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**Department of Sociology,**

**Maynooth University, National University of Ireland Maynooth,**

**Final Year Research Project**

**“How do retail workers feel about Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) and what impact does it have on their quality of work life?”**

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**Special Topic Group: Digital Technology**

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**Abstract**

This research seeks to find out how retail workers feel about working with Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) and what impact they have on their quality of work life. It also seeks to find out if retail workers are satisfied working with SSTs. It also attempts to discover if the implementation of SSTs contributes to alienating retail workers in their workplace. To do this, the research used a qualitative method interviewing seven retail workers that work with SSTs. The interviews that were conducted were semi-structured and in-depth and were thematically analysed to discover key themes and patterns. The research findings focused on retail workers feelings towards working with SSTs, the factors impacting their quality of work life, technology and work satisfaction and alienation in the workplace. This showed that retail workers have mixed feelings towards working with SSTs. It showed that working with SSTs had a predominantly negative impact on the retail workers quality of work life. It revealed that they had a low level of work satisfaction working with SSTs. And it also showed that alienation was evident within some of the retail workers.

**Introduction**

My central research question is as follows:

“**How do retail workers feel about Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) and what impact does it have on their quality of work life?”**

Meuter et al. (2000:50) provides a definition of Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) as being “technological interfaces that enable customers to produce a service independent of direct employee involvement”. This dissertation will attempt to examine how retail workers feel about SSTs. An attempt will be made to discover whether the implementation of SSTs in the retail sector are positively or negatively impacting retail worker’s quality of work life. It will also attempt to discover whether retail workers are satisfied working with SSTs. It will also try to discover if there is a link between SSTs and worker alienation. SSTs have been especially introduced to larger retail stores to increase productivity, increase efficiency and create shorter queues. These advantages benefit the customers but what about the actual workers that are there to ‘guide’ and assist each person as they scan their own items? Do the retail workers think that SSTs are efficient? Do they think SSTs create shorter queues? And do they feel like it increases productivity? These are some important questions to take into consideration. SSTs are so focused on benefiting the customers which results in the workers being overlooked. This dissertation is important as it will focus on how the workers feel about SSTs and how it impacts them.

The recent proliferation of Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) being introduced into retail stores not only in Ireland, but also on a global scale has sparked a vast amount of research in this area. Current and past research on SSTs predominantly focuses on how the implementation of SSTs has an impact on customers and consumer behaviour. There is a limited amount of research on how SSTs impact the workers that assist and guide them in functioning correctly. I chose to undertake this research as there is a limited body of literature that addresses the impact of SSTs on workers, especially in Ireland. I also decided to do this research as I work in a large retail store that has implemented self-service checkouts, so I am interested in focusing on this area. This research will attempt to fill this gap of research by collecting qualitative data from face to face interviews with workers that work with SSTs daily.

The main aim of this research is to discover how retail workers feel about SSTs in their workplace and if it positively or negatively impacts their quality of work life. It will then try to determine if they feel satisfied working with SSTs. It will then go on to determine if SSTs play a role in producing a feeling of alienation within individual retail workers.

The objectives of this research include:

* Conduct interviews with retail workers that work with SSTs.
* Identify retail workers attitudes and feelings towards SSTs in their workplace.
* Determine whether SSTs has a positive or negative impact on retail workers quality of work life.
* Discover if retail workers feel satisfied working with SSTs.
* Discover if SSTs alienates retail workers.

In keeping with the aim, objectives and research question, this research will be guided by the following central research questions:

* What are retail workers attitudes and feelings towards SSTs?
* Do SSTs have a positive or negative impact on retail workers quality of work life?
* How do SSTs impact retail worker’s quality of work life?
* Are retail workers satisfied working with SSTs?
* Is alienation evident in the work lives of retail workers due to SSTs?

The literature that focuses on the impact of technology on workers will be analysed in a historical and modern perspective. Literature that focuses specifically on how retail workers feel about SSTs and the impact it has on them is limited but the available readings will still be analysed. It will then focus on original research that will examine how retail workers feel about SSTs and how it impacts their quality of work life. It also focuses on literature related to technology and work satisfaction. Karl Marx’s theory of alienation will be the main theoretical contribution focused on in this research.

Due to the limitation of the sample size of this dissertation, the scope of this study’s conclusions is restricted, but some suggestions can still be made.

**Literature review**

It is important to look at technology in the workplace from a historical context as there is a broad range of competing perspectives from scholars and major thinkers in the area of technology in the workplace. From Karl Marx to John Maynard Keynes, to Harry Braverman and Larry Hirschborn, there is ongoing debate as to what impact technology has on workers and what impact it will have on workers in the future.

The literature that has been read and reviewed for this thesis are a mixture of peer-reviewed scholarly articles and books. Research on this topic varies from past to present with renowned sociological thinkers such as Marx and Braverman and modern thinkers such as Frey and Osborne. The arguments made between the major thinkers on this topic vary. Marx mainly focuses on how workplace technologies under capitalism has an impact on workers (Spencer 2018). From a similar perspective Braverman views that technologies within the workplace is used by management to expropriate the worker’s skills which reduces their control in the process of production (Braverman 1974). Autor (2015) discusses how middle waged occupations are starting to decline due to machines being codified to perform routine tasks.

