

When for whom and why do frontline employees with disabilities affect perceptions of retail brands.

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This report was prepared by:
Dr Frank Mathmann



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Note

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Workers with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce (Rosenbaum et al., 2017) and there is a need for additional insights into how retailers specifically can employ workers with disabilities in frontline customer-facing roles (ARA, 2021). However, consumers' lack of acceptance of such employees, in terms of lower satisfaction and retail brand perceptions, may represent a barrier for employment opportunities.

We define customer satisfaction as a customer's judgement about whether their expectations are fulfilled by the service experience (Oliver, 2010; Lechner & Mathmann, 2021). On the other hand, Retail Brand Service Quality Perceptions are defined as a customer's evaluation of a brand's service with an emphasis on its quality relative to other brands (Bruner et al., 2001; Keller & Aaker, 1992). Specifically, as a consumer enters a retail store, they may create an overall impression of the service quality that affects the retail store brand.

This report begins with a discussion relating to the overall customer satisfaction toward employees with a disability based on a sample of 269 consumers. Overall, we find that consumers expressed slightly less satisfaction with employees who have disabilities, compared to employees with no visible disability.

The research shows that in retail settings consumers behave in generally two ways. Hence, to gain deeper insights, the sample was further segmented into either 'prevention' or 'assessment' focussed. 'Prevention' and 'assessment' motivations can be considered on a spectrum – consumers might be high or low prevention focussed, while others might be high or low assessment focussed.

'High' prevention focussed consumers tend to be concerned with avoiding negative outcomes by focussing on safety, security and the avoidance of risks. For example, these types of consumers tend to be more risk-averse, which may be reflected in a greater interest in preventing negative health outcomes or purchasing home security products. In contrast, assessment motivated consumers tend to compare and evaluate to make the right decision in terms of correctness but also morality. Consumers who are high 'assessors', will take considerable time considering a variety of products, before choosing the correct alternative, while low 'assessors', will often make impulsive purchase decisions. In other words, assessors tend to be 'think vs do'.

When the data was re-analysed with these two segments in mind, results found those consumers who were high in 'assessment' and 'prevention' indicated higher satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities. Whereas those consumers identified as low in 'assessment' and 'prevention' motivation were less satisfied. Retail Brand Service Quality Perceptions are thus higher when high prevention and high assessment consumers interact with employees who have disabilities.

This research aimed to determine:

- 1) Customer segments for which employees with disabilities lead to higher satisfaction with the service experience.
- 2) Customer segments for which employees with disabilities lead to lower satisfaction with the service experience.
- 3) The impact on Retail Brand Service Quality Perceptions as a result of engaging with a disabled employee.
- 4) Recommendations on how these segments may be best reached within a retail sector.

The present research documents an online experiment with four key findings and related recommendations. The report first offers a summary of key findings and recommendations, then provides a detailed overview of key aims, and a methods summary. Next, key findings and related recommendations are presented in detail along with related analyses and finally, limitations and detailed research methods are provided.

Key findings and recommendations

Finding 1: The findings indicate that customer satisfaction with the experience they have with frontline employees (irrespective of employee disability) is a key driver of Retail Brand Service Quality Perceptions. This means the service experience they encounter, either negative or positive, will impact their evaluation of the overall service quality of the retail brand.

Finding 2: Customer satisfaction and perceived retail brand service quality was slightly more negative for frontline employees with disabilities compared to employees who do not have a disability, suggesting average consumers prefer not to engage with employees who have a disability.

Recommendation: To increase acceptance for frontline employees with disabilities, retailers should employ workers with disabilities in locations where consumer segments show a) higher satisfaction with these employees and b) higher perceived retailer brand service quality after interacting with these employees. Findings 3 and 4 will provide further insights into these types of consumers.

Finding 3: Consumers with a high assessment (compared to low assessment) motivation show higher satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities. Satisfaction was measured as a customer's judgement about whether their expectations are fulfilled by the service experience (Oliver, 2010; Lechner & Mathmann, 2021). Customers with a strong assessment motivation want to "do the right thing", in terms of making the most accurate decisions (Kruglanski et al., 2000), and also the most moral decision (Kanze et al., 2019) rather than making quick, less informed decisions or actions. Given their increased interest in morality, high assessment consumers are thus more satisfied with employees who have a disability. In our sample Male (vs. Female) consumers have stronger assessment motivations, implying relatively higher satisfaction with disabled frontline employees.

Recommendation A: The research found males had a higher assessment motivation. Accordingly, high assessment motivated consumers may be segmented for retailers that operate across geographic locations with varying gender ratios (e.g., mining towns) or retailers that have a higher percentage of male customers (e.g., hardware stores, automotive retailers). By employing workers with disabilities in such environments, acceptance of employees with disabilities can be fostered (Rogers, 2003).

Recommendation B: Retailers can put consumers in a high assessment mindset through marketing communications (Avnet & Higgins, 2003; Mathmann et al., 2017). For instance, advertisements that use words such as "consider", "right", or "reflect" activate consumers high assessment orientations (Kanze et al., 2019) and thereby increase satisfaction with employees who have disabilities.

Finding 4: High prevention (compared to low prevention) focussed consumers show higher satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities. Once again, satisfaction was measured as a customer's judgement about whether their expectations are fulfilled by the service experience (Oliver, 2010; Lechner & Mathmann, 2021). A high prevention focus refers to a customers' motivation for avoiding negative outcomes (vs. approaching positive ones) in purchase situations. Customers with a strong prevention focus are likely to take fewer risks and tend to repeat past decisions, rather than try new things (Crowe & Higgins, 1997) implying higher loyalty. When engaging with disabled

employees, these consumers are more sensitive toward the employees' circumstances, rather than their own needs (Lechner & Mathmann, 2020).

