

## WAITING TIMES AT THEME PARKS: HOW MANAGERS INTERPRET WAITING

**Gilda Hernandez-Maskivker**

*Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain.*

**Gerard Ryan**

*Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain.*

**Maria del Mar Pàmies**

*Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona, Spain.*

---

*This paper explores how managers of theme parks interpret waiting times from a services marketing perspective. In-depth interviews are undertaken in order to uncover manager's perceptions of waiting.*

*'The inevitability of waiting times', 'the negative interpretation of waiting times' and 'neutral waiting times' are three themes that emerge from this qualitative study.*

*A deeper analysis of the waiting experience may contribute to enhanced strategies for managing waiting in theme parks, improved evaluations of the service and increased customer satisfaction. Finally, some practical tips for practitioners are proposed in the form of management takeaways.*

**Keywords:** waiting; theme parks, consumer behaviour, qualitative research

---



### INTRODUCTION

Waiting in services has been studied for more than thirty years (Maister, 1985; Pearce, 1989; Cameron, Baker and Peterson, 2013). During this time, researchers have endeavoured to better understand the process and effects of waiting and to design services that eliminate or reduce waiting times (Hornik, 1984; Taylor, 1994; Yan and Lotz, 2006). Various disciplines have attempted to explore and bring solutions to this issue. For instance, Operations Management studies have proposed solutions based on the use of different types of queues and how to organize these to improve operating capacity (Sheu and Babbar, 1996; Pullman and Thompson, 2002; Pullman and Rodgers, 2010). In Services Marketing, research has focused on understanding customer behaviour in waiting situations, including how consumers perceived waiting and how waiting affects customer satisfaction and service evaluation (Maister, 1985; Larson, 1987; Taylor, 1995; Davis and Heineke, 1998). Nevertheless, despite three decades of research on consumer waiting, customers continue to dedicate a considerable portion of daily life to waiting for services. According to Matter (2012), in the USA this amounts annually to about 37 billion hours spent waiting in line.

Tourism is especially prone to long, repeated waiting times (Moore, 2007). There is considerable research on waiting in a range of tourism contexts, such as waiting in restaurants (Davis and Heineke, 1998), in airports (De Lange, Samoilovich and Van der Rhee, 2013) and in various tourist and cultural attractions (Rowley 1999). Within tourism, theme parks have become synonymous with waiting (Gnoth, Bigné and Andreu, 2006) to the extent that research suggests that a typical visit to a theme park may involve more time spent waiting in line than time spent enjoying the park's attractions (Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009). Yet research suggests that waiting causes considerable dissatisfaction among tourists (Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005). In practice, queues are almost inevitable in theme parks because park attendance frequently surpasses the optimal capacity (Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). Indeed, a number of studies examine theme park guests activity patterns and

the time allocated by visitors to each activity (Birenboim et al., 2013). In addition, events such as the opening of new park attractions and rides unsurprisingly lead to queues (Cornelis, 2010). Meanwhile, management initiatives such as the recent appearance and growing popularity of wait-avoiding fast or express tickets and virtual queues have not always been successful (Matthew et al., 2012) and may result in even longer waits for consumers who do not purchase this option. In turn, this may lead to the perception that fast passes are inherently unfair to consumers (Biege, 2012).

However, there is also some contradicting evidence that tourists have come to expect and accept a certain amount of waiting time as part of the tourism experience and that waiting may not necessarily negatively affect tourist satisfaction (Sundström, Christine and Stavroula, 2011). Indeed, Heger, Offermans and Frens (2009) go as far as suggesting that by filling the waiting time in theme parks with fun activities to entertain park guests, making park guests wait may actually enhance the overall experience.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to consider the attitudes and perceptions of theme park managers of waiting in the theme park experience. We explore manager's perceptions because they have not been the focus of research on this issue, which normally focuses on the consumer (or 'theme park guest'). As a relevant stakeholder in the context of waiting, theme park management strives to balance park and attraction capacity with fluctuating demand in order to maintain guest satisfaction while simultaneously achieving operational efficiency (Pullman and Thompson, 2002). We propose that exploring theme park manager's perceptions of waiting will enable us to consider the contrasting evidence on this issue from the point of view of a stakeholder which has until now been largely overlooked in research.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on waiting times in services with special emphasis on waiting times in the context of tourism and theme parks. We then we outline the methodology chosen for this study. We present and discuss the

results of the empirical study and finally we outline the conclusions and management takeaways.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK : WAITING IN SERVICES**

### **Defining waiting in services**

Prior literature defines waiting time as “the time from which a customer is ready to receive the service until the time the service commences” (Taylor, 1994:56). Indeed, consumers may wait before (*pre-process waiting*), during (*in process waiting*) or after (*post process waiting*) receiving the service (Dubé-Rioux, Schmitt and Leclerc, 1989). For instance, in the tourism and hospitality context of a restaurant dining experience, waiting times may be present before the service commences (before getting a table), just after the service has started (waiting once you have ordered your meal) or after the service has finished while the consumer is waiting to pay the bill and leave. In addition, as Taylor (1994) suggests, pre-process waits may be classified as pre-schedule waits: when customers arrive before the appointed time (when a tourist arrives early and waits for his flight), delays: when the service doesn't start at the time of the event (when a tourist waits beyond the scheduled time) and queue waits: when the system of first-come first-served is applied to manage waiting times (e.g., when visitors wait in regular lines to check in at an airport or a hotel).

