positive effect on encounter satisfaction compared to averted eye gaze. The finding also suggested that it was mainly social impression that mediated this effect. This finding indicates that the effect of eye gaze on satisfaction goes via the consumer’s impression of the frontline employee; that is, an employee who uses a direct gaze was evaluated as more friendly, competent, and likeable, which in turn increased the consumer’s level of encounter satisfaction.

2.4.3 Experiment 2

Design

The first purpose of Experiment 2 was to replicate the findings in Experiment 1 (that is, that direct eye gaze would have a positive main effect on emotions, social impression, and satisfaction) in another service context. The second purpose was to investigate whether various levels of consumer autonomy (defined as the need for assistance from a frontline employee based on the consumer’s
knowledge of what to buy) would moderate the effect of gaze. A text-based scenario with a photograph (the same photo as in Experiment 1) was employed, with a sporting goods store as the service setting. Three scenarios, each with a low, medium, or high degree of autonomy, were used. The scenarios contained a description of an encounter with a frontline employee who directed his gaze toward or averted his gaze from the consumer before approaching and welcoming the consumer (see Appendix II for the scenarios). The same manipulation check used in Experiment 1 was used to control whether the participants experienced being affirmed or not. A one-way ANOVA on gaze (direct versus averted) revealed that those participants who received eye contact had a stronger feeling of being seen ($M = 6.96, SD = 2.07$) than those who encountered an averted gaze ($M = 4.41, SD = 1.99$); $F(1,299) = 117.844, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .28$. Therefore, the gaze manipulation appeared to have affected the participants successfully. A convenience sample of 300 undergraduate students in social science and natural science participated in the experiment (59 percent female and 41 percent male) with a mean age of 26 (SD = 6.28) years.

**Instrument**

The questionnaire was the same as that used as in Experiment 1.

**Procedure**

The participants were recruited on campus and all participation was voluntary. The participants were randomly divided into six groups. When a student accepted to participate in the study, he or she received a questionnaire and they were asked to read the scenario and subsequently complete the questionnaire. No course credits were given for participation. Subjects were compensated with a lottery ticket valued at approximated US$2 upon completion of the paper-and-pencil questionnaire.
Statistics

A 2 (gaze: direct versus averted) x 3 (level of autonomy: low, medium, high) analysis between subjects of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences in the means of the dependent variables social impression, consumer emotions (excitement and calmness), and encounter satisfaction, followed by post-hoc analysis using the LSD Test.

Results

Firstly, the results showed that direct eye gaze has a positive effect – compared to averted eye gaze – on consumer emotions, the social impression of the frontline employee, and on encounter satisfaction. Secondly, the results indicated that that the level of autonomy (the need for assistance from a frontline employee based on the consumer's knowledge of what to buy) did not moderate the effect of eye gaze.

2.4.4 Experiment 3

Design

The first purpose of Experiment 3 was to replicate the findings in Experiment 1 regarding the mediating role of social impression on consumer emotions (calmness and excitement), and encounter satisfaction. The second purpose was to investigate whether a specific purchase situation (defined as consumers’ approach or avoidance behavior) would moderate the effect of gaze that was found in the other two experiments.

Participants were presented with a text-based scenario with a photograph (the same one as in Experiments 1 and 2) and a photograph of a product shelf from two retail settings: a wine and liquor store, which depicted a shelf with wine; and a pharmacy, which depicted a shelf with condoms. The scenarios described encounters with a frontline employee who either directed his gaze toward the
consumer or averted his gaze. The first scenario (avoidance) described a situation in which the consumer needed to buy condoms in a pharmacy. The pharmacy and the purchase of condoms were selected to represent the avoidance condition because the product has often been used in research to elicit negative feelings of shame and embarrassment (Dahl, Manchanda, & Argo, 2001). The second scenario (approach) described a situation in which the consumer sought to buy a bottle of wine from a liquor store as a birthday present for a friend. The second scenario stated that the consumer knew much less about wine than the friend, which created the need for approach behavior. The liquor store was chosen to represent the approach condition since discussing wine selection with frontline employees is a common and socially acceptable practice (see Appendix III for the scenarios and shelf photographs).