Recommendation A: It is therefore recommended for retailers to segment prevention focussed consumers by focussing on loyal consumer groups, consumers with high spending on safety goods, such as preventative health supplements from pharmacies, or consumers who pay for non-essential insurance services. As an example, this implies that pharmacies, particularly those with a loyal consumer group, are a good location for programs that include employees with disabilities in consumer-facing roles.

Recommendation B: Customers have also been found to be more likely to adopt a high prevention focus when interacting with female workers (irrespective of their own gender) (Kanze et al., 2018). For example, females are more commonly evaluated in terms of how they can prevent negative outcomes, compared to male counterparts (Kanze et al., 2018). Hence, given that the work of females is commonly evaluated with a high prevention mindset which we found to be beneficial for employees with disabilities, it is recommended that inclusion programs should ensure an appropriate representation of female employees with disabilities.

Recommendation C: Finally, retailers can activate consumers prevention focus through marketing communications. In-store advertisements that use words such as "risk", "safety" or "careful" may lead consumers to think and act with a stronger prevention focus (Crow et al., 2021; Kanze et al., 2018; 2019; Lechner & Mathmann, 2020), resulting in increased acceptance for employees with disabilities. Such advertisements have been found to improve the evaluation of service employees, even if the advertisement itself is about a specific product, rather than the employee (e.g., "these safety glasses prevent injuries"; Lechner & Mathmann, 2020).

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KEY AIMS

Frontline employees are of key interest for Australian retailers and workers with disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Hence, there is a need for insights into how retailers specifically can employ workers with disabilities in the organizational frontline (ARA, 2021). In Australia, 17.7% of the population (4.4 million people) have a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Among this group, working-aged people have a lower employment rate (53.4%) than those without disability (84.1%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In the context of these numbers, it is important to note that in 2018 one in 10 (9.6%) people with a disability aged 15 years and over had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months because of their disability, up from 8.6% in 2015 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). For the retail context specifically, one way to address these issues may be to create wider acceptance of frontline employees with disabilities among consumers. Considering this issue, this research aims to identify:

1. Customer segments for which employees with disabilities lead to higher satisfaction with the service experience.
2. Customer segments for which employees with disabilities lead to lower satisfaction with the service experience.
3. The impact on Retail Brand Service Quality Perceptions as a result of engaging with a disabled employee.
4. Recommendations on how these segments may be best reached within a retail sector.

Specifically, a detailed investigation of the impact of shopping experiences with frontline employees on retail brand perceptions is provided. The focus will be on considering potential positive outcomes and solutions for employing frontline staff with disabilities. This is a major gap in the literature, because, while other frontline employee characteristics have been investigated (e.g., employees' displays of emotions; Lechner & Mathmann, 2020; Lechner, Mathmann & Paul, 2020; Employee Ethnicity; Houston, Grandey & Sawyer, 2018; Employee body shapes: Otterbring et al., 2018), employees with disabilities have received limited attention and remain underemployed across many sectors (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

While tasks such as cleaning and restocking items have traditionally been associated with workers who have disabilities, retailers may need more insight into where, when, and for which customers employees with disabilities in the organizational frontline result in the most positive outcome. We conducted an online experiment to determine customer segments for whom interacting with workers with disabilities affects customer satisfaction, to determine where and how retail stores may best employ this group. We expected that certain customers may generally react more positively to employees with disabilities and show a more positive perception of the retail brand after such interactions. Specifically, consumers who have a distinct motivation for avoiding negative outcomes in purchase situations (i.e., consumers with a high prevention focus) (Higgins, 2012), and consumers with a strong motivation for evaluation (i.e., consumers with a high assessment motivation) show more positive reactions than consumers who do not have such motivations.

A high prevention focus refers to a customers' motivation for avoiding negative outcomes (vs. approaching positive ones) in purchase situations. A customer with a strong prevention focus is likely to take fewer risks and tends to repeat past decisions, rather than try new things (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Customers with a strong assessment motivation on the other hand want to "do the right thing", in terms of making the most accurate (Kruglanski et al., 2000), but also the most moral decision (Kanze et al., 2019) rather than taking quick action. Our findings are grounded in the notion that purchasing from frontline employees with disabilities may be perceived as facilitating social integration and

opportunities for employees with disabilities by high assessment and prevention focussed consumers, which in turn has implications for consumer segmentation and advertising.

Empirical research on consumer responses to disabled frontline employees is limited, while the literature suggests that this should be an important area for inquiry (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Specifically, previous research acknowledges that frontline employees – and thus also disabled frontline employees - may play an important role in the social servicescape (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Moreover, there are initial indications from service environments such as hotels that highlight how some tourists seek out hotels that employ disabled employees (Gröschl, 2013). However, researchers in the hotel industry also indicated a managerial preference for employees who have certain aesthetic qualities and self-presentation skills, and recent evidence suggests that this would be mirrored in retailing (Otterbring et al., 2018). This represents an employment barrier for persons with disabilities which prevent them from entering sectors such as hotels (Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson 2003; Warhurst et al. 2000). Persons with disabilities may be perceived by managers and co-workers as lacking the required innate capacities and attributes that are needed for employment in certain sectors (Nickson, Warhurst, and Dutton 2005).