## **The Negative Effects of Waiting**

The negative effects of waiting on customers are widely accepted. It is generally accepted that waiting times are a serious problem for consumers (Bitner, Booms and Tetreault, 1990; Pruyn and Smidts, 1998; Lee and Lambert, 2000;) and companies (Schwartz, 1978; Taylor, 1995; Nie, 2000). Waiting can provoke unpleasant emotions such as nervousness, anxiety, stress or helplessness (Carmon, Shanthikumar and Carmon, 1995; Rafaeli, Barron and Haber, 2002). It may decrease customer satisfaction (Davis and Vollmann, 1990; Katz, Larson and Larson, 1991) and negatively influence overall evaluation of the service (Taylor, 1994; Hui and Tse, 1996; Pruyn and Smidts, 1998; Lee and Lambert, 2005) while reducing customer loyalty (Bielen and Demoulin, 2007). Waiting times may make customers abandon the service (Zhou and Soman, 2003; Nip, 2014) and decide not to return (Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005; Lutz, 2008). Indeed, Friedman and Friedman (1997) suggest that waiting may be a reason for not choosing a specific service provider in the first place.

## **Service Solutions to Reduce Waiting Time**

With this in mind, companies continually seek strategies to reduce these undesirable effects. This may involve reducing real waiting times (Davis and Heineke, 1994) or speeding up transactions (Katz et al., 1991). It may also include extending opening hours or implementing new technologies to more effectively manage waiting times and appointments (Davis and Vollmann, 1990; Yan and Lotz, 2006). Additionally, strategies may be oriented towards reducing perceived waiting time (the time the consumer 'feels' they have waited) (Hui and Tse, 1996; Davis and Heineke, 1998). For instance, when firms provide information about waiting time, the

overestimation of waiting times on the part of consumers tends to be less prevalent (Antonides, Verhoef and Van Aalst, 2002). Other strategies oriented towards reducing perceived waiting times consist of manipulating contextual factors such as music (Antonides, Verhoef and Van Aalst, 2002; Cameron, Baker and Peterson, 2013), social environment (Maister, 1985; Sommer, 1989) or activities to fill the wait (Maister, 1985; Taylor, 1994; Durrande Moreau, 1999) such as providing drinks for adults or entertainment for children while waiting (Kostecki, 1996). In the specific context of theme parks research suggests that some parks deliberately overestimate the waiting time in the information they provide to consumers knowing that guests like when the actual waiting time is less than the expected time (Geissler and Rucks, 2011).

The tourism industry has implemented several of the above strategies to reduce both real (Pullman and Thompson, 2002; Sheu, McHaney and Babbar, 2003; Rendeiro Martín-Cejas, 2006) and perceived waiting times (Pearce, 1989; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Hwang, Yoon and Bendle, 2012). As waiting is a relevant and regular issue in tourist experiences, these contexts have been widely analysed by researchers. As mentioned earlier, there are a number of studies of waiting in a variety of specific tourist contexts; airports (Folkes, Koletsky and Graham, 1987; Minton, 2008; De Lange, Samoilovich and Van der Rhee, 2013), restaurants (Marquis, Dube and Chebat, 1994; Davis and Heineke, 1998; McGuire et al., 2010), theatres (Pearce, 1989; Becker, 1991), cinemas (Brady, 2002), ski resorts (Pullman and Thompson, 2002) and museums (Schmitt, Dubé and Leclerc, 1992; Riganti and Nijkamp, 2008).

### **Waiting in Theme Parks**

Theme parks have also received considerable attention in academic research in recent years (Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005; Cope III, Cope and Davis, 2008; Koo and Fishbach, 2010; Chuo and Heywood, 2014). Studies have been conducted at a number of theme parks situated around the

world, such as Taiwan (Chuo and Heywood, 2014), the Netherlands (Kemperman, 2000), Colombia (Álvarez and Mejía, 2012) and the United Kingdom (Matthew et al., 2012). Many of those studies use scenarios to reproduce waiting experiences at theme parks (Lutz, 2008; Gavián-Bouzas and García de Madariaga-Miranda, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). However, little research has been conducted in theme parks, in their natural settings (Koo and Fishbach, 2010; Li, 2010) on actual waiting situations. There are few studies that adopt a qualitative approach, as the focus tends to be on carrying out quantitative studies based on consumer reactions to a range of hypothetical scenarios. The main focus of research on theme parks focuses on virtual queues and priority or express ticket systems (Tone and Kohara, 2007; Cope III, Cope and Davis, 2008; Lutz, 2008; Cope et al., 2011; Matthew et al., 2012) and the use of new technologies in managing and facilitating waiting times (Hwang, Yon and Bendle, 2012). Nevertheless, the optimal strategy for dealing with queues and waiting at theme parks remains a contested topic (Pearce, 1989; Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Dickson, Ford and Laval, 2005). In general, theme parks have struggled to find effective solutions to the persistent problem of waiting. For instance, Disney, probably the most well-known of the theme parks, is continuously working on improving their free virtual queue system (Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Elliott, 2002). Theme park managers are aware that waiting times and queues can overshadow the fantasy world of the parks who offer customers a break from the routines of everyday life by transporting consumers in time and space (Milman, 1991) and that making guests wait causes dissatisfaction (Brown, Kappes and Marks, 2013; Wu, Li and Li, 2014). If waiting times and queues are present, that entire experience may be interrupted and fragmented. Instead of having fun on the rides, tourists end up waiting in frustrating queues during a considerable part of their time (Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009). Added to this, as attendance is increasing in some of the major theme parks around the world (Heo

and Lee, 2009; Milman, 2010), the problem of long queues for rides is ever-present and becoming more urgent (Martin, 2013; Nip, 2014).

