

# Understanding Service Convenience

The subject of service convenience is important in service economies, yet little is known about this topic. The consumer convenience literature strong in certain respects, underdeveloped in other respects gives insufficient attention to service convenience. The prevailing pattern is either to treat service convenience generally or to lump services and goods together into an overall convenience construct. The authors seek to stimulate a higher level of research activity and dialogue by proposing a more comprehensive and multidimensional conceptualization of service convenience and a model delineating its antecedents and consequences. The authors build their case by systematically examining the convenience literature, explicating the dimensions and types of service convenience, developing the overall model and related research propositions, and presenting directions for further research.

**C**onsumer convenience in buying and using services is not well understood. Convenience is acknowledged to be increasingly important to consumers, yet no known research has defined the service convenience construct or examined how it is evaluated. Although most researchers and managers consider service convenience to involve more than locational proximity or hours of operation, the specific types of service convenience have not been established, and no comprehensive analytical framework has been presented in the literature.

Observers have long noted consumers' interest in conserving time and effort (see, e.g., Anderson 1972; Gross and Sheth 1989; Kelley 1958; Nickols and Fox 1983). This phenomenon has encouraged the development of convenience goods and services, increased advertisers' promotion of the time-oriented benefits of their products, and motivated consumers to use convenience as a basis for making purchase decisions (Anderson and Shugan 1991; Gross and Sheth 1989; Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). The continuous rise in consumer demand for convenience has been attributed to socioeconomic change, technological progress, more competitive business environments, and opportunity costs that have risen with incomes (Berry 1979; Etgar 1978; Gross 1987; Seiders, Berry, and Gresham 2000).

Because the demand for convenience has become so strong, marketers must develop a more precise and complete understanding of the concept. Convenience is integral to the marketing of both goods and services and merits deeper examination in both cases. Our focus in this article is service convenience, which we conceptualize as consumers' time and effort perceptions related to buying or using a service. We propose the different types of service convenience and consider how time and effort costs influence consumers' convenience perceptions.

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In some convenience studies, the distinction between service and goods convenience is clear. For example, consumers' convenience orientation has been related to all products that save consumers time and effort both "labor-saving" goods (e.g., frozen dinners) and services (e.g., child care). Some proposed aspects of the convenience construct are specific to manufactured goods. These include product size, preservability, packaging, and design, which can reduce consumers' time and effort in purchasing, storage, and use (Anderson and Shugan 1991; Kelley 1958). However, many discussions of goods-related convenience are distribution oriented, focusing on convenience related to the distribution of goods through retailers, which falls in the realm of service convenience. All types of convenience that reduce consumers' time or effort in shopping, such as operating hours or credit availability, belong to the domain of service convenience.

Service organizations create value for consumers through performances. All businesses are service businesses to some degree. Computer manufacturers and food retailers create consumer value through a goods-services mix. Commercial banks and hospitals create consumer value largely through services. Service convenience facilitates the sale of goods as well as the sale of services. Fast checkout in a retail store is service convenience, as are available, competent salespeople who help consumers find the right garment to buy. Because virtually all organizations create value for consumers through performances and because convenience is an important consideration for most consumers, it follows that understanding service convenience better is useful. The extant convenience literature offers little explicit discussion of service convenience. Much of this literature is relevant to service convenience but lacks the specificity and comprehensiveness that more focused efforts could bring. We seek to provide such focus in this article.

## The Convenience Literature

The concept of convenience first appeared in the marketing literature in relation to categories of products. Copeland's (1923) classification of consumer products included *convenience goods*: intensively distributed products that require minimal time and physical and mental effort to purchase.

Later product classification schemas also incorporated the convenience goods category (e.g., Bucklin 1963; Murphy and Enis 1986). Thus, in early marketing usage, “convenience” denoted the time and effort consumers used in purchasing a product rather than a characteristic or attribute of a product (Brown 1990). Focusing on resources such as time, opportunity, and energy that consumers give up to buy goods and services, some researchers began to view convenience as an attribute that reduces the nonmonetary price of a product (Etgar 1978; Kelley 1958; Kotler and Zaltman 1971).

Because the issue of nonmonetary cost is central to the convenience concept, literature related to time and energy expenditure (effort) is particularly relevant to our research. The literature on time is substantial and multidisciplinary in nature; the literature on effort is smaller and limited primarily to cognitive effort. Two specific marketing literature streams also are salient to our study. The first and most extensive stream is the consumer waiting literature, which examines how consumers respond to waiting and how firms manage the waiting process. The second stream focuses on consumer convenience orientation, examining why some consumers are more likely than others to purchase convenience-related goods and services.

### **Research on Time**

Researchers characterize time as a limited and scarce resource (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976); the term *saving time* actually means reallocating time across activities to achieve greater efficiency (Feldman and Hornik 1981). Time, unlike money, cannot be expanded; it is finite (Berry 1979; Gross 1987). Although time usage in consumption can be perceived as either an investment or a cost, it is more common to view it as a cost (Anderson and Shugan 1991). Becker (1965) incorporated time into the classic economic choice model, recognizing that time, like income and price, constrains choice. Economic household production models such as Becker’s acknowledge that time is used in production (work) and consumption (leisure): Consumers sell time in the labor market and buy it with time-saving goods and services (Feldman and Hornik 1981). Researchers following a time budget allocation approach view the cost of time as an opportunity cost of forgone income or participation in other activities (Bivens and Volker 1986). Consistent with economic theory, the marketing literature has assumed a relationship between time scarcity and consumers’ desire for goods and services that offer convenience.

Time-related consumer research includes studies of time allocation, temporal orientation and perception, and cultural influences (Gross and Sheth 1989; Voli 1998). Time allocation, an outcome of demographic, socioeconomic, and psychographic determinants, influences lifestyle and consumption behavior (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981). Consumer researchers have focused on time expenditures associated with information acquisition and choice behavior (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). Most studies have modeled and analyzed activities as if people performed them one at a time (monochronic time use), but respondents have reported

combining activities (polychronic time use) (Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991).

Studies indicate that people differ in their temporal orientation, including perceived time scarcity, the degree to which they value time, and their sensitivity to time-related issues (Bergadaa 1990; Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999; Graham 1981; Hornik 1984; Murphy and Enis 1986; Shimp 1982). Noting that cultural factors can affect attitudes toward time, Gagliano and Hathcote (1994) examine how cultural differences affect the evaluation of convenience. Luqmani, Yavas, and Quraeshi (1994) use convenience orientation as an international market segmentation variable.

Time has been classified according to work and nonwork roles; nonwork includes activities of necessary self-maintenance, household maintenance, and leisure (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981). Classifying activities allows an understanding of why noneconomic variables are significant—why consumers sometimes seek to prolong rather than minimize time expenditures (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). For example, consumers may choose a mode of travel that is more expensive and time-consuming than alternatives (Feldman and Hornik 1981).

### **Research on Effort**

Consumers’ energy expenditures, or effort, are acknowledged to be a distinct type of nonmonetary cost that, like time, influences perceived convenience (Seiders, Berry, and Gresham 2000) and satisfaction (Lovelock 1994). Downs (1961) cites the basic costs of consumption as money, time, and effort, and Mabry (1970) notes that stamina constraints, in addition to time and money constraints, influence choices among activities (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). In consumer convenience research, however, the role of energy expenditures has received far less attention than the role of time expenditures. Because the convenience literature has concentrated almost exclusively on saving time, attributes that save work are perceived instead as saving time (Brown 1990). For example, O’Shaughnessy (1987) explains performance-based product choice by noting that consumers buy time by using brands that are more labor saving (Voli 1998).