Going back to retail and services specifically, while there is ample evidence that retail shoppers respond to sales associates' physical attributes (Kim & Kim, 2012; Otterbring et al., 2018), research on how consumers react to frontline employees with disabilities in the retail domain is limited (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Moreover, there has been no research on how frontline employees with disabilities shape key retail metrics such as consumers' perceptions of the retail brand, satisfaction or how consumers react to frontline employees with visible disabilities specifically. This is a major oversight, given the importance of this group and the underrepresentation of this group in the workforce (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

Method Summary

Consumers were randomly assigned to one of two online survey conditions, where they were asked to read a scenario that involves a store visit, which either included interactions with an employee who was described as having a visible disability (Version A) or who has not (Version B). The following scenario was presented.

Imagine you are going to a department store to purchase a blender. As you enter the store, you are greeted by an enthusiastic employee [with a visible disability (only presented in version A)]. You went about your shopping and found the blender you were looking for in the home section. It has the right colour and all the technical specifications you were looking for.

The remainder of the survey was identical to all respondents. Participants indicated their perception of the retail brand and completed several survey questions regarding their motivation for avoiding negative outcomes in purchase situations (i.e., high prevention focus), their motivation for evaluation (i.e., assessment motivation), and their demographic background, which helped us to understand whether the effects of disabled frontline employees would differ between consumer segments.

To execute this research, 300 respondents were recruited on a crowdsourcing platform (Amazon Mechanical Turk). Of those responses, 29 were incomplete and 2 cases were removed due to non-sensical response patterns (one respondent indicated being 2 years old and the other one indicated an age of 338). A final sample of 269 respondents was assessed for further analysis. Within this sample, we had 178 Males and 91 Females. The average age was 34.78 years with a standard deviation of 9.68 years. The youngest participant was 19 years old and the oldest one was 73.

Beyond the above-mentioned data cleaning two key steps were taken to verify the validity of our findings:

Firstly, we ensured the reliability of our dependent variables, satisfaction, and retailer brand service quality perceptions by performing a reliability analysis. This reliability analysis yielded an acceptable level of reliability for the satisfaction measure ($\alpha = .66$) and retailer brand service quality perceptions ($\alpha = .89$).

Secondly, we tested whether participants in version A (the version containing the description of an employee with a visible disability) actually perceived that the scenario contained a frontline employee with a visible disability. An independent samples t-test indicated stronger agreement with the statement "there was a disabled service employee in the scenario" in version A ($M=5.11$; $SD=0.98$) than in version B ($M=3.90$; $SD=1.78$) ($t(267) = -6.932, p < .001$).

Key Findings

Finding 1: Customer satisfaction with frontline employees is a key driver of Retail Brand Service Quality Perceptions

As a first step, it is important to consider critical frontline employee-related predictors of brand service quality. A linear regression analysis was performed for our first finding, which highlights that satisfaction with frontline employees increased perceived brand service quality ($\beta=1.13$, $t=17.78$, $p<.001$). Figure 1 visualizes this relationship.

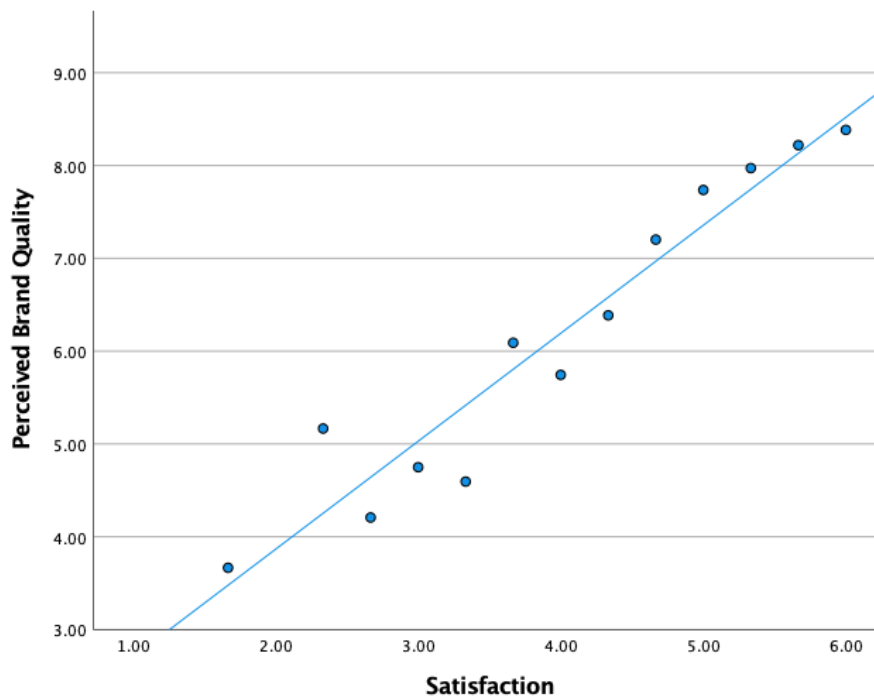


Figure 1: Positive relationship between customer satisfaction and Perceived Brand Service Quality

We considered this finding for subsequent analyses by focusing on satisfaction, as well as retail brand service quality perceptions.

Finding 2.1: Customer satisfaction with frontline employees is slightly higher with employees who do not have a disability

Given the importance of customer satisfaction for retail brand service quality perceptions, the next step was to investigate whether frontline employees with disabilities (compared to frontline employees without disabilities) influence satisfaction. An independent samples t-test indicated stronger satisfaction with employees who have no disability ($M=4.90$; $SD=0.78$) compared to those who do ($M=4.84$; $SD=.77$). However, this difference was found to be statistically insignificant ($t(267) = 0.61$, $p > .05$). In that sense, our findings suggests that there are differences, and a larger sample would be useful to determine their magnitude.