There were many conflicting arguments on what impact the substitution of labour with technology had on workers. Vallas (1988) claimed that the decades after World War II, a theory of work and technology began to emerge that predicted the disappearance of alienated labour. It’s argued that at that time the dominant perspective was that mechanization gave rise to specialized and alienating labour (Vallas 1988). However, Faunce (1965) argued that automation would free the worker from direct machine pacing and reintegrate specialized tasks into more meaningful roles. Hirschborn (1985:73) furthers this idea and suggests that automation “moves the worker from being the controlled element in the production process, to operating the controls, to controlling the controls”. From this perspective it is suggested that workplace technologies increase work autonomy and complexity which reduces alienation from work (Hirschborn 1985). These perspectives are argued to be implausible and unrealistic. Braverman (1974) provides a more critical perspective and argues that whatever liberating potential new technologies might harbour is prevented by capitalist production relations. He claims that management use automation to eliminate worker’s skills which reduces their control over the production process (Braverman 1974). Although Braverman is a renowned thinker, his perspective in this situation can be criticized. His deskilling perspective and studies in this often ignore the role of factors such as gender equality which may alter or thwart the deskilling trend (Vallas 1988). Marx’s theory of alienation was mentioned in relation to the substitution of human labour with technology which addresses my research questions as it is an example of how SSTs are impacting retail workers today. Marx would argue that technology was a driving force of capitalism leading to the expansion of production and consumption and its use was limited to produce inequalities such as the exploitation and alienation of workers (Spencer 2018). The constant strives for profit meant that technology was used to benefit capitalist employers and not the workers (Spencer 2018). Marx’s perspective still seems appropriate to today’s society with a minority of people having such a large proportion of the world’s wealth.

Shepard (1977) explicitly discussed the relationship between work-related technology and job satisfaction which closely links to this research. It was claimed that the term work satisfaction is broad and that it contains numerous different work related attitudes and behaviour in which the most prominent are job satisfaction and alienation (Shepard 1977). Shepard (1977) went on to highlight that there are four job characteristics most often employed in research on technology and work satisfaction. These characteristics are worker control, social interaction on the job, skill level and job specialization which will all be taken into account for this research (Shepard 1977). Going into even more detail, Blauner (1964:5) suggests that there are four dimensions of alienation in the workplace. The first dimension is powerlessness which occurs when workers are unable to control their job activities (Blauner 1964:5). The second dimension is meaninglessness which occurs when workers do not contribute much to the total product (Blauner 1964:5). The third dimension is social alienation which exists when workers do not belong to any close work groups (Blauner 1964:5). The fourth dimension is self-estrangement and occurs when workers view their work as “a means to some other end such as making money, rather than a means of self-fulfilment” (Blauner 1964:5). These dimensions will also be focused on in this research. Blauner (1964) argued that if charted on a graph, the pattern of alienation would be an inverted U-curve. This means that alienation would be at its lowest point historically in the craft industry, then reached its highest with the mass production technology of the twentieth century and then declined with the introduction of automation technology (Blauner 1964). Shepard (1971) supported this pattern of alienation as Blauner’s study was replicated by interviewing a sample of 305 factory workers which reported the same inverted U-shaped pattern. Shepard (1971) supported this yet again as he collected identical data on 2000 office employees which again reported the same inverted U-shape pattern. The large sample sizes of these studies suggest that they may yield more accurate results and a lower margin of error. There is some conflicting research from Goldthorpe (1966) as he emphasizes the effect of biographical factors (social background) in determining attitudes towards work. This suggests that workers select jobs providing a higher level of economic benefits rather than jobs offering greater intrinsic rewards (Shepard 1971). However, further research conducted by Goldthorpe (1968) presented some contradicting evidence and found that comparisons of the five different types of workers confirmed research that was in the tradition of Blauner.

From a more modern perspective, Frey and Osborne (2017) predicted that close to half of existing jobs in the United States of America will be automated in the next twenty years. According to their study, the jobs that were at low risk of automation were within professional occupations that included non-routine tasks (Frey and Osborne 2017). The jobs that they argued that were at medium risk of being automated were mainly caring and leisure occupations that required both routine and non-routine tasks (Frey and Osborne 2017). The jobs that were said to be at high risk of automation were mainly administrative and jobs that involved routine manual tasks (Frey and Osborne 2017). The Frey and Osborne study has sparked much debate in recent years. In a large study done by Arntz et al. (2016) they estimated the risk of automation for 21 OECD countries including the U.S. Arntz et al. (2016) used a similar approach to Frey and Osborne but instead of assuming that it is occupations that are displaced by machines, they argued that it is certain tasks that can be displaced. They found that by using a task-based approach, the results show a much lower risk of automation compared to the occupation-based approach (Arntz et al. (2016). Frey and Osborne (2017) found that 47% of U.S jobs were at risk of automation, but the figure that was found in this study was only 9% (Arntz et al. (2016).

There is a large amount of research that focuses on quality of work life. There are conflicting views on what factors have more influence on a person’s quality of work life. Walton (1973) suggested that growth and security was an important factor in the quality of work life. Mirvis and Lawler (1984) argued that opportunities for advancement played a crucial role in an individual’s quality of work life. Baba and Jamal (1991) claimed that job satisfaction, job involvement, work role overload and job stress were some of the main factors that influence the quality of work life. Ellis and Pompli (2002) agreed that workload was an important factor but also suggested that the inability to deliver quality of care preferred, professional isolation, lack of recognition, poor work relationships and a lack of learning new skills were other factors that had implications on the quality of work life. From a more modern perspective, Saraji and Dargahi (2006) suggest that factors such as job security, training and career advancements, satisfying work, recognition of efforts, amount of work to be done and level of stress experienced at work are some of the most important factors that influence the quality of work life. This research will try to identify if some of these factors are evident and influence retail workers that work with SSTs.