Effort has been viewed as a relevant and positive input to an exchange: In an equitable exchange, the more effort one party exerts, the more outcome he or she expects in return (see Oliver and Swan 1989). Youngdahl and Kellogg (1997) relate effort to time, thought (intellectual effort), and emotion. Mohr and Bitner (1995), in the context of employee behavior, suggest the dimensions of physical, cognitive, and emotional effort. These dimensions are likely to apply equally well to consumers of services.

The dimension of physical effort has received little attention in consumer research, and emotional effort has been explored only slightly more (in relation to the psychological costs of waiting). However, cognitive (or mental) effort has been the focus of many studies in psychology, decision theory, economics, and marketing (Bettman, Johnson, and Payne 1990). A consistent finding is that people have limited cognitive resources and, as cognitive misers,

conserve these resources during decision making (Fennema and Kleinmuntz 1995; Fiske and Taylor 1984). Studies suggest that people have only limited ability to estimate or predict how much effort will be required by a task (Fennema and Kleinmuntz 1995). Moreover, Bettman, Johnson, and Payne (1990) find significant individual differences in consumers' perceptions of required effort.

### **Consumer Waiting**

Several marketing studies have focused on the management of consumer waiting time (Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999; Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991). Researchers have defined two aspects of waiting time that influence consumers' evaluation of convenience (Davis and Vollmann 1990). *Objective* time is continuous and metric and can be measured by clocks. *Subjective* time is based on perceptions and influenced by psychological factors (Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999). Research suggests that consumers, on average, significantly overestimate time spent waiting (Hornik 1984).

Although waiting for service delivery traditionally has been treated as an economic (or time) cost, the psychological cost of waiting also has been documented by consumer researchers (Carmon, Shanthikumar, and Carmon 1995; Osuna 1985; Pruyn and Smidts 1998). The stress, boredom, anxiety, and annoyance often triggered by waiting influence consumers' service evaluations and satisfaction with the firm (Dube-Rioux, Schmitt, and Leclerc 1989; Kumar, Kalwani, and Dada 1997; Taylor 1994). Recent marketing studies have examined the factors that influence consumers' reactions to waiting and the methods firms can use to manage satisfaction with waiting (Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999; Pruyn and Smidts 1998; Taylor 1994). Among the factors widely cited as influencing consumers' perceptions of waiting are service, facility, and customer characteristics; perceived fairness of the wait; and information provided by the firm.

Aspects of a service that are believed to affect consumers include its value and importance and whether it can be obtained elsewhere or at another time (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Maister 1985). In necessary services, consumers have limited control and cannot "balk" (Carmon, Shanthikumar, and Carmon 1995). The stage of a service encounter (preprocess, in-process, postprocess) during which the delay occurs also can influence affective response. Service stage is argued to be influential relative to its distance to the consumer's goal for the service encounter (Dube-Rioux, Schmitt, and Leclerc 1989; Hui, Thakor, and Gill 1998). Preprocess waits are theorized to feel longer and be more unpleasant for consumers than in-process waits (Larson 1987; Maister 1985; Taylor 1994). Facility characteristics such as location, attractiveness, and the presence of distractions to occupy customer time are proposed to affect consumers' perceptions, though empirical results have been mixed (Baker and Cameron 1996; Davis and Vollmann 1990; Pruyn and Smidts 1998).

Consumers' individual differences also influence waiting perceptions. Consumers' expectations for the length of a wait are an internal reference that affects the consumers' willingness to accept the wait (Hui and Tse 1996; Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1995). Expectations vary according to a person's prior experiences with the service firm and its com-

petitors (Kumar, Kalwani, and Dada 1997). Other individual difference factors that influence perceptions of waiting include consumers' time orientation and sense of time urgency (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Taylor 1994).

The perceived fairness of a wait is believed to be a major influence on consumers' satisfaction (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Maister 1985). Fairness perceptions are influenced by attributions of controllability: When consumers believe that a service provider has control over a delay, affect and judgments of fairness and service quality are adversely affected (Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Seiders and Berry 1998; Taylor 1994). Seeking to understand the links among attribution, fairness, and satisfaction, researchers have examined the effect of offering consumers various types of information about waiting (Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Taylor 1994).

### **Convenience Orientation**

Convenience orientation refers to a person's general preference for convenient goods and services. Anderson (1972) was among the first to examine convenience-oriented consumption, focusing on the use of convenience-oriented food products and appliances. Yale and Venkatesh (1986) identify convenience preference as a distinct consumption strategy, and Morganosky (1986, p. 37) defines a convenience-oriented consumer as one who seeks to "accomplish a task in the shortest time with the least expenditure of human energy." More recent research defines convenience orientation as the value consumers place on goods and services with inherent time- or effort-saving characteristics (Brown 1990; Voli 1998). Researchers agree that convenience orientation has a major impact on consumers' buying decisions.

Several studies have sought to determine the factors that influence consumers' use of convenient goods and services. Convenience consumption has been operationalized by the use of convenience foods (e.g., frozen expensive entrees, ready-to-eat cold cereal), time-saving durables (e.g., microwave oven, dishwasher, freezer), and paid services (e.g., domestic services, child care). Total household income has consistently been found to correlate with convenience consumption. Other demographic variables proposed to relate to convenience orientation include age, occupation, wife's employment, hours worked per year by husband, residence, family size, stage in family life cycle, education, and socioeconomic status (Anderson 1971, 1972; Bellante and Foster 1984; Morganosky 1986; Nickols and Fox 1983; Reilly 1982; Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991; Strober and Weinberg 1980). Lifestyle variables considered relevant include time pressure, role overload, emphasis on leisure, hedonism, attention to mental and physical self-improvement, and devotion to work (Berry 1979; Etgar 1978; Fram and DuBrin 1988; Reilly 1982).

Many convenience orientation studies have reported inconclusive findings. Demographics believed to be related to time constraints have shown relatively weak and inconsistent relationships with convenience-oriented behavior (Voli 1998). In addition, problems in operationalizing the dependent variable have been noted (Bellante and Foster 1984; Reilly 1982). Although consumers' willingness to pay for convenience or to sacrifice convenience for a lower price is commonly acknowledged and cost-oriented and

convenience-oriented consumers have been found to be significantly different (Morganosky 1986), researchers have yet to understand the price–convenience trade-off process.

In summary, the research streams most related to service convenience are those focused on consumers' time and effort expenditures, consumer waiting, and convenience orientation. Although convenience orientation has been examined relative to services (e.g., Nickols and Fox 1983), no known studies offer an in-depth, explicit focus on service convenience. Thus, the extant literature is helpful only to a point. Much work needs to be done to further the understanding of service convenience. Toward this end, we propose an overall model of service convenience and related propositions in the next section.

## Model of Service Convenience

A conceptual model of service convenience is presented in Figure 1. Certain service characteristics, including some traditionally used to classify services, are important influences of consumer-perceived convenience. Specifically, convenience perceptions vary on the basis of whether a service is consequential, inseparable, supply constrained, labor intensive, or hedonic. Central to our model is the service convenience construct, conceptualized as consumers' time and effort perceptions related to buying or using a service. These

perceived time and effort expenditures encompass five defining types of convenience—decision, access, transaction, benefit, and postbenefit—which mirror the activities consumers undergo to purchase or use a service. The dimensions of time and effort can be viewed as the benefits of convenience (saving time and/or effort) or the burdens of inconvenience (wasting time and/or effort).