Recommendation:

- For retailers, this means that there may be consumer-acceptance based barriers and psychographic analyses of consumers (cf. finding 3-4) are necessary to identify consumers

who show higher satisfaction with employees that have disabilities to create acceptance in the wider population (Rogers, 2003).

However, before we consider such segments, there will also be a test for differences in perceived brand service quality after service interactions with employees who do (not) have a disability (cf. finding 2.2).

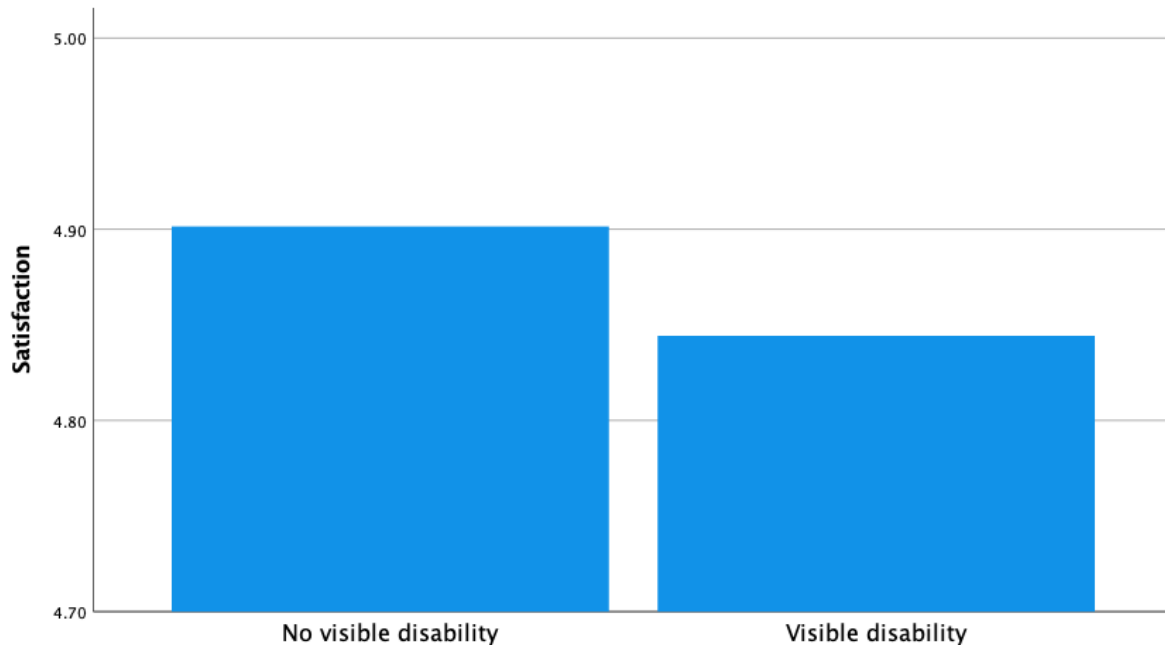


Figure 2: Customer satisfaction with frontline employees with disability vs. no disability.

Finding 2.2: Perceived Brand Service Quality is slightly higher after service interactions with employees who do not have a disability

Mirroring finding 2.1, an independent samples t-test indicated stronger perceived brand service quality after interactions with employees who have no disability ($M=7.35$; $SD=1.39$) compared to those who do ($M=7.23$; $SD=1.32$), which, again was statistically insignificant ($t(265) = 0.68$, $p > .05$). This means that our findings suggests that there are differences, and a larger sample may be useful to determine their magnitude.

Recommendation:

- Together with finding 2.1, this finding highlights clearly, that initiatives that focus on integrating employees with visible disabilities into the retail and service environment need further support as consumers do neither exhibit higher satisfaction, nor higher perceived brand service quality for retailers who employ frontline staff with disabilities.

The remainder of the report will proceed to identify psychographic and demographic consumer characteristics so that retailers can focus on more supportive consumer groups first, before generating wider acceptance of frontline employees with disabilities (Rogers, 2003).