Literature that focuses specifically on SSTs in retail stores and how it impacts workers is limited but there is still enough to discuss and analyse. In an article by McWilliams et al. (2016), retail employee’s perceptions were gathered and analysed. This article linked closely to my research question as it focused explicitly on retail workers that deal with SSTs. There were both positive and negative perceptions on the SSTs implemented in their workplace (McWilliams et al. 2016). Some claimed that SSTs made their job faster, and that there was more time to work on building customer relationships (McWilliams et al. 2016). However, the limitation of this part of the research is that the workers who made them claims were only based in small scale retail stores (McWilliams et al. 2016). The SSTs seemed to benefit the higher positioned staff as it increases productivity and saves money because less wages have to be paid (McWilliams et al. 2016). This is a disadvantage to the lower paid workers due to less wages being paid due to this technology. A major part of this research was focused on workers negative perceptions towards SSTs. They claimed that on top of their usual jobs, they now have to deal with an increased amount of theft and job loss (McWilliams et al. 2016). These extra and unnecessary extra duties make their jobs more stressful and demanding than it was before the introduction of SSTs (McWilliams et al. 2016). A major issue argued by workers was determining the amount of staff it takes to cover the amount of self-service checkouts.

In a study conducted by Beck (2011) it showed that only 54% of employees working over four self-checkouts feel as though they can effectively watch all the customers to ensure that all items were scanned. Beck (2011) also argues that as the number of self-checkouts increases, the confidence of the workers monitoring those decreases. Another negative aspect of SSTs according to Di Pietro et al. (2014) was job loss. The workers are in constant worry about the safety of their jobs as customers can now actually act like workers themselves and are able to perform the same job without any training (McWilliams et al. 2016). It is suggested that the workers are now just there to either answer any customer queries or stack shelves (McWilliams et al. 2016). This might contribute to a feeling of alienation as they might perceive their jobs as being meaningless. It is also suggested that the implementation of SSTs is ruining the interaction between workers and customers and as a result customer service is worsening (McWilliams et al. 2016). This may result in the worker feeling isolated due to the limited interaction with both customers and other colleagues.

It has been argued that the introduction of self-checkouts has drastically changed the job as they have turned checkout assistants into customer assistants (Vogel et al. 2012). Workers now have to deal with between four and eight customers at a time instead of one and on top of that they have to deal with machine problems and mistakes made by the customers (Vogel et al. 2012). Due to this it is argued that workers feel at a loss to cope in these situations as they might not be prepared (Vogel et al. 2012). Vogel et al. (2012) stresses that workers have become slaves to machines and that the inroads made by new technologies in the retail industry has increased the feeling of dehumanization. It is argued that everything is controlled and that workers have restricted communication because they are afraid that they might make a mistake as the computers are able to pinpoint the exact worker who is at fault (Vogel et al. 2012).

**Critique of Literature**

Some of the major thinkers such as Marx and Keynes provide insightful assumptions and theories but some of them are outdated and irrelevant to today’s society. Faunce (1965) and Hirschborn (1985) make some in depth arguments but a major downfall in this research is the lack of empirical evidence to support their claims. Braverman (1974) also provides a critical perspective toward workplace automation but again there is a major issue with the absence of empirical evidence to back up the arguments. Blauner’s (1964) inverted U-shape pattern of alienation hypothesis seemed more credible as it was supported by numerous studies. Shepard (1971) gathered empirical evidence to support Blauner’s hypothesis by replicating the study which gave consistent results. In more modern studies, Frey and Osborne (2017) made the claim that close to half of existing jobs in the U.S. will be automated in the next twenty years. Even though this claim was supported by research it is still highly contested. Arntz et al. (2016) conducted a similar study and found a dramatically lower risk of automation in the U.S. This study was supported by a large amount of data not only from the U.S. but from a total of 21 OECD countries (Arntz et al. 2016). The McWilliams et al. (2016) journal article on employee perceptions of SSTs was very detailed and yielded valuable information but the downfall was that it was entirely based on perceptions which may not be as valuable as other sources of data. One gap that I noticed when reading the literature was the lack of qualitative research on my research topic in Ireland. The aim of my research is to fill this gap and attempt to gather qualitative data on the impact that SSTs has on retail workers in Ireland. Part of the theoretical contribution will be to attempt to gather data on whether alienation is occurring in the workplace due to the presence of SSTs.

**Methodology**

The research explores how retail workers feel about the use of SSTs in their workplace and the effect it has on their quality of work life. In addition to this, the research will try to determine if SSTs play a role in producing a feeling a of alienation within the workers. Four central research questions are proposed in this research. Firstly, the research will try to discover the attitudes and feelings that retail workers have towards working with SSTs. The research is also focused on determining whether SSTs have a positive or negative influence on retail workers quality of work life. Another question is how do SSTs effect retail workers quality of work life? And finally, using a theoretical contribution from Karl Marx, the research will try to determine if the use of SSTs in the retail sector contributes to a feeling of alienation within the workers.

**Research Approach**

My approach to these research questions is within the interpretivist paradigm as this research gathers in-depth information about the subjective experiences of retail workers using SSTs. Strauss and Corbin (1990:11) argue that qualitative research design can “refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organisational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena an interaction between nations”. Upon reading this definition I realised that a qualitative approach was suitable as this research focuses on retail worker’s experiences, behaviours, feelings, emotions as well as organisational functioning.