Service convenience is affected by a variety of firm-related factors, including the physical service environment, information provided consumers, company branding, and service system design. Individual consumer differences, such as a person's overall time orientation, time pressure, empathy toward the service provider, and prior experience, also affect convenience perceptions.

Perceptions of service convenience affect consumers' overall evaluation of the service, including satisfaction with the service and perceived service quality and fairness. The relationship between service convenience and service evaluation is moderated by consumers' attributions of firm controllability. In the sections that follow, we address the various constructs in our model and the key relationships among those constructs.

### *Service Characteristics*

Consumers perceive convenience differently according to the type of service they are buying or using. Researchers

**FIGURE 1**  
**A Model of Service Convenience**



have proposed several classifications that group services according to relevant marketing characteristics (Lovelock 1983). These classifications consider whether the service is tangible or intangible dominant (Shostack 1977), supply constrained (Lovelock 1983), equipment- or people-based (Kotler 1980), performed for people or their possessions (Hill 1977), or remote or face-to-face (Shostack 1985). Other frameworks consider the extent to which consumers participate in or co-produce the service (Chase 1978; Hubbert 1995).

Service characteristics most germane to convenience include consequentiality (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991), inseparability (Chase 1978; Hubbert 1995; Shostack 1985), supply constraints (Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml 1984; Lovelock 1983), labor intensiveness (Berry 1995), and hedonic value (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981).

*Consequential services* include those that are highly valued by consumers and/or involving (see, e.g., Murphy and Enis 1986). When waiting to purchase a service with a highly valued outcome, for example, consumers would likely be more tolerant of inconvenience. Most high-involvement purchases include relatively high levels of perceived risk, and consumers typically exert more cognitive effort when making high-involvement purchase decisions (Celsi and Olson 1988; Hawkins and Hoch 1992; Richins and Bloch 1986).

*Service inseparability* refers to the simultaneity and interconnectedness of service performance and use. Because inseparable services involve consumer participation (Kelley, Donnelly, and Skinner 1990), consumers' time and effort costs are heightened. If a service's *availability is constrained*, consumers will expect to spend more time and effort, and their convenience demands will lessen. Unless they are willing to forgo the service, consumers have no choice but to accept the added time and effort burden associated with supply constraints (e.g., waiting for a table at a popular restaurant).

*Labor-intensive services* introduce a degree of variability that is not usually found in equipment-intensive services or in goods. Expected differences in the skills and attitudes of service personnel encourage consumers to be careful in selecting a service provider. Consumers perceive time and effort costs differently for *hedonic services* that are pursued for pleasure (Bellante and Foster 1984). More time and effort can increase the value of a hedonic service.

The literature indicates that the nature and type of service influence consumers' sensitivity to time and effort expenditures and affect service convenience. Some types of convenience are likely to be affected more strongly than others. We further examine and formally propose these relationships in our discussion of the service convenience construct.

### **Service Convenience**

Intrinsic to consumers' perceptions of service convenience are the time and effort required to buy or use a service. Time and effort are nonmonetary costs consumers must bear to receive the service. The degree of cost varies, but the presence of some amount of time and effort cost is inherent. Time and effort are opportunity costs that prevent consumers from participating in other activities (see Bivens and Volker 1986).

Consumer assessment of time expenditures is both objective and subjective (Davis and Vollmann 1990; Hornik 1984, 1993). Time spent waiting often involves significant psychological costs (Carmon, Shanthikumar, and Carmon 1995; Osuna 1985; Pruyn and Smidts 1998) and affective reactions (Dube-Rioux, Schmitt, and Leclerc 1989; Hui and Tse 1996; Taylor 1994). Cognitive and affective judgments about waiting time affect each other reciprocally (Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999; Hornik 1993), though the influence of cognition on affect appears to be smaller than that of affect on cognition (Pruyn and Smidts 1998).

The marketing literature has emphasized the importance of consumers' desire for convenience and the value of time. In general, the greater the time costs associated with a service, the lower are consumers' perceptions of service convenience. An exception would be *time-investment* services, in which a service's duration, to a degree, increases its value, such as a cruise. Time-investment services often have hedonic value, which is especially relevant to discretionary activities pursued for their own sake rather than as a means to another goal (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981). Most services, however, are time-cost services rather than time-investment services.

Some elements of time evaluation—for example, that subjectivity is involved and that required expenditures are estimated in advance—can be applied to effort-related judgments. The physical and emotional dimensions of effort are likely to underlie the affective component of response to delay and other types of inconvenience, but these relationships are not explicitly stated in the literature. In many service exchanges, especially those requiring a consumer's participation, physical, emotional, and cognitive effort are all likely to be relevant.

Researchers argue that consumers seek to conserve cognitive effort (Fennema and Kleinmuntz 1995; Fiske and Taylor 1984). When people exert more cognitive effort in processing an alternative, they are likely to experience more negative affect (Garbarino and Edell 1997). Kahneman (1973) observes that though two mental tasks may take a similar amount of time, one might be perceived as requiring more effort than the other.

Whereas cognitive effort associated with purchase decisions is expended for both goods and services, physical and emotional effort may be greater for services in which consumers participate in the production process (Kelley, Donnelly, and Skinner 1990). Interacting with service providers may require significant effort from consumers (Surprenant and Solomon 1987). The more effort spent by a services consumer, the stronger is that consumer's commitment to the service outcome and the higher is the potential for frustration (Hui, Thakor, and Gill 1998). We suggest that physical and emotional efforts, similar to cognitive effort, are treated by consumers as scarce resources (Bettman, Johnson, and Payne 1990; Kahneman 1973). In the aggregate, consumers' perceptions of convenience are negatively influenced by their perceptions of the cognitive, physical, and emotional effort associated with the service.

Consumers' perceived expenditure of time and effort interacts to influence their perceptions of service convenience. Research that relates stress and other psychological costs of waiting to perceived time duration provides insights into the interactive effect of effort and time costs (Kumar,

Kalwani, and Dada 1997). The perception of high effort costs may inflate the perception of time costs, which occurs when a consumer who is supposed to be at work is waiting at home for a late-arriving plumber and expending involuntary mental and emotional effort during the wait. Alternatively, when consumers self-scan their grocery purchases, the voluntary effort they expend may reduce their perceived waiting time. Whereas consumers' voluntary effort to reduce time is likely to increase their perceptions of service convenience, involuntary effort is likely to make time costs more salient and decrease perceptions of service convenience.

### **Types of Service Convenience**

Time and effort saving are the two aspects of convenience most often cited in the literature (Anderson 1971, 1972; Anderson and Shugan 1991; Bellante and Foster 1984; Brown 1989, 1990; Gehrt, Yale, and Lawson 1996; O'Shaughnessy 1987; Reilly 1982; Strober and Weinberg 1980; Yale and Venkatesh 1986). Whereas some researchers (e.g., Luqmani, Yavas, and Quraeshi 1994) have labeled the convenience-related costs of time and effort as dimensions, others have defined distinct types or categories of convenience as dimensions.

Yale and Venkatesh (1986) divided product convenience into six types (e.g., accessibility, portability); later, it was found that these overlap, however, and do not represent discrete categories (Gehrt and Yale 1993). Drawing on economic utility theory, Brown (1989, 1990) proposed five types of convenience: time, place, acquisition, use, and execution. The execution dimension refers to the contracting out of previously performed tasks. Similar to Brown (1990), Anderson and Shugan (1991) used a convenience continuum to show that products with the highest levels of time- and effort-reducing attributes are those that represent an alternative to the consumer's own time and effort (see also Lovelock 1994). Shopping convenience has been examined by Seiders, Berry, and Gresham (2000), who developed a convenience framework related to consumer shopping speed and ease.