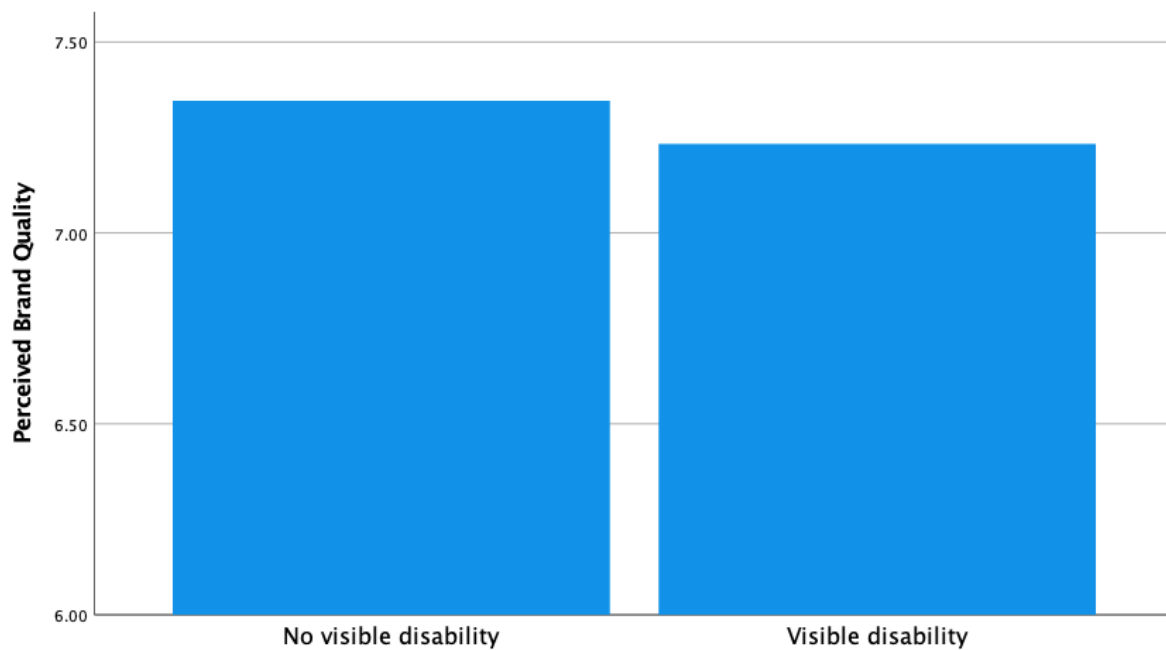


Figure 3: Perceived Brand Service Quality after interaction with frontline employees with disability vs. no disability.

Finding 3: Consumers with a high assessment motivation (a motivation for evaluation) show higher satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities than those with a low assessment motivation

Finding 3 highlights consumer differences that affect satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities in terms of consumers’ motivation for evaluation (i.e., assessment motivation). Satisfaction is defined as a customer’s judgement about whether their expectations are fulfilled by the service experience (Oliver, 2010; Lechner & Mathmann, 2021). Specifically, to test whether consumers with a high assessment motivation react more positively to frontline employees with a disability in terms of their satisfaction, we performed a linear regression analysis. The effects of assessment (A) and employee disability (vs. not) (B) together with their interaction (A x B) were entered into a linear regression analysis.

Replicating finding 2.1, the results yielded no significant effect of frontline employee disability when considering the population across the entire low vs. high assessment spectrum, and a negative effect of consumers’ assessment motivation ($\beta = -4.24, p < .05$).

Importantly, there was a two-way interaction between consumers’ assessment motivation and frontline employee disability ($\beta = .27, p < .05$). This effect suggests that consumers with a high assessment motivation react more positively to frontline employees with a disability than consumers with a low assessment motivation. Specifically, consider a consumer with a low assessment motivation (i.e., Assessment: -2.58, lower values indicate lower assessment, while higher values indicate higher assessment). For such a consumer, exposure to a frontline employee with a disability had a negative marginal effect on satisfaction ($\beta = -.63, p < .10$). On the other hand, for consumers with a high assessment motivation (i.e., Assessment: 2.25) exposure to a frontline employee with a disability had a positive marginal effect on satisfaction ($\beta = .67, p < .10$),

This finding results in three key recommendations:

- Firstly, it highlights consumers can be segmented based on their satisfaction with frontline employees who have a disability as consumer demographics are correlated with key demographic variables. For instance, as we will discuss in more detail below, male consumers tend to show higher assessment motivations than females, which implies relatively higher satisfaction with consumers who have a disability. Consequently, retailers that have a larger number of males (e.g., hardware stores or automotive retailers), or retail stores in locations with largely male demographics (e.g., supermarkets in mining towns), may be good locations to build momentum for the acceptance of frontline employees with disabilities. Retailers who cater to low assessment consumers (i.e. females) on the other hand such as beauty retailers, fast fashion retailers or other retailers focussed on female clothing, may be a less appropriate environment for workers with disabilities. Next, we will confirm that assessment relates to consumer gender, which is beneficial for retailers as it showcases how, by creating frontline employee strategies that expose male consumers to frontline employees with a disability, broader acceptance can be fostered for disability in the retail workplace.
- Secondly, by using the correct messaging retailers may also temporarily place consumers in a high assessment mind state (Avnet & Higgins, 2003). For instance, previous research has found that online banner advertisements in emails (Mathmann et al., 2017), mission statements (Kanze et al., 2019), product names (Collinson et al., 2020), and even tweets (Crow et al., 2021) all have the capability of creating a high assessment mind state if designed in the right way. For instance, the use of words such as “consider”, “right”, or “reflect” in in-store adverts could increase satisfaction with employees who have a visible disability. In-store advertisements may prompt consumers to “consider our local produce” or “choose the right tire”, thereby creating a high assessment mind state that benefits the evaluation of employees with disabilities.
- Finally, while using a survey instrument like the one we employed in this research may not be feasible or scalable in a cost-effective manner nation-wide, previous research has highlighted consumers may also reveal their assessment motivations in social media posts through the use of words such as “consider”, “right”, or “reflect”, which can be determined cost-efficiently in an automated fashion (Crow et al., 2021). Consequently, a retail conglomerate such as Wesfarmers may test whether consumers who interact with Bunnings (vs. Kmart) have higher assessment motivations. If confirmed, they could then start programs for frontline employees with disabilities at retail brands that have the most assessment-motivated consumer base.