The same manipulation check as in the other experiments was used to control whether the participants experienced being affirmed or not. A one-way ANOVA on gaze (direct versus averted) revealed that those participants who received eye contact had a stronger feeling of being seen (M = 7.14, SD = 2.03) than those who did not (M = 4.17, SD = 2.16); F(1,171) = 85.903, p < .001, η²p = .34). Therefore, the gaze manipulation appeared to have affected the participants successfully.

To control whether the two purchase situations elicited approach versus avoidance motivation, two new manipulations statements were used: “Being seen by the frontline employee was important to me,” and “I managed this store visit without help from a frontline employee.” These two statements were measured on a 10-point scale (1 = do not agree, 10 = agree). It was assumed that the desire to either be noticed by the frontline employee or to manage the store visit without help from the frontline employee would depend on whether the participants wanted assistance (approach) or not (avoidance). A one-way ANOVA on purchase situation (approach versus avoidance) revealed that those participants in the approach condition had a stronger desire to be noticed by the frontline employee (M = 7.05, SD = 2.87) than those in the avoidance condition (M = 3.87, SD = 2.77; F(1,161) = 54.169, p < .001, η²p = .25). A similar analysis on purchase situation (approach versus avoidance) revealed that those participants in the avoidance condition thought they could manage the purchase
without help from the frontline employee (M = 9.41, SD = 1.29), to a
greater extent than those in the approach condition (M = 4.74, SD =
3.01); F(1,167) = 180.601, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52. Thus, the purchase
situation manipulations appeared to have been induced successfully.
A convenience sample of 172 undergraduate students in social science
were recruited to participate in Experiment 3 (69 percent female and
31 percent male) with a mean age of 23 (SD = 5.28).

*Instruments*

The same questionnaire was used as in Experiments 1 and 2.

*Procedure*

The participants were recruited during lectures and all participation
was voluntarily. The participants were randomly divided into four
groups. When a student agreed to participate in the study, he or she
received a questionnaire and they were asked to read the scenario and
subsequently complete the questionnaire. No course credits were
given for participating.

*Statistics*

A mediating analysis using the PROCESS computational tool (Hayes,
2013) was used to investigate whether social impressions mediated
the relationship between gaze and the dependent variables. A
bootstrapping method (sample of 5,000) was used because of the
relatively small sample size (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). To
determine whether the direct effects were conditional (moderated by
the specific purchase situation), a conditional process analysis using
the PROCESS computational tool, model 5, was conducted (Hayes,
2013). The moderator (W: purchase situation) was coded as 1 =
approach and 2 = avoidance; gaze was coded as 0 = averted gaze and 1
= direct gaze. Separate analyses for each of the dependent variables
(calminess, excitement, and encounter satisfaction) were conducted.
Results

The results indicated that social impression of the frontline employee mediates the effect that eye gaze has on consumer emotions (calmness and excitement) and encounter satisfaction. Furthermore, the results indicated that specific purchase situation moderates the effect of gaze (when controlling for social impressions) on consumer emotions and encounter satisfaction. Specifically, in the approach condition (buying wine), direct gaze had a positive impact on the emotional reactions and satisfaction; in the avoidance condition (buying condoms), direct gaze had a negative impact on the emotional reactions and satisfaction.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Introduction to conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate and understand how the physical and social dimensions of a servicescape affect consumers’ service encounter experience and approach/avoidance behavior in a retail context. More specifically, the effect of music, employees’ self-disclosure, and employees’ gazing behavior was studied in relation to consumers’ service encounter experience and their approach/avoidance behavior. Paper I comprised two experiments. Experiment 1 investigated the influence of the independent variable no music/music and Experiment 2 investigated the influence of the independent variable no music/slow-tempo music/fast-tempo music. Because both experiments were conducted in real retail settings with actual consumers, a quasi-experimental design was used in these two experiments. Paper II investigated the influence of the independent variable self-disclosure and used a role-playing design with text-based scenarios. Finally, Paper III investigated the influence of the independent variable eye gaze and used a text-based scenario with a picture methodology.
3.2 Discussion of main results

3.2.1 The influence of music on emotions and approach/avoidance behavior

The results of Paper I show that music positively affects one important part of approach behavior: actual purchase. This result is in line with several other studies that have shown that music influences sales (Eroglu et al., 2005; Caldwell and Hibbert, 2002; Milliman, 1986). Despite the fact that consumers spend more money under music conditions, other parts of approach behavior – particularly enjoyment – decrease under these conditions, especially in Experiment 2. In Experiment 1, gender moderates the effect that music has on approach behavior, where females display approach behavior more than males when no music is playing.