We propose five types of service convenience: decision convenience, access convenience, transaction convenience, benefit convenience, and postbenefit convenience. These convenience types reflect stages of consumers' activities related to buying or using a service. Consumers' perceived time and effort costs related to each type of service convenience affect the consumers' overall convenience evaluations. An activities-based approach to defining service convenience is consistent with the services literature. The study of service encounters and service design has evolved in response to the process and experience-oriented nature of services and service delivery (Shostack 1987). Service maps or blueprints, for example, define the steps in a service encounter by noting the sequence of consumers' activities (Heskett 1992; Zeithaml and Bitner 2000).

*Decision convenience.* Consumers who desire a particular performance devote time and effort to deciding how to obtain it. The first decision is whether to self-perform or purchase the service. A decision to purchase requires decisions on which supplier to use and what specific service to buy. Decision convenience involves consumers' perceived time and effort expenditure to make service purchase or used decisions.

Consumers confront the "make-or-buy" decision more commonly for services than for goods. Whereas many services lend themselves to self-performance, few goods lend themselves to self-manufacture. The decision to self-perform or buy can be complex. A service that is designed to save consumers time may be perceived as not worth the effort of finding a reliable supplier or monitoring that supplier's performance. One form of convenience may trigger another form of inconvenience. Consumers who self-perform services that are readily available for purchase often do so to conserve effort. For example, using an online bill-paying service may create a trade-off between time-saving convenience (contracting out bill payment) and effort-consuming inconvenience (worrying if the right payments are being made at the right time). One study reports that the main attraction of electronic bill-paying was "convenience" but that 37% of respondents using online bill-paying services said they disliked losing control and not knowing when a bill would be paid (Lloyd 2000).

Many services require special training or equipment, making purchase the only realistic option for most consumers. Service intangibility means that consumers inform their buying decisions without the benefit of prepurchase product inspection. Instead, they use surrogate evidence such as word-of-mouth communications, the company brand, and the appearance of service facilities and personnel. Unlike manufactured goods consumers, who also use surrogate evidence in making buying decisions, service consumers are totally reliant on such evidence.

Consumers have learned to expect variability in labor-intensive services and devote time and effort to finding services in which they can be confident especially services that are consequential, involving, complex, and recurring. Labor-intensive services with some or all of these characteristics are common, such as financial, professional, transportation, and health care services. Consumers of these services often seek enduring relationships with a supplier they can trust, in part because of the time and effort economies in repurchasing. Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner (1998) find that consumer confidence reduced anxiety and faith in the trustworthiness of the service provider is the most important benefit to consumers of maintaining a relationship with a service firm.

Informing service-buying decisions requires time and effort and is a facet of service convenience. Prior research has addressed how consumers reduce time and effort costs by enlisting the help of others such as opinion leaders (Montgomery and Silk 1971), surrogate shoppers (Solomon 1986), and market mavens (Feick and Price 1987). Demand for third-party support has spurred the growth of concierge agencies and personal shoppers as well as the creation of new online services. Some consumers use shopping bots (e.g., mysimon.com, bizrate.com) to locate the lowest prices in the market. Other Internet applications enable consumers to obtain the opinions of others, for example, restaurant rankings (e.g., zagat.com).

P<sub>1</sub>: Consumers consider decision convenience more important when selecting a labor-intensive service than a service perceived as less labor intensive.

*Access convenience.* Access convenience involves consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to initiate service delivery. It involves consumers' required actions to request service and, if necessary, be available to receive it. Consumers may initiate service in person (going to a restaurant), remotely (telephoning a take-out order), or through both means (telephoning for a reservation and then going to the restaurant). Service facility location, operating hours, parking availability, and remote contact options figure prominently in the access convenience of firms that rely on consumers' physical presence (Seiders, Berry, and Gresham 2000). Receiving the service, which may be separated by space and time from requesting it, can be affected by service delivery capacity and flexibility and the option to make appointments or reservations (Bitner, Brown, and Meuter 2000). Regarding access, convenience in buying a good falls in the realm of service convenience, such as the convenience of a store's location or a product's location in the store.

Access convenience typically plays a more complex role for inseparable services. Services performed directly for the consumer (such as a taxi service) rather than for the consumer's property (such as product repair) are usually inseparable. Inseparability means that consumers must synchronize their availability with the availability of the service. They shop when stores are open, fly according to an airline's schedule, and make appointments to see doctors. Users of manufactured goods need not be present at the factories where the goods are produced, but users of inseparable services must be present at a site where the services can be performed. Service inseparability heightens the importance of accessibility.

One reason for the growing use of self-service technologies, as discussed by Meuter and colleagues (2000), is that many of them reduce time and effort costs for inseparable services. Access convenience is a primary reason for consumers to self-perform certain services. Self-service reduces consumers' dependence on service providers whose accessibility may be inconvenient. Automatic teller machines are popular in part because they are available when financial institution offices are closed.

Nothing happens until consumers gain access to the service. Ultimately, services marketing success may rest on whether a convenience-minded consumer is willing to make a left turn into traffic to reach the service facility. The speed and ease with which consumers can access the service may powerfully influence the choices they make.

P<sub>2</sub>: Consumers using inseparable services will perceive access convenience as more important than will consumers using separable services.

*Transaction convenience.* Transaction convenience involves consumers' perceived expenditures of time and effort to effect a transaction. Transaction convenience focuses strictly on the actions consumers must take to secure the right to use the service. When consumers have decided to buy a service and have reached the service site, they still must participate in a transaction. An exchange must occur usually money for the promise of service performance. Transaction convenience inherently falls within the domain of service convenience. Completing transactions requires

firms to render performances (services) such as the checkout service.

The waiting time literature reveals the negative consequences for companies that make consumers wait too long to pay (Larson 1987; Tom and Lucey 1997). Waiting to pay can be the least rewarding act required of consumers. Consumers normally pay for (or agree to pay for) services before they experience them. The implication of transaction inconvenience is converging nonmonetary cost (time and effort) and monetary cost before consumers experience any benefits.

According to a Forrester Research report, two-thirds of Internet shoppers abandoned their "shopping carts" before actually buying something (Tedeschi 2000). Another study found that most Internet shoppers abandon their shopping carts in slow sites in as little as eight seconds (Cimino 2000). Transaction inconvenience (including required completion of detailed registration forms), though not the only cause of high abandonment rates, is a contributing factor. The e-commerce case illustrates a consumer convenience maxim that holds regardless of transaction format: Paying for services or goods is an unwanted chore.

Transaction inconvenience is an opportunity cost. Concurrent time usage generally is not practical for consumers whose presence is required in a queue. Moreover, consumers are inclined to perceive wait times to be longer than they actually are (Hornik 1984). Transaction inconvenience also can exact an emotional toll on consumers who incorrectly guess which of several queues to enter and become trapped in the slower line or who question the fairness of the service system (Larson 1987).

P<sub>3</sub>: Consumers are more likely to perceive higher time and effort costs related to transaction convenience than to decision or access convenience.

*Benefit convenience.* Benefit convenience is consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to experience the service's core benefits, such as being transported in a taxi or watching a movie. Moving consumers efficiently and effectively to the benefit stage of the service process only to inconvenience them at this point can have a powerfully negative effect because the perception of burden interferes with the perception of benefit.