With this in mind, we set out to gather the viewpoints of theme park managers on the issue of waiting. Our objective was to explore the perceptions and opinions about waiting from the viewpoint of managers with the purpose of extending our knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of waiting in a tourism environment from the point of view of a stakeholder that has largely been overlooked in studies on this issue.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to explore in-depth manager's perceptions of waiting times in theme parks, a qualitative approach is adopted. As the literature suggests, qualitative methodologies provide flexibility and adaptability to the research project (Carson et al., 2001) and facilitate the exploration of individual's thoughts, emotions and feelings (De Ruyter and Scholl, 1998; Silverman, 1998). In addition, empirical studies in natural settings, as is the case in this study, enable us to examine real reactions and behaviours of participants in situ (Ryan and Valverde, 2006).

Hence in-depth interviews were judged as an appropriate data collection method. Specifically, semi-structured interviews, each of approximately 60 to 80 minutes, were conducted with ten managers of major theme parks in Spain between March and December of 2013. The ten cases were not extreme cases, but were chosen based on their current activities and their varied years of experience managing tourist and leisure services (from 1 year to 25 years in the sector) and their willingness to take part in the study. The specific managers were contacted by telephone. We explained the purpose and nature of our study and asked for an appointment to carry out the interview. The first three contacts were established through professional contacts at our university. These first participants assisted us in contacting five more managers through their own

professional networks. The final two contacts resulted from 'cold calling' a number of theme parks and requesting an interview. As waiting times at theme parks have not previously been analysed in detail from the point of view of managers, a data-driven approach was considered. This means the progress of the research project is guided by data and not by prior theories, experiences or intuition.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that after many years of research on this topic, the researchers were equipped with a range of empirical and theoretical studies on the topic of waiting in services in general. Hence, a number of pre-prepared research questions were employed with the aim of giving some structure to the research process. Hence, the interviews were loosely framed around a number of questions areas: how managers manage waiting times at theme parks; how managers consider and perceive waiting time, including negative and positive interpretations. Participants, however, were free to raise and explore issues they considered salient to their experiences. This was an important characteristic of our study, given the long history of research on waiting. We suggest that if we are to advance in our knowledge and understanding of this persistent problem, a qualitative approach coupled with the participation of a mostly overlooked stakeholder may enable us to uncover new knowledge on this topic. Much of the time managers spoke of the specific context of waiting in queues for rides or attractions. However, they also spoke of waiting to purchase tickets to enter the park, as well as waiting in park restaurants, fast-food stalls, photographic services and so on.

All interviews were transcribed and then examined using computer assisted qualitative analysis software Nvivo. This software assists in making sense of the qualitative data (Ryan and Valverde, 2006). The procedures of open, axial and selective coding (Gibbs, 2002) were employed with the purpose of reaching a deeper understanding of the interview data. The number of interviews was decided upon according to the principal of saturation which states

that data collection should end when no new categories emerge from the data (Silverman, 1998).

As qualitative data and procedures cannot be validated through statistical techniques, systematic actions of verification of the research process were applied. These include: adequacy (considering different waiting situations at theme parks) (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Morse, 1994), maintaining an audit trail throughout the study (Morse, 1994), two separate coders (Morse, 1994), a high level of fitness of the method with theory on waiting and reality (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and a highly understandable language (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Ryan and Valverde, 2006).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section outlines and discusses the main results that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the theme park managers.

### **The Inevitability of Waiting Times**

Theme parks are generally situated in tourist destinations where seasonality is a significant factor, and where demand is concentrated during specific periods of the year. The presence of waiting times and queues as a typical scenario at theme parks' contexts was described across all cases. All participants reported that waiting was inevitable and unavoidable in theme parks. Although the managers involved all reported increases in park capacity in recent years, all managers described the inevitability of delays and the forming of queues on certain days, such as during the peak season or on a day of good weather just after a number of days of poor weather. During these specific periods, managers stated that the arrival of guests would predictably lead to the forming of uncomfortably long queues for certain attractions, despite the measures they undertook to avoid this.

“Attractions and rides don't have the capacity to avoid generating queues” (Josep)

In spite of all the provisions and the strategies implemented to cope with demand, the number of visitors will always exceed the service capacity on certain days and queues are impossible to avoid.

“For instance, there is a ride that can take up to 1,500 visitors per hour, with all trains running and all employees working. If more than 1,500 people turn up during one specific hour, you will have queues and there is nothing you can do about it” (Ricardo)

In an ideal distribution service context, waiting times would not exist and customers would receive their service when they order it without delays (Wang, 2011). However, the data suggest that this is not a realistic goal in the context of theme parks where reducing waiting time to zero is impossible for firms (Pearce, 1989; Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). There is an ‘under capacity by default’ (Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009).

This is an important result because despite three decades of research on waiting, the literature continues to work towards the general aim of eliminating waiting. We suggest that a change of approach to waiting is required if we are to develop innovative solutions. The first step in this new approach would involve accepting the inevitability of some waiting.

### **Waiting and Consumer Satisfaction**

Although managers know that waiting is a common occurrence that is generally interpreted as an inconvenience or annoyance by park guests, they also recognized that at certain times waiting becomes a serious problem. Although we do not claim a cause-effect relationship in light of the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study, the analysis of the qualitative data suggests that waiting may not generally play an important role in undermining customer satisfaction. Yet under certain conditions, when the park is very crowded, waiting may be more strongly linked to poor service evaluation and inevitably to reduced satisfaction.