**Research Method**

This research was conducted using a series of face to face, semi-structured interviews with seven customer assistants in a large retail store. Semi-structured interviews were selected to collect data as they are “well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents” and “enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (Barriball and While 2016:330). Semi-structured interviews also generate more detailed information when compared to quantitative research methods such as surveys. The face to face interviews allows for the experience and examination of the participants’ body language and real-life emotions and feelings towards SSTs in their workplace which is not possible in other methods such as secondary data analysis. Each worker that was interviewed works directly with the self-service checkouts which indicates that each of their individual experiences, opinions, feelings and attitudes are relevant to this research. I had access to these workers as I am employed in this retail store and the interviews were organised with the assistance of a manager. A training room was provided where I could confidentially interview each participant. This was a private room in which no distractions could occur. The location benefitted each participant as the interviews took place on lunch breaks in the store. Having to organise an alternate location to conduct interviews may have added unnecessary costs and time. As the retail store is large and there is a vast number of employees, I attempted to eliminate bias by choosing colleagues that were acquaintances rather than colleagues that were within my department. Prior to each interview, I had a list of questions that were used as a guideline. Each interview was recorded on a mobile phone and was later uploaded onto a computer for analysis. All participants consented to being recorded prior to each interview and a consent form was presented and signed. As they were semi-structured interviews, this allowed for additional questions to be asked and unique answers to be provided by each participant.

A purposive sample was used in this research which is adopted when there is a “deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Etikan 2016:2). Participants were chosen for this research on the basis that they worked mainly at the self-service checkouts. Each participant also works with employee operated checkouts when required. Random sampling would not have been appropriate to this research as participants were required to do a specific job.

**Limitations**

One of the main limitations of this research was the sample size. Due to time constraints and interview cancellations in this research, only seven participants could be interviewed. Having a small sample size may produce problems with generalizability to the whole population of retail workers. A larger sample size may have produced more accurate results. Due to SSTs being a relatively recent phenomenon, there is limited research in this area, especially in Ireland. Another limitation was due to accessibility issues which restricted this research to one large retail store. The findings of this research may not be applicable to all retail stores. Another evident limitation to this research is that the sample was limited in terms of gender. five out of seven respondents in this research were female as a large proportion of checkout staff are predominantly female.

**Data analysis**

According to Simon (2018) analysis begins with identification of the themes emerging from raw data, a process that is also known as “open coding” (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Firstly, this was done by taking notes during the interviews. This was useful in identifying important information associated to the research. Transcripts of the interviews were then typed up in a Microsoft Word document which was used to highlight key themes that were similar throughout the participants. Each respondent was identified using letters to ensure confidentiality. There were six respondents so each of them was identified from A-F.

The next stage of analysis comprises of re-examining the categories that were identified to determine how they are linked, which is also known as axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The themes that were identified during the first stage of analysis were then compared and combined to form a broader understanding.

**Ethical Considerations**

The Maynooth University ethical guidelines were carefully followed during this research. Maynooth University’s policies are adopted from the Sociological Association of Ireland. Four main principles were considered in this research as guided by the Sociological Association of Ireland. The four principles that were followed are competence, integrity, respect for human rights, diversity and equality and social responsibility.

While conducting this research I was conscious in doing no harm, both physically and emotionally, in the questioning observation and recruitment of respondents. It was also ensured that no respondents were under the age of eighteen. Each respondent was provided with an information sheet prior to the interview and I explained in detail the nature of this research. Each respondent was also asked to sign a consent form and two copies of this were signed. One copy was given to each respondent and one copy was kept in a locked and secure cabinet. The respondents were also made aware that they were being recorded on a mobile device and that they can request to stop the interview at any time. The interviews were recorded using my mobile phone that was secured using a unique passcode that only I know. After the research was conducted all data was anonymised. Pseudonyms were used instead of the respondent’s real names and all other information such as their workplace was kept anonymous. The interview data was transferred onto my personal computer into encrypted files and was then immediately deleted from my phone. This ensured the safety of the interview data. After the research is successfully completed, all data will be securely deleted, and any hardcopies used will be shredded.

**Discussion of Findings**

Firstly, this section will discuss the respondent’s feelings towards working with SSTs and what they like and dislike about working with them. This will provide some insight before discussing the major themes that became evident when analysing the data. The discussion will contain three sections that focus on specific theme in each. The first theme is the factors that impact the respondent’s quality of work life. This is closely linked to the work of many authors that were mentioned already such as Walton (1973). The second theme that became evident was work satisfaction which focuses on the relationship between SSTs and work satisfaction. This is linked the work of Shepard (1977) and his four characteristics of work satisfaction. The third and final theme is alienation in the workplace. This is linked to Marx’s theory and Blauner’s (1964) four dimensions of workplace alienation. This focuses on the relationship between SSTs and worker alienation.