Experiments 1 and 2 both found that music affected arousal level, but that gender moderated this effect. The results from Paper I indicate that arousal level is connected to approach behavior. When arousal level is high, approach behavior increases, but gender moderates this effect. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggested an interaction between pleasure and arousal in determining individual approach-avoidance behavior. In pleasant environments, an increase in arousal would increase approach behaviors; in unpleasant environments, an increase in arousal would increase avoidance behaviors. Furthermore, research into the effect that pleasure and arousal have on approach behavior has suggested that pleasantness has a consistently positive effect on approach behavior, but that arousal effects are not as consistent and vary across studies (Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006). For example, Milliman (1982) reported that arousal decreases purchase intension and spending. Sherman, Mathur, and Smith (1997) found the opposite, and Smith and Curnow (1966) found no effect. Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006) suggested that the arousal effect may be moderated by consumers’ motivational orientation, in that high arousal has a positive effect on pleasantness if consumers have a recreational motivational orientation. Conversely, when consumers have a task-oriented motivational orientation, high arousal has a negative effect on pleasantness.
The result of music and gender interactions in Paper I indicates that music and music tempo affects females and males differently. Females are positively affected by no music or slow-tempo music. Males are affected positively by music and fast-tempo music. This result is in line with studies by Kellaris and Rice (1993), who found that females respond positively to music at lower volumes, and by Stipp (1990), who showed that females prefer slow and soft music compared to males, who prefer fast and louder music.

The results of Paper I show a degree of complexity regarding the influence of music on approach/avoidance behavior. One might assume that if music affects approach behavior in a positive way, then music should also affect purchases in a positive way. However, that was not the case (this particularly applies to experiment 2), and the results actually show the opposite. The consumers spent most money during the music conditions, but exhibited a lower degree of approach behavior during music conditions.

A possible explanation to the contradictory results of purchase and approach/avoidance behavior could be the measurement of purchase. Studies that have shown a positive relationship between approach behavior and purchase have most often measured purchase intentions (Baker et al., 1992; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Sweeney & Wyber, 2002), and not actual purchase, which was measured in Paper I. It may be that approach/avoidance behavior does not predict actual purchase in the same way as for purchase intentions.

Another possible explanation for these complex results may be that music influences by distracting the customer. The consumption activity in both stores where the studies were conducted can be seen as utilitarian consumption activity, where it is more common for the consumer to decide in advance what to buy; they may even have a shopping list, either in their head or written down (Baker & Wakefield, 2012). Music’s influence on actual purchase could be a result of music distracting the consumer so that they do not focus on the pre-determined shopping list, which may lead to an increase in purchase. This is a limitation in Paper I, because we did not measure whether the consumer had pre-decided what to buy.

Another aspect that should be considered regarding the results from Paper I is the problem of multiple comparisons (that is, the multiple testing problem), which can increase the risk of making a
Type I error. This applies especially to the test of Hypotheses 3 and 3:2, which stated that: Music will affect (a) general approach/avoidance behavior, (b) enjoyment with the store, (c) time experience, (d) contact with others and, (c) purchase experience. Since as many as five comparisons were made on the general approach/avoidance variable and its subscales, the reader should keep the risk of Type I error inflation in mind. There are several ways to control the familywise error rate. One way to counteract the problem of multiple comparisons is the Bonferroni correction. The Bonferroni correction sets the significance cut-off at \( \alpha / n \). In this case, with five tests and \( \alpha =0.05 \), the null hypothesis should only be rejected if the p-value is equal or less than 0.01. There is a possibility that a null hypothesis has been incorrectly rejected; this applies to general approach/avoidance in Experiment 2, which had a significance level of \( p = .03 \).

The conclusion of the two experiments in Paper I are that gender moderates the effect that music has on approach behavior, but that music alone has a positive effect on actual sales. This is an important finding that gives retail managers knowledge about the different effects of music being played in the retail store. Music increases sales in the short run, but in the long run music could decrease consumer satisfaction and loyalty. The conclusion from the two experiments is that music affects consumer behavior, but that the type of retail store and gender influence both the strength and the direction of the effect.