“There is a curve that goes something like this. With up to about 1500 guests, satisfaction is not really affected. But above 1500,

satisfaction begins to fall. However, it is not a huge fall. Satisfaction only fell significantly on very specific days when attendance was well above our capacity limitation of 1500 per hour” (Armand)

Negative customer’s responses such as complaints only tend to appear when customers are forced to wait repeatedly and consequently, this may influence customer satisfaction. As one of the interviews explained, waiting times are not a minor issue.

“The problem of queues is probably the most important issue for customer satisfaction in theme parks” (José Luis)

“My experience in aquatic theme parks tells me that queues are negative. Queues affect my service quality index... queues at the attractions or at the entrance of the park are the main reasons for complaints” (Josep)

Because of the problems associated with waiting, managers in this study strive to solve the waiting problem. As one of the managers explained, a correct management of waiting times may influence positively customer satisfaction:

“When long lines and waits were managed properly, improving the quality of the service... the visitor left the park very satisfied” (Angels)

“You look for customer satisfaction, you want your client leave the park happy, so that they return on a future occasion and they speak well of you” (Pau)

Interviewees described several strategies that they apply at theme parks in order to manage waiting times. As one of the managers described, even Disney is concerned about queues and they implement different solutions to minimize waits:

“All theme parks have tried to minimize queues in one way or another. Disney is the benchmark of the theme parks and, as the benchmark, they have created the fast pass to avoid queues” (Maria).

However, reducing the real wait may be not an easy task. It may include extra human resources and extra training.

“The act of opening a new ticket office cannot be done instantly. You have to locate the person who will work there, the person has to

move to the ticket office, and the person has to be prepared to work there” (José Luis)

The managers explained that they also try to reduce perceived waiting times. They do so by providing information on how much time customers will have to wait, entertaining people while they are in the queue and making the queuing environment attractive. The following quote expands on the strategy to fill the wait with fun activities in order to reduce perceived waiting:

“We try to make queues less boring. In fact, there are pre-shows before the shows to make queues less boring” (Armand)

### **Waiting Times Expectations**

In spite of the unavoidable negative aspects of waiting, some issues emerged from the interviews that may not be classified as negative. This was a surprising result given the overriding emphasis in the literature on the negative nature of waiting in services. For instance, managers explained that depending on whether customers are irregular or regular visitors to theme parks, they might perceive the inevitability of waiting times in different ways. Managers claimed that when customers are not familiar with the service (they are irregular visitors), waiting times are often viewed as a serious problem. Hence, waiting times act as an important barrier for irregular visitors. Indeed, they suggest that customers may decide not to visit the theme park in the first place due their expectations of long waiting times. Otherwise, they can choose not to buy the service again or decide to go to another service provider without queues.

In contrast, the managers interviewed suggest that when customers are familiar with theme parks, waiting times are generally viewed as something normal and not as a significant concern. These visitors enjoy the theme park’s experience and they accept that queues and waiting are part of the experience.

“When you do market research at theme parks, the most important hindrance for new visitors is queues. If you ask customers

why they don't visit the theme park, they will tell you that it is because of lines, because they don't want to queue. However, for people who have visited the theme park, the presence of queues doesn't tend to influence their decisions. People with prior experiences know when it's best to visit the park, when there are fewer queues, and in any case they are aware that they would find queues and they absolutely assume it. They don't give much importance to the issue of queues" (Maria).

These results support prior literature about prior experiences and customer's perceptions. As Eroglu, Machleit and Barr (2005) suggest, customers may end up habituated to some stimulus like crowds and not pay attention to them after receiving this stimulus for a long period of time. They may be tourists who are not really that bothered if they have to wait (Sundström, Lundberg, and Giannakis, 2011).

### **Willingness to Wait**

A further situation in which waiting may not be associated with negative connotations is the fact that that some customers are willing to wait for the service. According to our interviewees, some guests are not so bothered by delays if they eventually achieve their goals. Some guests are willing and prepared to wait to enjoy and ride attractions, regardless of the length of the queue. Some managers suggest that this may be due to the exceptional nature of the visit to the park and the fact that it generally takes place during holidays, when consumers are more relaxed. Because it's an event that often occurs once a year they are willing to join the queue and wait. It is important to note that we are not naively arguing that consumers like to wait or that when faced with the choice between a wait and a no wait situation, they will choose to wait. However, we are arguing that sometimes consumers will choose to accept to wait.

"Customers join queues because they want to enjoy the attractions. If you come to the theme park for a specific attraction

and there is a two-hour queue to ride it, you will join the queue, you won't go home. If you have travelled a long distance to visit the theme park and you want to ride a particular roller coaster, you will wait for it. The same happens if it is a new attraction or it is a show that occurs only once a year: there is a three-hour queue but people want to enjoy it" (Pedro).

Related with this, the literature explains that the willingness to wait increases when customers perceive a greater value of the service (Brady, 2002; Yan and Lotz, 2006; Gavián-Bouzas and García de Madariaga-Miranda, 2009). As Yan and Lotz (2006) suggest, the overall value of the service (as the utility and benefits that customers expect to receive from the service) may increase the zone of tolerance with waiting.

### **Filling the Wait**

There are other positive aspects associated with waiting. The entertainment activities that theme parks provide while customers wait not only reduce the perceived waiting time, they also may become an important part of the service. In this way, visitors can actually enjoy the time they spend waiting for attractions.

"There were people who said they preferred the pre-show to the main show because actors in the pre-show asked them where they come from, they played games together and they had fun" (Angels).

Added to this, people can spend a relaxed time together while waiting. It may be a peaceful time where customers share their experiences and opinions about attractions. Rest and socialization may be positive outputs of waiting times. The next quotes expand on this:

"15 or 20 minutes waiting pass quickly and people have a good time; they share prior experiences, chat and rest. I think there is a waiting time which is not bad" (Sara).