**Feelings Towards Working with SSTs**

The purpose of gathering the respondent’s feelings and whether they like working with SSTs is to gain an overall insight and background into their experience. When discussing what each respondent liked about working with SSTs the recurring answer was that they were constantly busy. Most respondents said that it keeps them busy and that the day goes quicker. Another important aspect was working with customers. Respondent A, age 28, with the company for 3 years, said:

*I like that you are constantly busy. You are looking at eight self-checkouts at any given time. The day goes quick enough you are so busy. I also like working with customers. That’s all I can think of really. Well I suppose you’re not really packing so it’s not too labour intensive. However, you are on your feet constantly so you’re not sitting at a till like you would be traditionally. That’s it really.*

Another feature that most respondents liked was that they weren’t sitting at a manually operated checkout all day which suggests that they like the freedom of being able to walk around. Respondent D, age 31, with the company 7 years said:

*I do like working of self-service but not for good reasons its more for my own selfish reasons because it passes time and I hate sitting down and I hate the normal checkouts, so self-service is a change. You are kept going you are busy on them.*

A noticeable pattern in the respondent’s answers when asked if they liked working with SSTs was that nobody mentioned that they enjoyed working with the actual technology. They enjoyed the busyness and freedom to move around but nothing about the technology was mentioned which was interesting.

Some interesting patterns became evident in the respondent’s answers when they were asked what they disliked about working with SSTs. The most consistent reason across all the respondents was the workload. All respondents suggested that the workload was too demanding because it is one worker serving eight customers at any given time. Respondent C, age 32, with the company 12 years, said:

*It is demanding. Too demanding in that respect. The demand is the biggest part that I don’t like. People can be very disruptive. Customers can be very rude. Other than that, I don’t really mind it. It’s just the demand can be torturous when you are serving 8 people at a time.*

This demanding workload suggested by Respondent C is consistent with Vogel et al. (2012) as they suggest that workers now must deal with between four and eight customers at a time instead of one and on top of that they must deal with machine problems and mistakes made by the customers. This response is also linked to the work of Beck (2011) as it is argued that as the number of self-checkouts increases, the confidence of the workers monitoring those decreases.

Another factor that the respondents disliked about working with SSTs was customers. Some respondents claimed that some customers can be very rude and disruptive, and it can cause frustration within both staff and customers. Respondent E, age 30, with the company 12 years, said:

*I don’t like the way if it gets busy customers can be very rude and they can be very demanding. They don’t realise how busy you are and that you are trying your best to get to them. If you have to price something you have to leave for a few minutes and that can be frustrating for customers and staff.*

One respondent also discussed how working with SSTs can make them feel very stressed in certain situations and that there should be more than one staff member to manage eight self-service checkouts. Respondent F, age 20, with the company 3 years, said:

*Customers can be rude. You have to manage the 8 self-scans on your own. So sometimes the customers start clicking their fingers or if there is like a product enquiry that can be very stressful because we are not allowed to leave to go and find a supervisor. It can be very stressful like when its busy they should have two people working at the self-service but that never happens. It does get very hands on and stressful. That’s what I don’t like.*

This response is consistent with a study conducted by Beck (2011) as it showed that only 54% of employees working over four self-checkouts feel as though they can effectively watch all the customers to ensure that all items were scanned. That study was only focused on workers that worked over four self-checkouts whereas the respondents that I interviewed work at eight self-checkouts which is double that workload.

**Factors Impacting the Quality of Work Life**

An important theme that became evident while analysing the data was the factors that impact the quality of work life of the respondents. The first major factor that seemed to influence the respondent’s quality of work life was job satisfaction. Baba and Jamal (1991) claimed that job satisfaction was an important and influencing factor in an employee’s quality of work life. Most of the respondents reported that they feel unsatisfied while working at self-service checkouts. Only two respondents claimed that they feel satisfied while working with SSTs. When asked whether they were satisfied, or dissatisfied Respondent G, age 21, with the company 3 years, said:

*Satisfied. The main reason is because it is busy. It passes the time. Being on the self-service the time actually goes quicker because you are rushed off your feet. So, the satisfaction that I get is that your busy busy busy. But the downfall of that is the pressure the customers can put on you.*

It is interesting to note here that no job activities were mentioned in the response. It was only due to the busyness and the passing of time that the respondent felt satisfied. This is important because Baba and Jamal (1991) argue that work role involvement is crucial to job satisfaction. A very similar response was made by the other respondent that said they felt satisfied while working on the self-service checkouts. Respondent D said:

*Satisfied because it passes time. I work 12 hour shifts so if you are working on self-service it only feels like 6 hours. It keeps you going. Sitting down on a normal checkout is boring. Self-service isn’t boring.*

This response was very similar to Respondent G as they only mention the passing of time as being the reason for feeling satisfied in their job. They don’t mention anything about the SSTs and their work role involvement in relation to their job satisfaction. All the other respondents reported that they feel dissatisfied while working on self-service checkouts. There was a vast amount of reasons for this. Respondent B, age 45, with the company 6 years, said:

*I don’t like it at all because there is less customer interaction. I think a shop works better having more staff to give the customers a better experience. Automation gives less customer experience and less staff means less questions can be answered; more problems can arise. So, there is less staff to actually deal with those problems.*

This response relates to the research of McWilliams et al. (2016) as they suggest that the implementation of SSTs is ruining the interaction between workers and customers and as a result customer service is worsening. In this response it also says that automation gives less staff which connects it to the Frey and Osborne (2017) research which claims that large amounts of jobs are being automated and almost half of the jobs in the United States are at risk of automation.

