

SELF-SERVICE TILL RAGE

Is it the new road rage? I'm sure if I logged rage episodes per hour self-service till rage would out-distance road rage by some margin. Just last week I was in the M&S on Sheffield station getting myself some food for the train. Until recently there were 3 normal checkouts, with 2 of them usually manned, and 3 self-service checkouts. Now there is 1 normal checkout, seemingly un-manned unless a customer demands it, and 6 self-service checkouts. As I approached the totally staff-free check-out area I could see an elderly lady standing staring at a self-service till. As you know, in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, so I explained to the lady how to scan her 1 item, went through the payment process as though I'd been doing it all my life and felt quite good about myself. Until, that is, I came to scan my 2 items. Needless to say, the second one wouldn't scan. After gesticulating furiously for some time a rare breed, M&S probably call them "colleagues" these days, came and made it scan, after several attempts.

All of this took me, the customer, much more time than it used to when queuing a little before being served very swiftly at a manned till. Plus the irritation factor. Previously none; now, sometimes,

quite a lot. Back in 1994, Bradley T Gale wrote 'Managing Customer Value'.

We wrote about his concept of relative perceived value in February 2010. You can find the article here:

<https://www.tlfresearch.com/co-creation-part-2-value-through-choice>

I think his value map idea is probably the best analytical technique not to have been widely adopted by the customer insight industry, but it took customer journey mapping about 30 years to gain traction so there's still time yet! In a very small nutshell, Gale plots all the benefits of doing business with a given supplier versus all the costs. As well as the price I paid for the goods, my costs in M&S included time, convenience and stress. Gale's very perceptive thesis is that customers gravitate

towards the suppliers that offer the best trade-off between total benefits and total costs. These suppliers gain market share whilst companies offering an inferior cost-benefit trade-off lose share. Price is often the main factor on the cost axis but don't under-estimate the importance of convenience.

For a recent article in Grocer Magazine about self-service till rage, an M&S spokesman denied the tills had been a cause of checkout rage and said the self-service units have been welcomed by customers. **"Our customers currently make over 600,000 transactions a week using these tills,"** he said. **"Wherever there are self-service tills present, customers always have the option of using a manned till point."** Not at Sheffield station in my experience!

As a catalyst of self-service till rage, there is something even stronger than bar codes that don't scan – supplier hypocrisy. The company PR about self-service tills is always that they are installed to benefit customers, never to reduce the cost base of the retailer. Even worse are the growing numbers of cameras. Sainsbury's customers have apparently been complaining on social media about "creepy" CCTV screens being placed above self-service checkouts at hundreds of the company's stores. The screens show people a live feed of themselves as they pay for their produce. After asking Sainsbury's about the cameras, one customer was told they were to help "facilitate a better customer journey", adding "The safety of our customers and colleagues is really important to us so we have invested in a range of measures to keep everyone safe, and this is essentially an example of that," she said.

When asked how the move would benefit customer safety, Sainsbury's said it could "not go into specifics". I bet they couldn't!