Therefore, research on music must continue to consider factors such as gender, which is often overlooked, in order to fully understand the effect that music has on consumer behavior.

### 3.2.2 The influence of self-disclosure on encounter experience and approach/avoidance behavior

The results of Paper II indicate that self-disclosure affects an important part of approach behavior; namely, consumers’ reciprocal behavior, which is related to store patronage intentions and positive communication with others, such as positive WOM (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Ryu & Jang, 2007. However, this effect is mediated through social impression and satisfaction.
Disclosure of personal information to another person is viewed as central in developing relationships, and research on self-disclosure suggests that liking should increase for a person who reveals personal information (Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1973; Forgas, 2011). Also, building consumer relationships between frontline employees and consumers using friend-like approaches in which self-disclosing information is given is becoming increasingly popular in retail today. However, both of the experiments reported in Paper II point to the conclusion that self-disclosure of private information leads to negative reactions by consumers. The results suggest that disclosing personal information in retail contexts (such as the bank and sporting goods store studied in Paper II) has a negative effect on several aspects regarding the consumers’ experience of the encounter with a frontline employee, and this negative effect is dependent on self-disclosure. Moreover, the effect seems to be independent of the service context studied in Paper II. In contrast to previous research, it was discovered that when a frontline employee discloses personal information, they are perceived as being less competent and more superficial, which leads to decreased encounter satisfaction. The results imply that it is not always beneficial to use self-disclosure as a strategy to create more satisfaction, and that doing so does not always lead to advantageous reciprocal responses.

There are several possible explanations for why self-disclosure yielded a negative response. The first potential explanation regards the appropriateness of the disclosure. According to Hewitt (2007), using Goffman’s theory of symbolic interactionism, individuals play several roles in their lives and these roles have certain behavior connected to them depending on the specific context in which they are acted. Therefore, self-disclosure may suit some roles (for example, a nurse taking care of a patient), whereas it is perceived as unnatural in others (for example, a bank teller).

Another possible explanation regards the role of the relevance of the topic being disclosed. Relevance here may pertain to the extent that the topic is important to the consumer; for example, useful information for decision-making (exchange-specific self-disclosure) or out-of-the blue information (social-disclosure), and the extent to which it has any connection to the situation (for example, whether the self-disclosing information is related to the investment offering). One
cannot rule out the possibility that the information disclosed in Paper II was irrelevant to consumer decision-making and therefore negatively affected social impression, satisfaction, and reciprocity. Furthermore, the disclosed information may not have been perceived as personalistic (that is, intended only for the consumer), which means that the positive effect of self-disclosure on liking might not occur. As a final tentative explanation, the length of the relationship could also explain the negative effects of self-disclosure in Paper II.

The majority of the literature on self-disclosure and its positive effects examines either relationships between friends or long-term business relationships. In the two experiments in Paper II, the relationship is short-term because there are many cases in which consumers only meet the frontline employee once and very briefly. In the next meeting a consumer has with that same organization, they are likely to meet another employee. With this in mind, researchers should be aware of the difficulty of transferring psychological findings (here in terms of self-disclosure) to business contexts and hoping for an automatically similar positive response, such as increased liking. Behavior that is natural in the context of developing relationships among friends could be perceived as manipulation and malicious in a business context.

This implication of Paper II suggests that the role of the frontline employee does not involve the behavior of “acting as a friend.” While it is plausible that the role of a hairdresser may involve disclosing information about oneself, other types of interactions between consumers and employees, such as a bank teller, does not involve these. This finding potentially offers considerable insights for management. Managers are expected to be interested in knowing how self-disclosure from an employee influences consumers’ future repurchase intentions. The notion that being friendly and personal is not only about acting as a friend has implications for employee training. Because employees represent and are the face of a company, front-line staff should recognize the effect that self-disclosure may have on consumers’ reciprocal behavior. To this end, front-line employee training should include recognition of the appropriate types of behavior (that is, in line with Goffman’s theory previously described) when providing consumers with service.
3.2.3 The influence of eye gaze on emotions and encounter experience