Benefit convenience is illustrated by the example of an airline passenger who begins a connecting-flight trip with a scheduled 30-minute span between the arrival of the first flight and the departure of the second. The first flight arrives at the airport on time; however, the designated arrival gate is occupied by another aircraft. The passenger needs at least 10 minutes when inside the terminal to reach the departure gate of the connecting flight. Meanwhile, the arriving aircraft waits near the occupied gate for what turns out to be 27 minutes, and the passenger misses the connection. Officially, the plane is only about a half hour late, but the passenger experiences considerable benefit inconvenience. The extra time cost causes the passenger to be late for an important meeting. The effort cost, which includes sitting on the first plane with mounting anxiety and running through the airport to the connecting gate, also is high. Benefit inconvenience diminished the core benefit of the service.

Consumers do not normally seek to minimize time and effort costs in the benefit stage of a hedonic service experience (see Bellante and Foster 1984; Feldman and Hornik 1981; Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). Because time and effort are more often viewed as investments, benefit convenience does not play a prominent role in consumers' evaluation of these services. Decision, access, and transaction convenience remain salient, however.

P<sub>4</sub>: Consumers' negative perceptions of benefit convenience will have a more adverse effect on overall service convenience than will negative perceptions of decision, access, or transaction convenience.

P<sub>5</sub>: Consumers using services with high hedonic value will perceive benefit convenience as less important than will consumers using services with low hedonic value.

*Postbenefit convenience.* Postbenefit convenience involves the consumer's perceived time and effort expenditures when reinitiating contact with a firm after the benefit stage of the service. Postbenefit convenience can be related to a consumer's need for product repair, maintenance, or exchange. Sometimes consumers reinitiate contact because of a service failure that is not recognized or resolved during the service encounter—for example, when a consumer calls a house painter back for touch-ups. (Service failure and recovery also may occur during the service encounter and be subsumed into decision, access, transaction, or benefit convenience, as is discussed subsequently.) Some activities related to postbenefit convenience are initiated by service firms, as when a patient returns to a surgeon for a postoperative evaluation. Postbenefit convenience might be experienced as timely, nonintrusive reminders from a dentist to schedule routine appointments.

Research supports the importance of the postpurchase experience to overall consumer satisfaction (Berry and Parasuraman 1991; Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998), using a justice theory framework, find that perceived convenience of complaint handling increases consumers' satisfaction with that process. The importance of postbenefit convenience has been underscored in recent years because of difficulties encountered by consumers in returning products purchased over the Internet.

It stands to reason that consumers will perceive not having a postbenefit encounter to be more convenient than having such an encounter unless they receive additional benefit. Consumers spend their time and effort resources to receive benefits. They have no incentive to spend more of these resources without the expectation of additional benefit. The postsurgery patient is likely to be willing to return to the surgeon for a follow-up appointment, because the surgeon can reassure the patient, offer advice, or determine a new course of recuperative treatment.

P<sub>6</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of postbenefit convenience will be positively correlated with their perceptions of the benefit received from the follow-up service.

*Service failure and recovery.* Consumer recovery efforts related to service failure can characterize postbenefit inconvenience, as mentioned previously. Service failure and

recovery efforts also can affect decision, access, transaction, and benefit convenience, according to the stage at which the failure occurred and the stage at which it was recognized by the consumer. Service failure can affect decision convenience if a consumer is given incorrect information, access convenience if an online connection fails or a parking area has no vacancies, transaction convenience if an incorrect price is charged and its correction delays a consumer, and benefit convenience if a dining experience is flawed by unresponsive service.

In general, the less time and effort required of consumers to effectively deal with a failed service, the better is the recovery service. Research conducted by Federal Express showed that 77% of complaining consumers were satisfied with the recovery service if they could resolve their complaint through only one contact. Only 61% were satisfied if they were sent to a second company representative (*The Service Edge* 1991). An extensive literature exists on effective service recovery. Several frequently mentioned guidelines involve service convenience, including making it easy for consumers to complain, responding quickly, and keeping consumers informed (Berry and Parasuraman 1991; Hart, Heskett, and Sasser 1990; Rust, Subramanian, and Wells 1992; Tax and Brown 1998; Zemke and Bell 1990).

### ***Firm-Related Factors***

A firm's marketing and operations can dramatically influence consumers' perceptions of service convenience. Studies have examined initiatives designed to reduce the actual length of a wait and improve consumers' response to waiting (Kumar, Kalwani, and Dada 1997). Firm-related factors that affect consumers' perceived convenience include service facility distractions and enhancements (Baker and Cameron 1996; Bitner 1992), information that clarifies required time and effort costs (Whitt 1999), the company brand (Berry 2000), and the design of the service system (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Meuter et al. 2000).

*Service environment.* Research suggests that consumers typically overestimate time spent waiting when they are in a passive mode (Davis and Vollmann 1990; Hornik 1984). Maister (1985), in his theory of queue psychology, argues that because unoccupied time feels longer, time perception is influenced by the degree to which waiting time is filled up. Environments that offer engaging activities (distractions) and enhancements increase satisfaction (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991) and moderate perceived waiting time and affective responses (Hui, Thakor, and Gill 1998). For example, televisions in airports for travelers and free appetizers served to restaurant patrons who are not yet seated are welcome distractions intended to offset perceived waiting costs. Although some studies examining the use of distractions have produced inconclusive results (Pruyn and Smidts 1998), considerable evidence suggests the effectiveness of this approach (Houston, Bettencourt, and Wenger 1998; Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Taylor 1995).

Elements that enhance the service environment have been shown to positively influence consumers' affective



responses in general (Bitner 1990, 1992) and reactions toward waiting in particular (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994). Music has been found to reduce both the perceived length of a wait and emotional effort costs related to waiting (Hui, Dube, and Chebat 1997; Kellaris and Kent 1992). The presence of an appealing scent in a service environment also can create positive affect and reduce the perceptions of time spent (Mitchell, Kahn, and Knasko 1995).

P<sub>7</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of service convenience will be higher for service firms whose environments provide engaging distractions and enhancements.

*Consumer information.* Several researchers have examined the effects of providing consumers information about the potential waiting time (Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Taylor 1994). Osuna (1985) argues that it is appropriate to inform consumers about wait times, and the failure to provide this information adds psychological cost. When people are uncertain about the length of a wait and have limited information, stress typically will increase (Hui, Thakor, and Gill 1998; Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1995; Maister 1985; Osuna 1985). This psychological stress may be reduced when consumers are informed about the expected length of the wait and/or the reasons for a delay (Hui and Tse 1996; Larson 1987; Whitt 1999).

Because anxiety makes a wait seem longer, uncertain and unexplained waits are perceived to require more time and effort cost than waits that are defined or explained (Houston, Bettencourt, and Wenger 1998; Maister 1985). Providing information is particularly effective in situations in which consumers endure long waits for service (Hui and Tse 1996). Although information can reduce consumer uncertainty and minimize negative attributions of firm controllability, its effectiveness varies according to the type of information offered and the type of wait (Hui and Tse 1996; Osuna 1985).

P<sub>8</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of service convenience will be higher when they receive information that reduces their uncertainty about required time and effort costs.

*Company brand.* Branding plays a special role in service companies, because strong brands increase consumers' trust of the invisible, enabling them to better visualize and understand the service and reduce their perceived risk. This positive response to a brand, related to brand meaning and awareness, is considered brand equity (Keller 1993). Whereas the product is the primary brand in packaged goods, the company is the primary brand for services. This is due in part to service intangibility: An automobile insurance firm, such as USAA, cannot package and display its service the way Kraft packages and displays food. Even more important is the source of consumer value creation. Brand impact shifts from product to firm as service plays a greater role in determining value (Berry 2000).