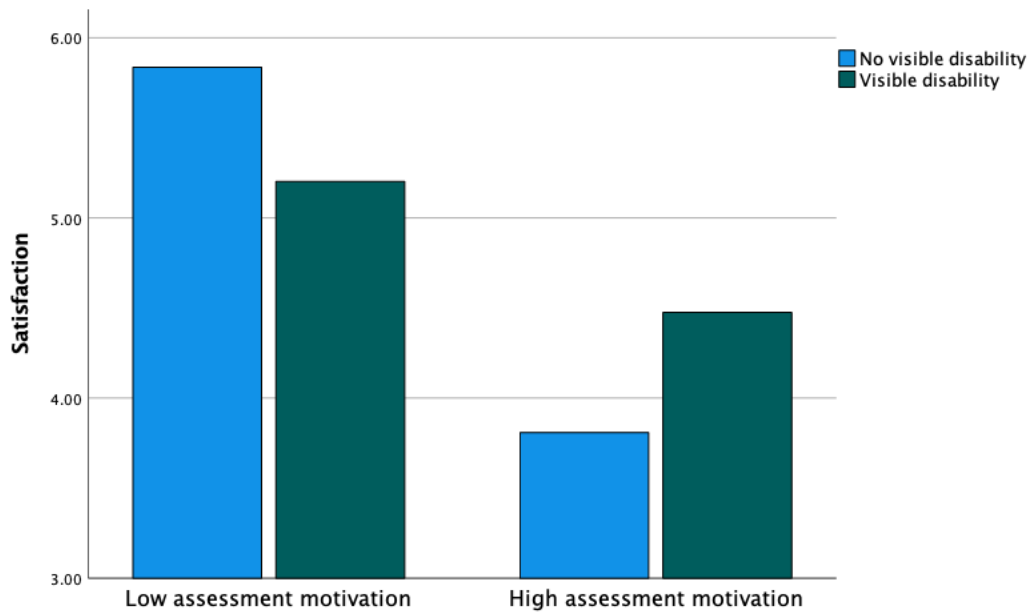


Figure 4: Satisfaction with frontline employees with disability vs. no disability depending on assessment motivation.

Male (vs. Female) consumers have higher assessment motivations, implying relatively higher satisfaction with disabled frontline employees

Measuring assessment motivations may not always be feasible in the retail environment. However, retailers may have demographic data on their consumers (such as their gender) that correlates with consumers’ assessment motivations. To test the relationship between assessment and gender, an independent samples t-test indicated significantly higher assessment motivations for males ($M=.18$; $SD=.63$) than females ($M=-.46$; $SD=.71$) ($t(273) = 3.32, p > .01$).

Recommendations:

- Thus, strategies to increase acceptance of frontline employees may be targeted at male-dominated retail outlets such as hardware stores or automotive retailers, sections of department stores that receive a higher percentage of male visitors such as the male section in stores that sell clothing like Target or Rebel, or locations with a predominantly male demographic such as supermarkets in mining towns. Thus, recent efforts by Bunnings to integrate employees with disabilities (Breakthru, 2021) are supported by our findings as an effective way to promote integration.

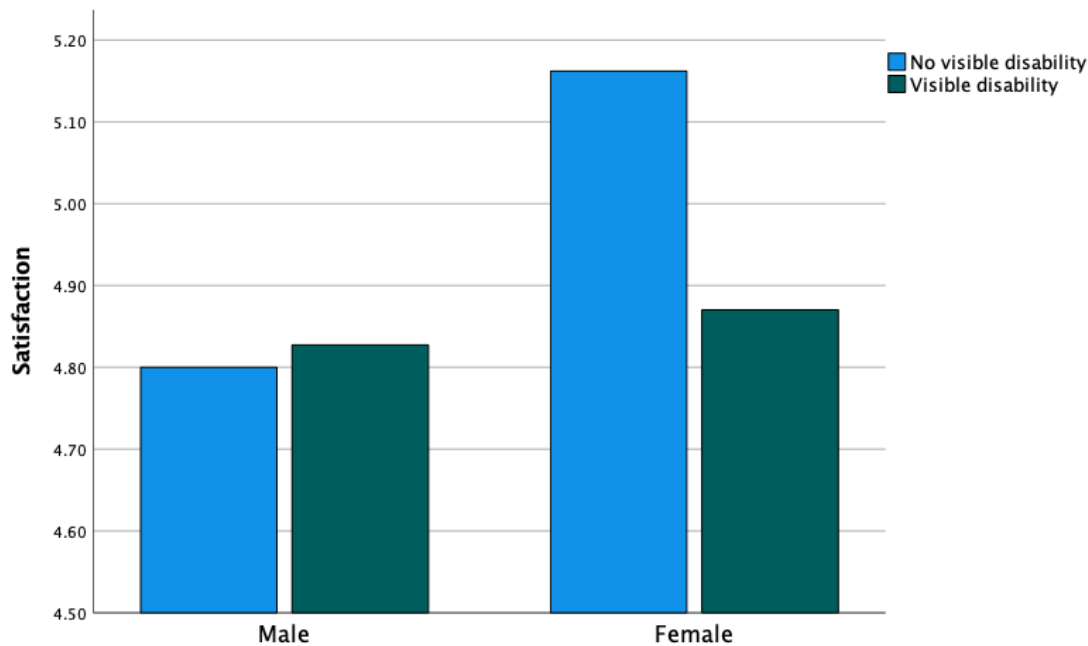


Figure 5: Satisfaction with frontline employees with disability vs. no disability depending on gender.

Finding 4: High prevention focussed consumers show higher satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities than low prevention focussed consumers

Finding 4 identifies a second consumer segment that determines satisfaction with frontline employees who have disabilities. Specifically, to test whether consumers with a high prevention focus react more positively to frontline employees with a disability in terms of satisfaction, we performed a linear regression analysis. The effects of high prevention (A) and employee disability (vs. not) (B) together with their interaction (A x B) were entered into a linear regression analysis.

The results yielded no significant effect of frontline employee disability (mirroring insight 2.1), and a negative effect of prevention focus ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$).