The results of Paper III indicate that eye gaze affects an important part of consumers’ encounter experience – namely, consumer emotions and the social impression of the frontline employee – which in turn affects consumers’ encounter satisfaction. These three experiments in Paper III confirmed the favorable effects of receiving direct eye contact with an employee during a service encounter. Participants who received a direct gaze reported feeling more affirmed, and their social impression of the frontline employee was more positive than participants who received an averted gaze. Moreover, the participants who received a direct gaze also reported more satisfaction with the encounter, thereby indicating additional positive short-term effects. However, Experiment 3 showed that the purchase situation can moderate the effect of gaze, and gaze can produce an opposite effect. When a consumer is buying an embarrassing product, direct gaze generates more negative emotions and lower levels of encounter satisfaction.

One possible explanation for the results of direct gaze yielding positive responses (with the exception of embarrassing purchases) has to do with the congruency, or the degree of match, between the function of direct gaze and the various stimuli (Lin & Mattila, 2010) that affect consumers’ behavioral intentions to approach or avoid the social environment (a frontline employee). Because gaze functions as a regulator in interactions, and direct gaze can signal the sender’s motivational tendency to approach the receiver (Adam & Kleck, 2005), those people who gaze more at others are considered to be more attentive during social interactions (Ewing et al., 2010). Tentatively, it appears that if the consumer’s intention to approach the frontline employee is positive, or at least neutral, receiving a direct gaze should be congruent with the consumer’s expectations, and should therefore generate the consumer’s positive evaluation of the encounter. The theory of congruency could also explain why averted gaze produces more favorable outcomes than direct gaze when consumers buy embarrassing products. Averted gaze signals less attention from the sender, which is congruent with the consumer’s desire not to be seen (avoidance), and direct gaze is
incongruent with the consumer’s desire to avoid interacting with others.

The findings in Paper III offer important insights for managers, frontline employees, and retail owners. Encounters imply interactions with consumers and, in order to improve consumer satisfaction, retailers must understand what type of interaction the consumer desires. As these three experiments have shown, failing to pay the right type of visual attention to the consumer can have negative consequences for satisfaction. The short-term consequences could be that consumers who receive an averted gaze feel ignored, which negatively impacts their satisfaction with the encounter and their impression of the frontline employee. Although the feeling of being ignored occurs over only a short time, it can affect the consumer’s future behavioral intentions, such as returning to or recommending the retailer. This effect holds true for most retailers, but not for those who sell emotionally charged products, such as condoms. There could be other scenarios where the consumer does not feel comfortable, in which gaze does not have the reported positive effects. Such scenarios could be other products that are embarrassing to buy, such as diarrhea tablets or hemorrhoid cream. It could also be a service situation, as services include a higher level of interaction between frontline employee and consumers, and where the service is experienced as embarrassing; for instance, visiting a medical clinic that treats sexually transmitted diseases, a couples’ therapy clinic, or a drug addiction clinic. Therefore, retailers who provide neutral or less personal products or services should instruct employees to make eye contact with consumers very soon after the consumer arrives in order to signal attentiveness. In contrast, retailers who provide products or services that can generate feelings such as embarrassment, guilt, or shame should be frugal with their eye contact (without ignoring the consumer) and allow the consumer to take the initiative to interact with the frontline employee.

3.2.3 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate and understand how the physical and social dimensions of a servicescape affect consumers’ service encounter experience and consumer behavior, in terms of
approach and avoidance, in a retail context. More specifically, the thesis examined the effect that music and employee behavior have on consumers’ service experience and consumer behavior, and showed that both physical and social stimuli in a servicescape affect consumers’ internal responses, which in turn affect their behavior. The internal and behavioral responses differ depending on the situation (type of purchase), retail (for example, bank, supermarket, or electronic retail store), and stimuli (physical or social).

The conclusion of Paper I is that music does have an influence on consumer behavior, such as approach behavior, and enjoyment, but this influence is moderated by gender and music tempo. Therefore, managers in a retail setting should adapt music based on who their consumers are. Otherwise, managers run the risk of turning half of their clientele into unpleased and stressed consumers.

Numerous contemporary studies on the servicescape concept have recognized the importance of including a social dimension as a critical variable that influences consumer behavior, where employee appearance and employee density are associated with the social environment (Baker et al., 1992; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003).