Consistent with cue utilization theory (Jacoby and Olson 1977), research suggests that consumers use brand names to assess the quality of goods and services (Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991; Rao and Monroe 1989). Consumers can reduce time costs through brand loyalty; buyers under time pressure are less likely to adopt a new brand (Hafstrom, Chae, and Chung 1992; Howard and Sheth 1969; Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). A strong service brand offers consumers decision convenience by functioning as a time-

and effort-saving heuristic. Because brand equity offsets the perceived risk in selecting a service or service provider, the choice process may be simplified and decision convenience enhanced. Buying an invisible service from a respected organization is an appealing option for many consumers.

P<sub>9</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of service convenience will be positively correlated with a firm's brand equity.

*Service system design.* Service system design is instrumental in managing the time and effort costs required for consumers to use a service. Environmental psychology suggests that the most important role of space in a facility is promoting the goals of its occupants (Canter 1983; Darley and Gilbert 1985). Spatial layout and functionality are especially important in limited- or self-service environments, where the availability of employee assistance is minimal (Zeithaml and Bitner 2000). For example, store layout and design influence consumers' efficient movement through a store (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994; Titus and Everett 1995) and affect their goals of getting in and out quickly and finding the desired merchandise easily (Seiders, Berry, and Gresham 2000).

Probably the most significant convenience research related to service system design is studies of queue management. Whereas early research involved company cost minimization, more recent studies have incorporated consumers' service expectations, justice perceptions, and psychological costs (Carmon, Shanthikumar, and Carmon 1995). For example, consumers' aversion to unfairness has been found to create a preference for queues that are guaranteed first-come, first-served even when the queue and the wait are longer (Larson 1987; Pruyn and Smidts 1998).

Technology is a key adjunct to service system design (see Meuter et al. 2000). Technologies specifically designed to improve consumer convenience can affect each type of service convenience. For example, toll-road users who display E-Z Pass computer-chip tags on their automobile's front window derive transaction convenience. Patients served by doctors using electronic medical records may receive more benefit convenience. Intelligence embedded in an organization's information systems and available to service providers can improve not only information content but also speed of delivery (Bitner, Brown, and Meuter 2000). Technology can streamline service performance by automating manual processes that are slower and more error prone. Well-designed technologies can give consumers more control and more options, including the option to be their own service providers. Online technology enables consumers to be their own stockbrokers or travel agents. Pay-at-the-pump technology allows gasoline purchasers to be their own cashiers and save the time and effort of walking to a facility (and possibly entering a queue) to pay. Not all consumers will prefer a self-service option, even if one is provided. Self-service technologies are most likely to improve consumers' convenience perceptions when consumers can choose the mode of service—full-service or self-service.

P<sub>10</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of service convenience will be influenced by their perceived fairness of a firm's queue design.

P<sub>11</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of service convenience will be higher for a firm that offers a choice between full-service and self-service when self-service technology is available.

### **Individual Consumer Differences**

Several individual consumer characteristics may influence convenience perceptions. A consumer's tolerance for inconvenience may be partially explained by demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, income) or shopping style (Bergadaa 1990; Goldman 1977; Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). However, in this article we explicitly focus on the role of time orientation (Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991; Shimp 1982), perceived time pressure (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Taylor 1994), empathetic feelings (Bagozzi and Moore 1994; Thompson 1997), and consumer's experience with service providers (Hui and Tse 1996; Kumar, Kalwani, and Dada 1997; Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1995).

*Time orientation.* Consumers differ in their time orientation and approaches to allocating time (Bergadaa 1990; Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999). Researchers have studied cultural differences related to monochronic and polychronic time use, present and future orientations, linear and cyclic time concepts, and beliefs on whether time is finite (Graham 1981; Hall and Hall 1987; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961). Studies examining cultural differences in attitudes toward time indicate that time and energy conservation influences buying behavior (Hafstrom, Chae, and Chung 1992; Luqmani, Yavas, and Quraeshi 1994).

Polychronic (concurrent) time use, which enables people to accomplish several goals at the same time, is preferred by consumers who view time as a scarce resource and plan its use carefully (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976; Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991). Research suggests the need for service providers to offer consumers more opportunities to be polychronic to combine activities thus reducing their perceived time costs (Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991). For example, some mall parking garages offer car detailing and servicing for customers while they are shopping. Consumers who are culturally influenced to view time as a finite resource are likely to be particularly sensitive to the time costs of activities (Shimp 1982). Accordingly, cultural differences in time orientation have been found to have an effect on perceptions of convenience (Gagliano and Hathcote 1994).

P<sub>12</sub>: Consumers who are given the opportunity to engage in polychronic time use will have more favorable perceptions of service convenience than other consumers.

P<sub>13</sub>: Consumers who view time as finite will have less favorable perceptions of service convenience than consumers who view time as nonfinite.

*Perceived time pressure.* The situational variable of time pressure, which occurs when people perceive their available time to be insufficient (see Landy et al. 1991), also has been found to affect people's time allocation strategies (Bergadaa 1990; Durrande-Moreau and Usunier 1999; Hornik 1982, 1984). For example, situational time pressure will affect a consumer who must complete a task quickly to meet a deadline (e.g., shopping for a birthday gift on the way to a birth-

day party). Time pressure is considered a lifestyle variable by convenience orientation researchers, who relate it to role overload (Reilly 1982).

People who are more concerned about time than others may be susceptible to the physical and psychological symptoms associated with strain when time demands are high (Landy et al. 1991). When influenced by required expenditures of time such as waiting, time pressure may trigger strong, negative emotions such as impatience and helplessness and result in particularly negative convenience perceptions (Hui and Tse 1996; Maister 1985).

P<sub>14</sub>: Consumers influenced by situational time pressure will perceive lower service convenience than will those who are not time pressured.

*Empathy.* Empathy, which is identified as an other-focused emotion (as opposed to an ego-focused emotion), involves feeling compassion for others in a social or interpersonal context. Whereas ego-focused emotions (e.g., pride, anger) are exclusive of others and reflect the need for individual expression, empathy satisfies the need for unity and harmony by fostering feelings of affiliation and connectedness (Aaker and Williams 1998). Empathy has been related to altruism in that it is an emotional response, driven by personalized norms and internalized values, motivating one person to help another (Thompson 1997). Aspects of empathy include perspective taking, compassion/pity, and protection motivation (Bagozzi and Moore 1994).

Empathetic responses vary across individuals, and those most likely to experience empathy possess either high empathetic ability (prior experience with the need faced by someone else) or an emotional attachment to a particular issue (Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi 1996). Consumers may demonstrate empathy toward a service provider by taking his or her perspective in a service experience. This has been defined as cognitive role taking (Stephens and Gwinner 1999). Such responses may cause consumers to exhibit self-control and refrain from voicing dissatisfaction in a service encounter. Feelings of empathy with a service provider are likely to affect consumers' convenience perceptions: With greater empathy, perceived time and energy costs will be lower.

P<sub>15</sub>: Consumers who are empathetic toward a service provider will perceive higher service convenience than will consumers who are not empathetic.