The second major factor that was evident in impacting the respondent’s quality of work life was the opportunities for career advancement or development. Mirvis and Lawler (1984) argued that opportunities for advancement played a crucial role in an individual’s quality of work life. However, when asked about opportunities for advancement, every respondent argued claimed that there were none. All respondents argued that there were no opportunities for career progression when working at self-service checkouts. When asked about what career opportunities there were, Respondent A said:

*Well, there is none. That’s the thing there is none because it is self-scan and that’s all you are ever going to be doing is maintaining the equipment. That’s all you are. You don’t have a role.*

The respondent claims that all you will ever do is maintain the equipment and that you don’t have a role. This response is related to what Vogel et al. (2012) argues as they stress that workers have become slaves to machines and that the inroads made by new technologies in the retail industry has increased the feeling of dehumanization.

The third factor that became apparent in impacting the respondent’s quality of work life was the training. Saraji and Dargahi (2006) mention that training is essential to having a decent quality of work life. All the respondents argued that they were not trained effectively to work with self-service checkouts. The phrase “thrown in at the deep end” was used by more than one respondent when discussing the training. When asked about the training they had received to work with the self-service checkouts, Respondent C said:

*Oh you mean training myself? I trained myself. You are thrown in at the deep end. Somebody might show you one or two things but after that they throw you in and you are supposed to know. And that’s the end of that whether you like it or not. If you don’t know then you have to figure it out by yourself.*

In a similar response Respondent D said:

*I didn’t have any training on self-scans I trained myself. I was thrown in at the deep end and I trained myself from top to bottom. The only thing they trained me on was closing them down and taking the money out and counting it but to actually use them I was never trained.*

It was clear that the lack of training had a major impact on the respondent’s quality of work life as they were not able to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

The fourth factor that became obvious in impacting the respondent’s quality of work life was job security. Saraji and Dargahi (2006) argued that job security played a role in maintaining a positive quality of work life. There was a mixed response when asked about their opinion on their job security. There was one main aspect that made some respondents feel that their job was secure. They felt their job was secure because they had signed contracts. When asked what their opinion of their job security, Respondent F replied:

*Yeah because I have a contract, but I can’t ever see my hours being increased. My hours for now are secure*.

In a similar response, Respondent E said:

*Yeah it is. I have a contract so that’s why I know I won’t get less hours than what my contract says.*

The respondents that felt like their jobs were not secure had signed contracts but had a slightly different viewpoints on their job security. These respondents were concerned with the future of automation and how advancements in technology might eventually take their jobs as self-service checkout staff. When asked about their job security, Respondent A said:

*It is not secure. If they work out some algorithm or software that constantly reboots and maintains itself then your assistance is not required whatsoever. If they had a system where it could ask for someone’s identification and it could be a barcode, let’s say all identification became barcoded in the next ten or fifteen years. There’s no one even needed at self-service then. If the technology never glitches, never breaks down, never goes out of service and no one needs to ask you for identification if you have alcohol you have to scan a card but you might have to have to prove that person is that person there has to be a sensor or camera looking at that person while they are scanning the card so there is face recognition. No one is even needed there. I mean if they could pack the shop floor with robots they would.*

Arntz et al. (2016) argue that it is certain tasks that will be displaced by automation which relates closely to this response as it is said that algorithms or software and face recognition will displace retail workers tasks.

The fifth and final factor that was apparent in impacting the respondent’s quality of work life was the functionality of the actual self-checkouts themselves. Overall the self-checkout functionality had a negative impact on the respondent’s quality of work life. Vogel et al. (2012) argues that workers must constantly fix machine problems and deal with customer mistakes too. This argument is mirrored in a response from Respondent A. When asked about the functionality of the self-checkouts, Respondent A said:

*They glitch a lot. Sometimes certain products will scan and it will require staff assistance whether you have to punch in a code to unlock the system or grant permission for a customer to buy a certain product whether it is pharmaceutical things or alcohol. They constantly glitch and are out of service all the time. And also I think customers have a hard time, especially elderly people, trying to adapt to the technology. I think they have a hard time trying to go through a transaction through a machine that they are not familiar with. Whereas if they go to a person they know that they are more capable of doing that for them.*

It became evident that the respondents feel that the SSTs in their workplace does not work adequately which directly impacts their quality of work life. It also adds to job stress which became evident through the response of a different respondent. Respondent F said:

They breakdown constantly. If people put in notes it might not give you back your change, so you have to open the checkout and on your own that takes so much time. And while this is happening you are still trying to deal with seven other customers. It actually happened today, and it stressed me out.

Baba and Jamal (1991) and Saraji and Dargahi (2006) both argued that job stress has major implications on the quality of work life. Due to the inadequate SSTs in their workplace it was evident that it increased their job stress levels.

**Technology and Work Satisfaction**

Another theme that emerged from analysing the data was the link between technology and work satisfaction. Shepard (1977) argued that there are four characteristics within technology and work satisfaction; worker control, social interaction on the job, skill level and job specialization. Only the first three of these characteristics emerged in most interviews with the respondents.

The first characteristic, as argued by Shepard (1977), that emerged in the data was worker control. When the respondents discussed the control they have in their jobs at self-service checkouts it was predominantly negative replies. Respondent A replied:

*Well you don’t have many options to do anything. You’re not actually doing much. All you are doing is maintaining the equipment for customers to scan and purchase their products and go on their way. It is pretty straight forward. There is no room for expansion, no room for development. So, to be in control ehm, yes you are in control of what you’re doing because you know what you’re doing all the time but you cant do what you want to do. You have no freedom. There’s no freedom to do anything else. There’s no freedom to innovatively do your job differently. Like you could be on the shop floor packing something and you might after and year or two get the hang of something and find out that there is a quicker way to do this but you don’t have that when working on self-checkouts.*

This response resembles some of Braverman’s (1974) views and perspectives of technology in the workplace. Braverman (1974) argued that technologies within the workplace is used by management to expropriate the worker’s skills which reduces their control in the process of production. In a more modern perspective, this response validates Braverman’s views as the respondent feels that they are not actually doing much at work and they only maintain the technology.