Visitors may consider waiting as a positive part of the global service. People may start enjoying the attraction when they are

waiting in the queue (Niles, 2014). In this way, waiting times may be managed to be a fun and exciting part of the theme park experience (Dawes and Rowley, 1996; Heger, Offermans and Frens, 2009). As Maister (1985) suggests, people may enjoy the waiting time because they feel that they are not really waiting at all.

### **Queues Attract Guests to Specific Rides**

Moreover, rather than acting as a hindrance, queues for specific rides may also attract other people and encourage visitors to join them. People become curious and want to know what is going on in that queue and why the ride seems so popular.

“I would say that queues attract people. We join a queue although we do not know exactly what will happen. We think: if there are many people here it is because this should be really cool, so we join the queue (Ricardo)

Thus, individuals may act according to what others do, imitating the behaviour of others.

“It is true that people sometimes act like sheep. If you see 4 or 5 people, then everybody goes there to see what is going on” (Juan Carlos)

In fact, in some situations people may prefer to trust and act according to the information given by other customers rather than according to the information given by the company. Customers may prefer the information provided by a physical queue of customers to the information provided by employees of the theme park.

“Sometimes people don’t believe the information that companies give them. Even if you are warning them that there are long waits for a ride, customers don’t believe you. Then, hiding the physical queue from the public may be not a good idea. I mean, sometimes it may be good for people to see the physical queue. It is not aesthetic, it is very ugly, but somehow it provides information to visitors” (José Luis)

Indeed, seeing a queue for an attraction may lead other visitors to perceive the attraction as more valuable. In contrast, the absence of a queue for an attraction may be perceived as something negative. Thus, people may act according what others do and join long queues. In fact, research suggests that sometimes people don't know why they are joining a queue but they join it because 'something is happening' (Mann, 1977).

"If there are no queues for an attraction, you will value less that attraction. A ride that has zero queues, where there is no one, this attraction gives the feeling that nobody really wants to ride on it. There should always be a minimum queue of at least three or five minutes. That always gives a bonus to that attraction. We were aware that a zero queue was not productive for the perception of the attraction." (Armand).

Indeed, making customers wait may cause services to be seen as more attractive and desirable (Kostecki, 1996; Gavilán-Bouzas and García de Madariaga-Miranda, 2009). As Bennett and Strydom (2001) explain, the presence of other customers may enhance and make the tourist experience more memorable.

### **Willingness to Pay to Avoid Waiting**

Finally, waiting times may be related to economic benefits for companies. The interviewees explained that more waiting times are inevitably related with more sales of fast passes to avoid queues and consequently with more revenues for firms.

"Express passes provide a great amount of income. We can say that thanks to waiting times we can improve income. The sale of express products is directly proportional to waiting times. This is finally a great contradiction. It's a great source of revenues that today the theme park can't go without" (Ricardo)

Indeed, it might be suggested that some theme parks take advantage of this situation. The price of the fast pass continues to rise, as more people are willing to purchase the service.

“Due to the increased demand for this product, theme parks must raise the price, season after season. They have to do that for two reasons: on the one hand, if people increasingly value the service, it will cost more; and on the other hand, if companies don’t raise the price waiting times for priority lines will be longer than waiting times for regular lines” (Sara)

Previous studies support this strategy of charging consumers to avoid the wait (Friedman and Friedman, 1997; Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012). The system of fast line passes increases company profits (Friedman and Friedman, 1997; Heo and Lee, 2009; Matthew et al., 2012) while improving waiting management and minimising congestion (Tone and Kohara, 2007).

## **CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study suggests a number of new and challenging issues on the stubbornly persistent problem of waiting in services, while focusing on this topic in the context of theme parks. The study takes an innovative approach to methodology in the sense that it adopts an exploratory nature to a problem that has been present for decades. We do so because we feel that academics and practitioner alike must seek new approaches to the old problem of waiting. Despite three decades of research on this topic, we continue to experience considerable waiting in our everyday lives as consumers. This is especially relevant in the context of theme parks which strive to balance park capacity, customer comfort and profitability.

This study suggests that some long-held beliefs about waiting should be questioned if we are to find new solutions. Firstly, we suggest that the inevitable nature of waiting means that searching

for the perfect solution to eliminate waiting may not prove fruitful. Secondly, we propose that consumers and tourists alike have become accustomed to and even expect a certain amount of waiting. Thirdly, we suggest that rather than striving to eliminate waiting, in certain contexts, especially in the tourism and hospitality sector, enabling consumers to pay to avoid waiting may prove increasingly profitable for companies. Nevertheless, research should further examine the issues surrounding equality, social justice and fairness in services that offer priority queues or express passes (Matthew et al., 2012).

In terms of managerial implications, the study outlines the following the practical considerations:

- Theme parks shouldn't necessarily focus their efforts on eliminating queues and waiting times. Instead efforts should be focused on reducing perceived waiting time.

- Waiting times should be considered as one part of the global customer experience and not as a residual and wasted time. Companies should manage waiting experience so that customers don't feel they are waiting by filling the waiting time with fun and entertaining activities.

- Less popular or less well-known attractions may benefit from the presence of a queue whether real or staged.

- Consequently, queues should not necessarily be disguised or made to appear shorter.

- Managers should clearly identify the customer segments that are willing to pay extra to avoid queues and provide the necessary services. Fast line passes should be available for those who are willing to pay.