*Experience.* Prior research has consistently demonstrated that consumers' experience or familiarity influences how they use information to make decisions and assess goods and services (Brucks 1985; Rao and Monroe 1988; Sujana 1985). As consumers gain experience with service providers, decision convenience costs decline as provider choice sets become smaller and relationships solidify. However, when consumers are inexperienced making their first overseas trip, for example decision convenience costs will rise. When people relocate to a new town and move from an experienced to an inexperienced status, they will invest significant time and energy resources to rebuild supplier networks. The work of Solomon (1986) and others suggests that a consumer's perceived self-expertise is inversely related to the probability of seeking help with purchase

decisions; for example, low confidence may mediate the likelihood of enlisting the services of an interior decorator, wardrobe consultant, or stockbroker.

Prior research has demonstrated that consumers have scripts and schemas for specific situations and transactions, and the more developed these schemas, the more easily evaluations are formed (Goodstein 1993; Sujun 1985; Wansink and Ray 1996). When new information is consistent with past schemas (and experiences), evaluations are more favorable (Wansink and Ray 1996). Consumers who know where to go and what to do as participants in a service operation minimize wasted time and energy. Experience influences service expectations and affects convenience perceptions. For example, satisfaction with waiting is related to expectations for the length of a wait, which is determined in part by a consumer's experience with a firm (Davis and Vollmann 1990; Hui and Tse 1996; Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1995). Therefore, consumers' familiarity with a service provider is likely to improve their perceptions of convenience (Kumar, Kalwani, and Dada 1997).

P<sub>16</sub>: Consumers who are familiar with a service provider's systems will perceive higher service convenience than will consumers who are unfamiliar with them.

### **Service Evaluation**

Researchers have consistently found that consumers' evaluation of waiting time affects their satisfaction with the service. Several waiting time studies report a strong relationship between consumers' evaluation of the wait and overall service satisfaction. For example, Carmon, Shanthikumar, and Carmon (1995) find dissatisfaction with waiting for services to be highly correlated with overall satisfaction judgments. Kumar, Kalwani, and Dada (1997) and Pruyn and Smidts (1998) find that consumer satisfaction increases when waiting time proves to be shorter than expected. Houston, Bettencourt, and Wenger (1998) find that perceived waiting time affects overall service quality. Their results suggest that waits perceived to be unacceptable negatively affect service quality perceptions, even for relatively unimportant transactions. Keaveney (1995) finds that service inconvenience contributes to consumer switching behavior.

Researchers also have considered the impact of consumer-perceived fairness on servicesatisfaction and quality (see, e.g., Seiders and Berry 1998; Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998). Convenience perceptions in general are likely to affect consumers' evaluation of service fairness. Equity theory (see Adams 1965), which focuses on distributive justice, relates fairness to the equitable balance of input (such as time and effort) and output among exchange partners. The relationship between consumers' justice perceptions and their attitude toward waiting has long been noted in the literature (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Larson 1987).

Consumers' convenience perceptions and their effects on service evaluation are likely to be influenced by attributions of blame for unexpectedly high time and energy costs (Bitner 1990). Whether the inconvenience is deemed within or beyond the control of the firm has been found to play a central role in consumers' emotional responses and cognitive assessments (Katz, Larson, and Larson 1991; Maister 1985;

Taylor 1994). We expect the relationships between consumers' perceptions of service inconvenience and their evaluations of quality, satisfaction, and fairness to be moderated by their attributions of control to the service provider. More specifically, when consumers believe that a service provider has control over service inconvenience, their judgments of quality, satisfaction, and fairness are likely to be more negative (Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Seiders and Berry 1998; Taylor 1994; Weiner 1986). Airline passengers are less likely to blame an airline for a weather-related delay than a delay believed to be caused by management-union tensions.

P<sub>17</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of convenience will have a positive influence on their (a) satisfaction with the service, (b) assessments of service quality, and (c) perceptions of fairness.

P<sub>18</sub>: Consumers' perceptions of inconvenience will more adversely affect their evaluation of a service when they believe the inconvenience was controllable.

### **Further Research**

This article provides a conceptual framework designed to guide further research in the domain of service convenience. Developing scales to assess the five types of service convenience and empirically testing the propositions presented offer avenues for further research. A crucial early step is to develop an instrument to measure the types of service convenience. We have identified some items for illustrative purposes and present them in this section. The items could be assessed using a Likert format.

Decision convenience is consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to make service purchase or used decisions:

- It took minimal time to get the information needed to choose a service provider.
- Making up my mind about what I wanted to buy was easy.
- It was easy to get the information I needed to decide which service provider to use.

Access convenience is consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to initiate service delivery:

- It was easy to contact the service provider.
- It did not take much time to reach the service provider.
- I was able to get to the service provider's location quickly.

Transaction convenience is consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to effect a transaction:

- I did not have to make much of an effort to pay for the service.
- They made it easy for me to conclude my purchase.
- I was able to complete my purchase quickly.

Benefit convenience is consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to experience the service's core benefits:

- I was able to get the benefits of the service with minimal effort.
- The service was easy to use.
- The time required to receive the benefits of the service was appropriate.

Postbenefit convenience is consumers' perceived time and effort expenditures to reinitiate contact with the service provider after the benefit stage of the service:

- The service provider resolved my problem quickly.
- It took little effort to arrange follow-up service.
- Theserviceprovidermadeiteasyformetoresolve myproblem.

When researchers have developed psychometrically valid scales for consumer perceptions of service convenience, the propositions advanced in this article could be tested by means of experimental and survey methods. Ostrom and Iacobucci (1995) provide a relevant discussion of the experimental methodology needed to manipulate various kinds of services. In their research, they explicitly examine the role of experience versus credence services. A similar procedure could be used to manipulate various service characteristics, such as labor intensiveness, inseparability, and hedonic value. Such procedures would involve manipulating these factors and asking subjects to assess their perceptions and the relative importance of the five types of service convenience. For example, researchers could test  $P_1$  by manipulating labor intensity of the service (high, low) and asking subjects to assess the aforementioned measures.

Experimental research also could provide important insights on the convenience effects of the firm-related variables, such as service facility enhancements and the availability of information. The four firm-related factors could be individually manipulated (i.e., four studies with a between-subjects design having two levels). The service environment could be manipulated using the presence versus the absence of engaging activities (e.g., music videos) at the checkout counter, similar to the approach used by Pruyn and Smidts (1998). Providing consumers with information about potential wait times could be manipulated as either the presence versus absence of the information (see Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Taylor 1994) or the duration of the wait time. The service provider brand could be manipulated at high versus low levels of brand reputation or equity (see the research on manipulating brand names by Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal [1991]). Service system design could be manipulated using the presence versus absence of a time-saving option (e.g., self-scanners) (see the research by Meuter et al. [2000] and Bitner, Brown, and Meuter [2000]). The critical dependent variable in these studies would be the service convenience construct, which could be operationalized as the sum of each type of service convenience (decision, access, transaction, benefit, and postbenefit) weighted by its importance. Postbenefit convenience would enter the summation only when applicable. Such a research design would enable testing of  $P_7$ ,  $P_8$ ,  $P_9$ , and  $P_{11}$ .

Alternatively, a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  research design could be used to test the effects of any three firm-related factors. Such a design would enable the researcher to test the complicated interactions between the firm-related factors and service convenience. For example, by examining the effects of time-saving options, brand equity, and wait time information, researchers could investigate the effects of the three two-way interactions. It might be expected that the effects of time-saving technology options on consumer perceptions of

convenience would be more pronounced for a well-regarded service provider (i.e., an interaction between service delivery technology and the service brand). Another possible interaction is between the wait time information factor and the brand reputation factor. The effect of providing wait time information is likely to be more pronounced for well-known than for less-known providers because the information probably will be viewed as more credible and accurate. Finally, the presence of time-saving options will particularly enhance perceived convenience when consumers are aware of the potential wait (i.e., consumers will have a greater opportunity to employ the time-saving options). Studies such as these would benefit from developing interaction hypotheses and testing both main and interaction effect hypotheses.