Papers II and III in this thesis investigated the influence of frontline employees’ verbal (self-disclosure) and nonverbal (eye gaze) behavior. The results indicated that self-disclosure and gaze influences consumers’ emotion, encounter evaluation and behavioral intentions in the same fashion as employee appearance and density. However, previous research largely neglected the role that social dimensions have on a servicescape, and focused only on the physical appearance of employees and density variables (for some exceptions, see Barger & Grandey, 2006; Gabbott & Hogg, 2000; Söderlund & Rosenlund, 2008). The results in the present thesis show the importance of acknowledging verbal interaction (in this case, self-disclosure) and nonverbal interaction (in this case, gaze) as part of the social dimension in a servicescape.

The conclusion of Paper II is that self-disclosure has a negative effect on approach behavior regarding consumers’ reciprocal behavior, and the proposed model shows that this effect is mediated through social impression and satisfaction.

The conclusion of Paper III is that receiving direct eye contact with an employee during a service encounter has positive effects on
encounter satisfaction and on consumers’ impression of the frontline employee. However, Experiment 3 in Paper III showed that the purchase situation can moderate the effect of gaze, and direct eye gaze can produce an opposite effect. When a consumer is buying an embarrassing product, direct gaze generates more negative emotions and lower levels of encounter satisfaction.

Overall, the implications of the present thesis picture a situation in which influencing stimuli can take retailers out of control. This is indicated in Paper I by the fact that both laboratory studies and field studies have shown a positive effect on approach behavior (such as sales) from music, but the same conclusions were not present in a real retail context. Instead, as shown in Paper I, the music effect was moderated by variables such as gender and tempo. In Paper II, the negative influence of self-disclosure on approach behavior indicates the risk of using and transferring psychological findings directly into a business context, and takes for granted that the same result will appear. Instead, self-disclosure from a frontline employee resulted in avoidance behavior from the consumer. Finally, in Paper III, this risk is indicated by the fact that the favorable effects of receiving direct eye contact with an employee during a service encounter was not valid when a consumer is buying an embarrassing product; this meant that consumers experienced more negative emotions and lower levels of encounter satisfaction.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, another motivation for the study was to investigate whether – as retailers commonly believe – these stimuli always lead to positive outcomes, such as increased sales. To conclude, desirable psychological effects that managers and business leaders take for granted, were shown to be superficial when implemented in retailers’ servicescape. This thesis has shown that the use of these stimuli does not always lead to positive effects when they are implemented in contexts other than those in which they were originally investigated. For instance, the majority of self-disclosure research has focused on relationships in more intimate situations, such as between friends, partners, or more long-lasting relationships. This stream of research has generally found a positive effect of self-disclosure. However, this does not necessarily mean that self-disclosure has a positive effect in other situations, such as when an employee discloses personal information
to a consumer in one-time encounters. Therefore, business leaders and managers should be careful not to conclude that psychological skills can be implemented to boost sales.

In sum, this thesis has contributed to the framework of servicescape by showing that both physical (music) and social (self-disclosure and gaze) stimuli in servicescapes have effects on consumers’ internal responses (emotions), service encounter experiences (social impression and encounter satisfaction), and behavioral responses (approach–avoidance).
4. REFERENCES


Changing the servicescape

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and understand the effect of a servicescape’s ambient and social conditions on consumers’ service encounter experience and their approach/avoidance behavior in a retail context. In three papers, with a total sample of over 1600 participants (including 550 actual consumers) and seven experiments, the author investigates the effect of music, employees’ self-disclosure and employees’ gazing behavior on consumers’ service encounter experience and approach/avoidance behavior in a retail store.

The results in this thesis show that music affects consumers in both positive and negative ways (Paper I). Self-disclosure affects consumers negatively, in such a way that it decreases encounter satisfaction (Paper II) and, finally, eye gaze affects consumers by regulating both positively – and in some cases also negatively – consumers’ social impression of the frontline employee and their encounter satisfaction (Paper III).

The conclusions of this thesis are that both ambient and social stimuli in a servicescape affect consumers’ internal responses, which in turn affect their behavior. Depending on the purchase situation, type of retail, and stimuli, the internal and behavioral responses are different.