In conclusion, despite three decades of research on waiting in services and the numerous advances that have been made in terms of understanding consumer waiting behaviour, many issues remain. As consumers we still experience waiting on a daily basis. Waiting in

line during leisure time or while on vacation can sometimes be a particularly unpleasant and frustrating experience. This paper examines the view of theme park managers on waiting and suggests a number of new insights on waiting in general as well as more specific proposals for waiting in the specific context of tourism.

## REFERENCES

- Álvarez, L., and Mejía, G. (2012). Simulation study of priority passes in a theme park in Colombia. *Proceedings of the 2012 Industrial and Systems Engineering Research Conference*.
- Antonides, G., Verhoef, P. C., and Van Aalst, M. (2002). Consumer perception and evaluation of waiting time: A field experiment. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol.12, No.3, pp. 193–202.
- Becker, G. S. (1991). A Note on Restaurant Pricing and Other Examples of Social Influences on Price. *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol.99, No.5, pp. 1109–1116.
- Bennett, J., and Strydom, J. (2001). *Introduction to travel and tourism marketing*. Juta Education.
- Biege, B. (2012). Priority boarding on Ryanair - Worth it? Ireland Travel. [Http://goireland.about.com/od/travelingtoireland/qt/ryanair\\_priority\\_boarding.htm](http://goireland.about.com/od/travelingtoireland/qt/ryanair_priority_boarding.htm). Accessed the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2013.
- Bielen, F., and Demoulin, N. (2007). Waiting time influence on the satisfaction-loyalty relationship in services. *Managing Service Quality*, Vol.17, No.2, pp. 174–193.
- Birenboim, A., Anton-Clavé, S., Russo, A.P., and Shoval, N. (2013). Temporal activity patterns of theme park visitors. *Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 601-619.
- Bitner, M. J., Booms, B. H., and Tetreault, M. S. (1990). The service encounter- diagnosing favorable and unfavorable incidents. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol.54, No.1, pp. 71–84.
- Brady, F. N. (2002). Lining up for Star-Wars tickets: Some ruminations on ethics and economics based on an internet study of behavior in queues. *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol.38, No.1-2, pp. 157–165.
- Brown, A.; Kappes, J. and Marks, J. (2013). Mitigating theme park crowding with incentives and information mobile devices. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 52, No.4, pp. 426-436.

- Cameron, M., Baker, J., and Peterson, M. (2013). Waiting for Service: The Effects of Music Volume and Gender. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.4.
- Carmon, Z., Shanthikumar, J. G., and Carmon, T. F. (1995). A psychological perspective on service segmentation models: The significance of accounting for consumers' perceptions of waiting and service. *Management Science*, Vol.41, No.11, pp. 1806–1815.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C., and Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative marketing research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Chuo, H., and Heywood, J. (2014). An Optimal Queuing wait for Visitors' Most Favourite Ride at Theme Parks. In J. S. Chen (Ed.), *Advances in Hospitality and Leisure*. Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Cope III, R. F., Cope, R. F., and Davis, H. E. (2008). Disney's Virtual Queues: A Strategic Opportunity To Co-Brand Services? *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, Vol.6, No.10.
- Cope, R. F., Cope III, R. F., Bass, A. N., and Syrdal, H. A. (2011). Innovative Knowledge Management At Disney: Human Capital And Queuing Solutions For Services. *Journal of Service Science (JSS)*, Vol.4, No.1.
- Cornelis, P. C. M. (2010). Impact of new attractions on theme park attendance. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, Vol. 2, No.3, pp. 262-280.
- Davis, M., and Heineke, J. (1994). Understanding the roles of the customer and the operation for better queue management. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol.14, No.5.
- Davis, M. M., and Heineke, J. (1998). How disconfirmation, perception and actual waiting times impact customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol.9, No.1, pp. 64.
- Davis, M. M., and Vollmann, T. E. (1990). A framework for relating waiting time and customer satisfaction in a service operation. *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol.4, pp. 61–69.
- Dawes, J., and Rowley, J. (1996). The waiting experience: towards service quality in the leisure industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol.8, No.1, pp. 16–21.