Survey methods could be used to assess individual consumer differences, such as time orientation ( $P_{12}$  and  $P_{13}$ ), time pressure ( $P_{14}$ ), empathetic feelings ( $P_{15}$ ), and level of experience ( $P_{16}$ ). The effects of these factors on service convenience and, in turn, its effect on satisfaction ( $P_{17a}$ ), quality ( $P_{17b}$ ), and fairness ( $P_{17c}$ ) could then be assessed using causal modeling procedures. In our article, we do not explicate the moderating effects that these individual consumer differences may have on the effects of firm-related factors on perceived service convenience. Further research needs to specifically examine and test these relationships. For example, the effects of self-service delivery options on service convenience ( $P_{11}$ ) are likely to be more pronounced for consumers who view time as a scarce resource or are operating under time pressure.

## Discussion

Service convenience is consumers' time and effort perceptions related to buying or using a service. Service convenience is a pervasive construct and an important issue. It is pervasive because all marketing performances that require consumer time and effort fall within its domain. It is important because time and effort are resources people must give up to become consumers. Time is nonrenewable and effort depletable. Societal trends such as the participation of women and mothers in the labor force and technological advances that create more communications, information, and entertainment options have placed added pressure on people's time and effort resources. Frequently, marketing effectiveness is more a function of saving consumers time and effort than saving them money.

It is useful to make a distinction between service convenience and goods convenience. Services performed directly for consumers require their presence where and when the service is available—on the plane at departure time, in the classroom during the lecture. Buying intangibles also requires consumers to make purchase decisions without inspecting the product. For some services, this may be of little practical significance. However, consumers may invest considerable time and effort to select nonstandardized, labor-intensive services that are personally important. Understanding service convenience better will help marketers improve the value of their market offers. Because goods marketing depends on support services such as per-

sonal selling, credit, and checkout, service convenience facilitates the marketing of goods, not just the marketing of services.

Service convenience is more instrumental to consumers in some situations than in others, for both determining the choice of a service firm and evaluating a firm's performance. The three sets of antecedents in our model address the influence of convenience on both choice and evaluation. Service characteristics identify conditions in which convenience may be particularly valuable to consumers, whereas firm-related factors identify company actions or traits that affect how favorably consumers rate convenience. Individual consumer differences identify characteristics that affect both the perceived importance of convenience (e.g., the degree to which a consumer is time pressured) and how favorably it will be rated (e.g., a consumer's level of empathy with service firm employees).

We propose that service convenience has two dimensions—time and effort. Consumers spend time and effort deciding on, accessing, transacting for, and benefiting from a service. They may also need to spend more time and effort after the service encounter. The relative importance of these convenience types varies across situations, services, and consumers. For example, waiting in an automobile queue to pay a bridge toll (transaction convenience) is likely to be more inconvenient to a driver who is late for an appointment than to many others in the same queue. Access convenience is particularly important for inseparable services, whereas decision convenience is central to consequential and labor-intensive services. All forms of service convenience are likely to be more salient to convenience-oriented consumers (Morganosky 1986; Yale and Venkatesh 1986).

A service can be convenient in some ways, inconvenient in other ways. One type of inconvenience may cancel the positive effects of other types of convenience. Consumers' perceptions of service convenience directly affect their perceptions of a firm's service quality and their satisfaction with a specific encounter or experience. Because time and effort are personal resources consumers must give up to buy or use a service, fairness issues also may surface when consumer convenience expectations are violated.

### **Improving Service Convenience**

Consumers' service convenience perceptions are influenced not only by the characteristics of the service and individual consumer differences but also by firm-related factors. Marketers can do much to improve consumers' convenience perceptions. They can lower consumers' actual time and effort costs in many cases and can almost always improve the quality of consumers' waits for service. Information is an essential tool. Of particular importance is information that (1) reduces consumers' uncertainty and anxiety about delays ("The doctor is running about 20 minutes late."), (2) helps consumers use the service system properly ("Please use this line for mailing packages outside of the United States."), and (3) explains the reasons for delays ("Because of the inclement weather, air traffic control is slowing the arrival of aircraft to the airport.").

Gathering information about consumers and using it to anticipate their requirements also can lead to improved con-

venience. Ritz-Carlton is among several hotel chains that use information technology to predict consumers' preferences and customize the service experience accordingly, such as assigning repeat guests to a preferred room pre-stocked with their favorite beverages and snacks. Walgreens' satellite-based information system, known as Intercom Plus, reduces consumer waiting time through an automated queuing process that has prescriptions ready when consumers want to pick them up.

Understanding the core issue underlying each convenience type is critical to improving service convenience. Decision convenience is important because making decisions about intangible and variable services can be difficult for consumers. Firms can reduce the difficulty through clear, accessible information and brand-strengthening efforts that include reliable service performance. Not only does convenience affect service quality, but service quality also affects convenience. Consumers who are confident about a firm's service quality because of their past experiences have an easier service-supplier decision to make than consumers who lack confidence.

Access convenience is important because so many services require consumers' participation. Consumers must be present at the right time and place. Firms can improve access convenience by (1) offering consumers multiple ways to initiate service, including the use of self-service technologies; (2) separating required front-end administrative tasks in time and place from the benefit-producing part of a service, such as allowing consumers to reserve a rental car online; (3) bringing the service to the consumer rather than bringing the consumer to the service; and (4) reducing consumers' time and effort in moving from the core service (such as buying a home) to functionally related services (such as mortgage financing and homeowners' insurance).

Transaction convenience is important because waiting to pay is especially unrewarding for consumers. *The Wall Street Journal* reports studies in which 83% of women and 91% of men indicate that long checkout lines have prompted them to stop patronizing a particular store (see Nelson 2000). McDonald's has determined that sales increase by 1% for every six seconds consumers save in using the drive-through window (Ordonez 2000).

Benefit convenience is important because a service's benefit is what consumers invest resources (including time and effort) to receive. Benefit inconvenience is common. Viewers complain about having to sit through too many commercials when watching telecasts of major sporting events such as the Olympics. Restaurant consumers complain about entrees that arrive at the table too late or too soon. Benefit inconvenience can reduce the benefit.

Postbenefit convenience is important because consumers must allocate additional time and effort resources to reinitiate contact with a firm after a service encounter. In the case of a service failure, consumers' time and effort expenditures are not only additive but also unanticipated. Postbenefit inconvenience is exacerbated by recency effects; it comes at the end of the consumer's service experience.

## More Questions Than Answers

Much useful research has been done on one aspect or another of consumer convenience. The waiting time literature is particularly robust, yet the convenience literature in marketing is neither cohesive nor mature. Questions dominate answers. Marketers know convenience is important to consumers even if they are not always sure how to deliver it.

Service convenience is uncharted territory. It tends to be either treated generally in the services literature or lumped into a broader convenience construct for which distinctions between goods and services are not made. Yet a distinction

between goods and service convenience is necessary. Manufactured goods convenience includes issues such as product form, size, packaging, and preservability. Service convenience leads in some other directions. Our quest in this article was to integrate the consumer convenience and services literature to propose a comprehensive model of service convenience. We know of no other such model and hope our model will stimulate needed research in this subject area. In service economies that include so many time- and energy-impooverished consumers, learning more about service convenience should be a priority.

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