The second characteristic of technology and work satisfaction that emerged was social interaction during work. McWilliams et al. (2016) argued that the implementation of SSTs in retail stores restricts social interaction and as a result it may isolate alienate the workers. This argument was certainly linked to some of the respondent’s answers. When discussing the social interaction with customers, Respondent A said:

*Oh it is rushed. You can’t really express yourself. You can’t be overly helpful. I mean even training in here and in retail alone they specify that you don’t take too much time with too much customers because it is going to have a knock-on effect on the queues. You don’t have time to talk to them. It is very rushed. It is not normal interaction that you would have down the town. It is in a high stress environment and plus the customers want to come in and get their shopping done so they might be a little bit rush themselves. But for a lot of customers that come in sometimes for a talk or chat they can be very pleasant, but you can’t afford to be pleasant back. You have to be direct, you have to be short and go onto the next person. It effects the way you talk to customers being under that workload.*

It became evident that the social interaction with other colleagues was also restricted. This became apparent when Respondent A said:

*Staff wise there is no social interaction, period. So, I mean you wouldn’t get a chance to talk to them. You can talk to them for a brief moment at the end of the night. You can talk to them then but generally you wouldn’t get to talk to staff.*

Blauner (1964) would argue that this lack of social interaction may play a role in alienation within the workplace.

What was particularly interesting was when one of the respondents compared the social interaction when working on the the manually operated checkouts to the self-service checkouts. Respondent A said:

*Completely because the manually operated checkouts are one to one. The next customer won’t be served until the current one is dealt with and that purchase is complete. So, you are going from one customer to the other. It’s a completely different interaction. It is face to face, its eye to eye, you are not rushed to go onto the next customer and if you are you still have at least 1-3 minutes devoted time to speaking one on one with each customer with no other interruptions. Whereas at self-service checkouts it is the opposite. There is a queue already with five people, the machine isn’t working, you’re going from one to the next and you know there is four people already waiting with their hands in the air complaining. There is no allotted time when you know there will be face to face interaction.*

This response argues that the social interaction when working on the manually operated checkouts is better and more thorough compared to the social interaction while working on the self-service checkouts. This suggests that SSTs have a negative effect on retail workers social interaction with both customers and colleagues.

The third a final characteristic of technology and work satisfaction that became evident in the data was skill level. When asked about what skills were used while working with self-service checkouts, the recurring response was people skills and customer service skills. Skills about using the technology was absent in all the responses. When asked about what skills are needed to work at self-checkouts, Respondent F replied:

*People skills is number one. You cannot get angry. You have to be head strong with each person and be patient.*

Respondent C said:

*What skills do you really need? Just use your customer service skills and that is just to be friendly, mannerly, courteous and all that stuff that people want to hear whether you mean it or not. And it’s not all the time you mean it because a lot of customers are rude*.

It became evident from all the responses that it is quite a small and limited set of skills that are required to work on self-service checkouts. Shepard (1977) suggests that job satisfaction increases with skill level, but it may be the opposite in this case based on the respondent’s answers.

**Alienation in the Workplace**

The final theme that emerged from the data was alienation. The responses linked closely to Blauner’s (1964) four dimensions of alienation in the workplace; powerlessness, meaninglessness, social alienation and self-estrangement.

Firstly, it was evident that there was a feeling of powerlessness in the respondent’s jobs. Blauner (1964) argued that powerlessness in the workplace meant that you were unable to control your job activities. This argument was reflected in Respondent A’s discussion:

*You don’t have any control over your job. It is a standard process that has to be adhered to at any given time. You have to do it in a specific way because it is technology and you wouldn’t have the education to actually try and do it differently because it is complex coding and technology. It is sort of a standard approach to work all the time and its definitely monotonous which isn’t really encouraging. So yeah, it’s boring and monotonous.*

In this reply it is evident that there is an element of powerlessness in the respondent’s job at self-service checkouts. This respondent felt a sense of powerlessness primarily due to the technology. This was different in some other respondents. Other respondents feel in control of the technology but do not feel in control of other aspects such as lunch breaks. This became obvious in Respondent D’s reply:

*The only thing I don’t have power over are things like lunch breaks. You have to wait for someone to take over. If you are waiting to go home, you have to wait for someone to come in and take over and if that person is not in then you don’t go home. You are consumed to stay there, and you are stuck there until someone comes to take over. And if you leave there and a manager sees you leave, or a customer sees you leave you are in trouble.*

Being stuck and having to stay at the self-service checkouts until another colleague takes over seems to contribute to a sense of powerlessness in some respondents. Blauner (1964) may argue that this would contribute to alienation in the workplace.