- De Lange, R., Samoilovich, I., and Van der Rhee, B. (2013). Virtual queuing at airport security lanes. *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol.225, pp. 153–165.
- De Ruyter, K., and Scholl, N. (1998). Positioning qualitative market research: reflections from theory and practice. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol.1, No.1, pp. 7–14.
- Dickson, D., Ford, R. C., and Laval, B. (2005). Managing real and virtual waits in hospitality and service organizations. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol.46, No.1, pp. 52–68.
- Dubé-Rioux, L., Schmitt, B. H., and Leclerc, F. (1989). Consumers' reactions to waiting: when delays affect the perception of service quality. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol.16, No.1, pp. 59–63.
- Durrande Moreau, A. (1999). Waiting for service: Ten years of empirical research. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol.10, No.2, pp. 171–185.
- Elliott, M. (2002). The woman behind the mouse. *IIE Solutions*, pp. 30. [Http://courses.washington.edu/inde101/Class Notes/Disney World IEs.pdf](http://courses.washington.edu/inde101/Class_Notes/Disney_World_IIEs.pdf). Accessed the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.
- Eroglu, S. A., Machleit, K., and Barr, T. F. (2005). Perceived retail crowding and shopping satisfaction: the role of shopping values. *Special Section: Retailing Research*, Vol.58, No.8, pp. 1146–1153.
- Folkes, V., Koletsky, S., and Graham, J. (1987). A field study of causal inferences and consumer reaction: the view from the airport. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.13, No.4.
- Friedman, H. H., and Friedman, L. W. (1997). Reducing the “wait” in waiting-line systems: Waiting line segmentation. *Business Horizons*, Vol.40, No.4, pp. 54–58.
- Gavilán-Bouzas, D., and García de Madariaga-Miranda, J. (2009). ¿Esperamos porque es mejor o es mejor porque esperamos? Un estudio exploratorio de la relación entre el tiempo de espera y el valor percibido. *Universia Business Review*, Vol.26, No.22, pp. 56–73.
- Geissler, G.L. and Rucks, C.T. (2011). The overall theme park experience: A visitor satisfaction tracking study. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol.17, No.2, pp. 127-138.
- Gibbs, G. (2002). *Qualitative data analysis: Explorations with NVivo*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Glaser, B., and Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY, USA: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gnoth, J., Bigné, J. E., and Andreu, L. (2006). Waiting time effects on the leisure experience and visitor emotions. In M. Kozak & L. Andreu (Eds.), *Progress in Tourism Marketing* (pp. 255–269). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Heger, C., Offermans, S., and Frens, J. (2009). Waiting as part of the fun: Interactive gaming in theme park queues. *Offermans SAM, Nagtzaam HA H.Proceedings ofSIDER, 9*, pp. 52–55.
- Heo, C. Y., and Lee, S. (2009). Application of revenue management practices to the theme park industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol.28, No.3, pp. 446–453.
- Hornik, J. (1984). Subjective vs. Objective Time Measures: A Note on the Perception of Time in Consumer Behavior. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.11, No.1, pp. 615–618.
- Hui, M. K., and Tse, D. K. (1996). What to tell consumers in waits of different lengths: An integrative model of service evaluation. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol.60, No.2, pp. 81–90.
- Hwang, J., Yoon, S. Y., and Bendle, L. J. (2012). Desired privacy and the impact of crowding on customer emotions and approach-avoidance responses: Waiting in a virtual reality restaurant. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol.24, No.2, pp. 224–250.
- Katz, K. L., Larson, B. M., and Larson, R. C. (1991). Prescription for the waiting-in-line blues- entertain, enlighten, and engage. *Sloan Management Review*, Vol.32, No.2, pp. 44–53.
- Kemperman, A. (2000). Temporal aspects of theme park choice behavior: modeling variety seeking, seasonality and diversification to support theme park planning. *Unpublished Phd Thesis*, Technische Universiteit Eindhoven. The Netherlands.
- Koo, M., and Fishbach, A. (2010). A silver lining of standing in line: queuing increases value of products. *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol.47, No.4, pp. 713–724.
- Kostecki, M. (1996). Waiting lines as a marketing issue. *European Management Journal*, Vol.14, No.3, pp. 295–303.
- Larson, R. C. (1987). Perspectives on queues- social- justice and the psychology of queuing. *Operations Research*, Vol.35, No.6, pp. 895–905.

- Lee, W., and Lambert, C. U. (2000). Impact of waiting time on evaluation of service quality and customer satisfaction in food service operation. *Foodservice Research International*, Vol.12, No.4, pp. 241–254.
- Lee, W., and Lambert, C. U. (2005). The effect of waiting time and affective reactions on customers' evaluation of service quality in a cafeteria. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, Vol.8, No.2, pp. 19–37.
- Li, W. L. (2010). Impact of waiting time on tourists satisfaction in a theme park: An empirical investigation. In *Proceedings of Industrial Engineering and Engineering Management (IEEM)* (pp. 434–437). 7-10 Dec. Alaska.
- Lutz, H. (2008). The impact of virtual queues for amusement parks. In *Proceedings of the 39th Annual Meeting of the Decision Science Institute*. Atlanta.
- Maister, D. H. (1985). The psychology of waiting lines. In M. R. S. J. A. Czepiel and C. F. Surprenant (Ed.), *The Service Encounter* (pp. 113–123.). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Mann, L. (1977). The effect of stimulus queues on queue-joining behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.35, No.6, pp. 437–442.
- Marquis, M., Dube, L., and Chebat, J. (1994). Consumers' Response to Waiting Time: New Segmentation Bases Are Required for Service Industries. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol.21, pp. 548–553.
- Martin, H. (2013). More theme parks make sure waiting in line is long on fun. *Los Angeles Times*. [Http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/08/business/la-fi-theme-park-lines-20130809](http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/08/business/la-fi-theme-park-lines-20130809) Accessed the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.
- Matter, G. (2012). Why waiting is torture. *The New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/why-waiting-in-line-is-torture.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/why-waiting-in-line-is-torture.html?_r=0) . Accessed the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2015.
- Matthew, A., MacLaren, A., O'Gorman, K., and White, C. (2012). Priority queues: Where social justice and equity collide. *Tourism Management*, Vol.33, No.4, pp. 875–884.
- McGuire, K. A., Kimes, S. E., Lynn, M., Pullman, M. E., and Lloyd, R. C. (2010). A framework for evaluating the customer wait experience. *Journal of Service Management*, Vol.21, No.3, pp. 269–290.
- Milman, A. (1991). The role of theme parks as a leisure activity for local communities. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol.29, No.3, pp. 11–16.