Importantly, there was a two-way interaction between prevention focus and frontline employee disability ($\beta = .27, p < .05$). This effect suggests that participants with a higher prevention focus react more positively to frontline employees with a disability than consumers with a low prevention focus. Specifically, consider a consumer with a low prevention focus (i.e., prevention: -1.36, lower values indicate lower prevention, while higher values indicate higher prevention). For such a consumer exposure to a frontline employee with a disability would have a negative significant effect on satisfaction ($\beta = -.26, p < .05$). On the other hand, for consumers with a high prevention focus (i.e., prevention: 1.87) exposure to a frontline employee with a disability had a positive marginal effect on satisfaction ($\beta = .60, p < .10$). Thus, this highlights a different way in which consumers may be segmented based on their satisfaction with frontline employees who have a disability.

Four recommendations can be derived from this finding:

- Firstly, retailers may segment consumers based on their prevention focus. High prevention focussed consumers are known to repeat decisions and care for safety (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Hence retailers may pilot programs that integrate employees with disabilities first in locations with a loyal, repeat purchasing consumer base or in locations with consumers who

show a high interest in security and safety-related products. For instance, pharmacies may be suitable employers for consumer-facing workers with disabilities. Similarly, electronics and hardware stores that sell home safety goods such as security cameras may have a suitable consumer segment as well. Finally, retailers such as Woolworths may consider home insurance sales (which Woolworths sells). In locations where sales indicate a high prevention focussed consumer base, satisfaction with employees who have disabilities is likely higher and barriers in terms of consumer acceptance can be overcome by piloting employee with disability employment programs with these consumers first. Retailers that face a consumer base which has a low prevention mindset, such as alcohol retailers, fast food retailers, or video game retailers, may be a less suitable environment.

- Secondly, previous research suggests that consumers take on a high prevention focus when evaluating the work of females (Kanze et al., 2018), irrespective of their own gender. Hence, given the increased satisfaction with frontline employees with a disability when consumers have a high prevention focus, retailers are recommended to ensure the appropriate inclusion of female frontline employees with disabilities.
- Thirdly, like high assessment motivations, consumers high prevention focus' can be activated through marketing materials (Kanze et al., 2018; Lechner & Mathmann, 2020). For instance, social media posts that use words such as "risk", "safety" or "careful" can get consumers into a prevention mind state (Kanze et al., 2018). Previous research has shown that such marketing communications can have desired effects on the satisfaction with service employees even if they are product-related (Lechner & Mathmann, 2020). For instance, a hardware retailer may advertise safety glasses in-store as "preventing risks" or "ensuring safety", creating a high prevention mindset among consumers which would increase satisfaction in subsequent interactions consumers have with employees with disabilities. Similarly, scripts that retailers use to describe how workers should interact with customers have been found to get consumers into a high prevention mind state when they emphasize health and the avoidance of risks (Lechner & Mathmann, 2020).
- Finally, retailers can determine their consumers' prevention orientations by analysing social media posts. Consumers who use words such as "risk", "safety" or "careful" are likely more prevention focussed (Kanze et al., 2018) indicating more support for workers with disabilities.

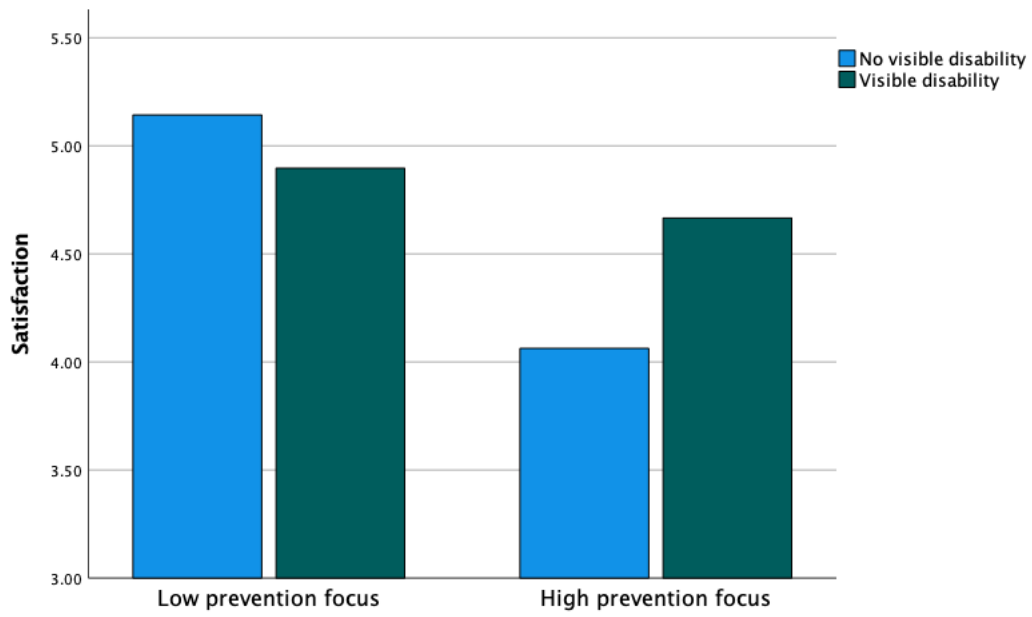


Figure 6: Satisfaction with frontline employees with disability vs. no disability depending on prevention focus.

Limitations and future research

No research is without limitations and the present work is no exception to that. This section will not only discuss limitations but also discuss how future research can utilize alternative methods to address these.