- Milman, A. (2010). The global theme park industry. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, Vol.2, No.3, pp. 220–237.
- Minton, H. (2008). Waiting and queuing in the check-in hall: An ethnographic study of queuing and waiting for check-in services at Manchester Airport. *Journal of Airport Management*, Vol.2, No.3, pp. 249–264.
- Moore, D. (2007) The Waiting game. UNLV Theses/Dissertations/Professional Papers/Capstones. Paper 556. University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
- Morse, J. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 220–35). London: Sage Publications.
- Nie, W. (2000). Waiting: integrating social and psychological perspectives in operations management. *Omega*, Vol.28, No.6, pp. 611–629.
- Niles, R. (2014). Twister - Ride It Out reviews. *Theme Park Insider Editor*. [http://www.themeparkinsider.com/reviews/universal\\_studios\\_florida/twister\\_-\\_ride\\_it\\_out/](http://www.themeparkinsider.com/reviews/universal_studios_florida/twister_-_ride_it_out/) Accessed the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.
- Nip, A. (2014). Waiting times at Hong Kong theme parks rise as tourism increases. *South China Morning Post*. <Http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1413797/waiting-times-hong-kong-theme-parks-rise-tourism-increases> Accessed the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.
- Pearce, P. L. (1989). Towards the better management of tourist queues. *Tourism Management*, Vol.10, No.4, 279–284.
- Pruyn, A., and Smidts, A. (1998). Effects of waiting on the satisfaction with the service: Beyond objective time measures. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol.15, No.4, pp. 321–334.
- Pullman, M. E., and Thompson, G. M. (2002). Evaluating capacity-and demand-management decisions at a ski resort. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol.43, No.6, pp. 25–36.
- Pullman, M., and Rodgers, S. (2010). Capacity management for hospitality and tourism: A review of current approaches. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol.29, No.1, pp. 177–187.
- Rafaeli, A., Barron, G., and Haber, K. (2002). The Effects of Queue Structure on Attitudes. *Journal of Service Research*, Vol.5, No.2, pp. 125–139.
- Rendeiro Martín-Cejas, R. (2006). Tourism service quality begins at the airport. *Tourism Management*, Vol.27, No.5, pp. 874–877.

- Riganti, P., and Nijkamp, P. (2008). Congestion in popular tourist areas: a multi-attribute experimental choice analysis of willingness-to-wait in Amsterdam. *Tourism Economics*, Vol.14, No.1, pp. 25–44.
- Rowley, J. (1999). Measuring total customer experience in museums. *International journal of contemporary Hospitality management*, Vol. 11, No. 6, pp. 303–308.
- Ryan, G., and Valverde, M. (2006). Waiting in line for online services: a qualitative study of the user's perspective. *Information Systems Journal*, Vol.16, No.2, pp. 181–211.
- Schmitt, B. H., Dubé, L., and Leclerc, F. (1992). Intrusions into waiting lines: Does the queue constitute a social system? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.63, No.5, pp. 806–815.
- Schwartz, B. (1978). Queues, priorities, and social process. *Social Psychology*, pp. 3–12.
- Sheu, C., and Babbar, S. (1996). A managerial assessment of the waiting-time performance for alternative service process designs. *Omega : The International Journal of Management Science*, Vol.24, No.6, pp. 689–703.
- Sheu, C., McHaney, R., and Babbar, S. (2003). Service process design flexibility and customer waiting time. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol.23, No.8, pp. 901–917.
- Silverman, D. (1998). Qualitative research: meanings or practices? *Information Systems Journal*, Vol.8, No.1.
- Sommer. (1989). Social facilitation effects in coffeehouses. *Environment and Behavior*, Vol.21, No.6, pp. 651–666.
- Sulek, J. M., and Hensley, R. L. (2004). The relative importance of food, atmosphere, and fairness of wait. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, Vol.45, No.3, pp. 235–247.
- Sundström, M., Lundberg, C., and Giannakis, S. (2011). Tourist shopping motivation: go with the flow or follow the plan. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, Vol.3, No.2, pp. 211–224.
- Taylor, S. (1994). Waiting for service: The relationship between delays and evaluations of service. *Journal of Marketing*; *Journal of Marketing*, Vol.58, No.2, pp. 56–69.
- Taylor, S. (1995). The effects of filled waiting time and service provider control over the delay on evaluations of service. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol.23, No.1, pp. 38–48.

- Tone, T., and Kohara, K. (2007). A Study of the Effects of Congestion Information and a Priority Boarding Pass in a Theme Park with Multi-Agents. *IEEJ Transactions on Electronics, Information and Systems*, Vol.127, pp. 407–415.
- Wang, P. C. (2011). How can Restaurant Waiting Time Experience Influence on Different Customer Groups' Waiting Time Satisfaction? *Unpublished Phd Thesis*, Widener University. USA.
- Wu, H-C., Li, M-Y, and Li, T. (2014). A study of experiential quality, experiential value, experiential satisfaction, theme park image, and revisit intention. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, December, pp. 1-48.
- Yan, R., and Lotz, S. (2006). The waiting game: The role of predicted value, wait disconfirmation, and providers' actions in consumers' service evaluations. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol.33, pp. 412–418.
- Zhou, R., and Soman, D. (2003). Looking back: Exploring the psychology of queuing and the effect of the number of people behind. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.29, No.4, pp. 517–530.

**Gilda Hernandez Maskivker Ph.D.** is an assistant lecturer in the Department of Business Management at the University Rovira i Virgili (URV). She has a degree in Tourism and a Masters in Analysis Techniques and Innovation in Tourism. Her main research line is on waiting time in tourist services.

**Dr. Gerard Ryan** is Associate Professor in marketing at the Rovira and Virgili University and visiting professor at Cornell University, with over twenty years of experience in teaching, research and management in university education. He was a founding member of FHOM, which is part of the Catalan government's map of official research groups.

**Dr. Pàmies** is an assistant lecturer in the Department of Business Management at the University Rovira i Virgili (URV). Her main research interests lie in consumer behaviour with an emphasis on waiting in services.