Perhaps the most important limitation of this research relates to its external validity, which refers to the degree that the study represents, and the findings generalize across, other contexts and consumption settings (Heerde et al., 2021; Lynch 1982). Unlike qualitative methods, which also have their limitations, quantitative methods, and experiments always represent a simplification of the real world. For instance, in our study, we looked at consumer reactions to frontline employees with a visible disability. We assume that findings would generalize to interactions with frontline employees that have different disabilities, however, in the absence of a formal experiment, residual uncertainty regarding generalizability remains. Perhaps even more importantly, as a cost-efficient and convenient approach, the present research confronted participants with a hypothetical scenario and asked questions regarding attitudes and intentions. Future research should examine behaviour in an actual store and consider actual spending behaviour. Research on consumers reactions to brands posts on social media (cf. recommendations related to 3 and 4) represent an alternative, and more cost- and time-efficient way, to investigate actual consumer reactions to retailer marketing at scale.

Another important limitation to note is socially desirable responding (Podsakoff et al., 2003). While socially desirable responses may affect absolute values within the disability condition (cf. finding 2.1 and 2.2), differences across segments in terms of responses by high assessment and prevention participants (finding 3 and 4) cannot be explained by socially desirable responses. Thus, strategies suggested in this report should still yield desired results irrespective of socially desirable responses.

Research Methods

The following pages offer an overview of all methods involved in this research. Note that *headings* were not given to participants to prevent hypothesis guessing (Podsakoff et al., 2003), but rather, are only added here. Also, participants were randomly assigned to either the control condition scenario or the disability condition scenario, not both. Citations in brackets next to headings indicate scientific references that document the validity of respective measures.

Control condition Scenario

Imagine you are going to a department store to purchase a blender. As you enter the store, you are greeted by an enthusiastic employee. You proceeded with your shopping and found the blender you were looking for in the home section. It has the right colour and all the technical specifications you were looking for.

Disability condition Scenario

Imagine you are going to a department store to purchase a blender. As you enter the store, you are greeted by an enthusiastic employee with a visible disability. You proceeded with your shopping and found the blender you were looking for in the home section. It has the right colour and all the technical specifications you were looking for.

Satisfaction (Homburg, Koschate & Hoyer, 2005)

Please respond to the following questions.

| | 1 Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 Strongly agree |
|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. All in all, I would be satisfied with this shopping experience | | | | | | |
| 2. The shopping experience would meet my expectations | | | | | | |
| 3. The scenario compares to an ideal shopping experience. | | | | | | |

Brand Service Quality (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Kumar 2005 a, b)

Please indicate how you would feel about the retail brand after this hypothetical shopping experience.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| Low quality | | | | | | | | | | High quality |
| Not at all likely to try | | | | | | | | | | Very likely to try |
| Inferior | | | | | | | | | | Superior |
| Bad | | | | | | | | | | Good |
| Worse than other brands | | | | | | | | | | Better than other brands |
| Negative | | | | | | | | | | Positive |

Manipulation Check

| | 1 Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 Strongly agree |
|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| There was a service employee with a disability in the scenario. | | | | | | |

Assessment (Kruglanski et al., 2000; Mathmann et al., 2017)

Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to your beliefs and experiences.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Slightly disagree | Slightly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly agree |

1. I don't mind doing things even if they involve extra effort.
2. I never evaluate my social interactions with others after they occur.
3. I am a "workaholic."
4. I feel excited just before I am about to reach a goal.
5. I enjoy actively doing things, more than just watching and observing.
6. I spend a great deal of time taking inventory of my positive and negative characteristics.
7. I like evaluating other people's plans.
8. I am a "doer."
9. I often compare myself with other people.
10. I don't spend much time thinking about ways others could improve themselves.
11. I often critique work done by myself and others.
12. I believe one should never engage in leisure activities.
13. When I finish one project, I often wait awhile before getting started on a new one.
14. I have never been late for work or for an appointment.
15. I often feel that I am being evaluated by others.
16. When I decide to do something, I can't wait to get started.
17. I always make the right decision.
18. I never find faults with someone I like.
19. I am a critical person.
20. I am very self-critical and self-conscious about what I am saying.
21. By the time I accomplish a task, I already have the next one in mind.
22. I often think that other people's choices and decisions are wrong.
23. I have never hurt another person's feelings.
24. I am a "low energy" person.
25. Most of the time my thoughts are occupied with the task that I wish to accomplish.
26. I feel that there is no such thing as an honest mistake.
27. I rarely analyze the conversations I have had with others after they occur.
28. When I get started on something, I usually persevere until I finish.
29. I am a "go-getter."
30. When I meet a new person I usually evaluate how well he/she is doing on various dimensions (e.g., looks, achievements, social status, clothes).

Prevention focus (Higgins, 2012)

This set of questions asks you HOW FREQUENTLY specific events actually occur or have occurred in your life. Please indicate your answer to each question by clicking the appropriate number below it.

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|-----------|---|------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Never or Seldom | | Sometimes | | Very Often |

1. Compared to most people, are you typically unable to get what you want out of life?
2. Growing up, would you ever "cross the line" by doing things that your parents would not tolerate?
3. Did you get on your parents' nerves often when you were growing up?
4. Growing up, did you ever act in ways that your parents thought were objectionable?
5. Do you often do well at different things that you try?
6. Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times.
7. When it comes to achieving things that are important to me, I find that I don't perform as well as I ideally would like to do.

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|----------------|---|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Always |
| | Never or Seldom | | A few times | | |

8. How often have you accomplished things that got you "psyched" to work even harder?
9. How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?

| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Certainly False | | | | Certainly True |

10. I feel like I have made progress towards being successful in my life.
11. I have found very few hobbies or activities in my life that capture my interest or motivate me to put effort into them.

Demographics

Age

Please indicate your gender.

Male

Female

Other

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