Secondly, some respondents found that working at self-service checkouts was meaningful and some found it meaningless. Blauner (1964) argued that a feeling of meaninglessness at the workplace is when there is a lack of contribution. Blauner (1964) claimed that this lack of contribution adds to the feeling of alienation in the workplace. Some respondents feel that working with SSTs is meaningful. This was mainly due to giving good customer service. This was particularly noticeable in Respondent B’s reply:

*In reality it all boils down to the human interface of the customer experience regardless of it being a normal checkout or a self-service checkout because even on a self-checkout you are saying hello or how has your day been, or do you need help. So, there is a human interface there and that’s the most important thing in retail, the customer experience. Sometimes customers don’t want to interact with staff but if you make it a good experience for them, they will remember it.*

Some respondents agreed that customer service was the main contribution, but they also stated that they have some meaningless and negative contributions. Respondent A said:

*The only thing you feel that you contribute to is the minimization of staff allocated hours and customer service. You only feel like you contribute to the grander scheme which is essentially reducing jobs and I think even if you are reducing jobs you are also contributing to the de-socialization of customer and staff interaction because it becomes robotic. Almost like you’re not even talking to them about the product anymore or asking them how their day was. That one on one when your scanning their products and having a bit of chit chat and then their going about their day. You are going from one customer to the next and the next and the next and the next and you don’t have that interaction anymore.*

This respondent states that they contribute to less working hour for staff, reducing jobs, de-socialization of customer and staff interaction. This reflects Blauner’s (1964) idea of meaninglessness as the respondent feels like they do not positively contribute anything in their work, which may suggest that some retail workers feel alienated while working with SSTs.

Another aspect that emerged from the data that may contribute to alienation in the workplace was the impact that working at self-service checkouts have on colleague friend groups. This relates to Blauner’s (1964) third dimension of alienation in the workplace; social alienation. Blauner (1964) claims that social alienation is evident in the workplace when workers don’t belong to close groups. This was a major problem among the respondents. Some of the respondents feel that working at self-service checkouts impacts how often they talk to other colleagues. This was particularly evident in Respondent A’s discussion:

*Oh yeah, I haven’t talked to them properly in weeks. If you’re not talking to anyone staff wise or even customer wise and you go for a training day or if you go to a staff party or go into the canteen, you haven’t talked to people in weeks, but you have been there five days a week. These people are even in my department and I haven’t talked to them in ages and I think how is that? It’s because of the self-checkouts.*

This respondent claims that despite working five days a week, they haven’t talked to other colleagues properly in weeks. This is clearly linked to Blauner’s concept of social alienation in the workplace. This may suggest that some retail workers feel socially alienated due to working with SSTs.

The final aspect that became obvious from the data and may contribute to alienation in the workplace was why the respondents work and continue to work in their jobs at self-service checkouts. This relates to Blauner’s (1964) concept of self-estrangement. Blauner (1964:5) argues that “self-estrangement exists when workers view work as a means to some other end such as making money, rather than as a means of personal self-fulfilment.” This concept was evident in every respondent’s answers. All respondents stated that they work in their current job at self-service checkouts for financial reasons. Respondent C said:

*I’m here to pay my bills. I am not here to get enjoyment or satisfaction out of my career choice which I’m hoping to change. Other than that no. It just pays the bills. This is not my goal in life. I don’t think it is anybody’s goal. If you are here to stay you are here to move up the ranks. I’m here 7 years and I’ve tried moving up but they knocked it back there was no positions so I’m back to square one.*

Respondent F also stated that they worked their current job for money:

*When I applied here, I wanted to work with people, but you don’t realise until you work here the stress that comes with it. People can be rude and hurtful, and you can go home upset. At the beginning I worked here to meet new people but now it’s just for money.*

No respondents stated that they work for their own personal self-fulfilment. Drawing from Blauner (1964), the responses may suggest that retail workers may feel self-estranged in the workplace due to working with SSTs and this may contribute to the overall alienation in the workplace.

**Conclusion**

Sociological research conducted on SSTs is predominantly about the impact they have on consumers and consumer behaviour. This research attempted to fill a gap in sociological research on SSTs and focus on how they impact workers rather that consumers in Ireland. The main purpose of this research was to discover retail workers feelings towards SSTs and if they positively or negatively impacted their quality of work life. The other main objectives were to determine if retail workers were satisfied with working with SSTs and to also determine if working with SSTs contributed to alienation in the workplace. The first section of the findings highlights what some retail workers like and dislike about working with SSTs. Some retail workers liked working with customers and liked that they are constantly busy. However most disliked the workload and disliked having to manage 8 self-checkouts on their own. The second section of the findings focused on some factors that impact retail workers quality of work life while working with SSTs. These factors were job satisfaction, career advancement/development, training, job security and self-checkout functionality. The findings showed that some retail workers were satisfied due to the passing of time and the busyness. However, many workers were dissatisfied due to the lack of customer interaction and the lack of staff. The findings also showed that all the workers claimed that there were no opportunities for career advancement or development. It was also highlighted that all the workers claimed that they were not provided efficient training to work with SSTs. In relation to job security, some workers felt that their job was secure because they signed contracts. On the other hand, some workers felt that future technology might replace their job at self-service checkouts. Self-checkout functionality was also a major problem as most of the workers claimed that they constantly breakdown and glitch. The third section of the findings explored the relationship between technology and work satisfaction. This focused on three of Shepard’s (1977) characteristics of technology and work satisfaction; worker control, social interaction and skill level. The findings showed that most respondents responded negatively towards the topic of worker control. It was also highlighted that most retail workers found that the social interaction with customers and staff members was restricted while working at self-service checkouts. The findings also showed that the skill level required to work with SSTs was miniscule and that only people skills and customer service skills are needed. The fourth and final section in the findings highlighted how working with SSTs may result in alienation in the workplace. This was closely linked to Blauner’s (1964) four dimensions of alienation in the workplace; powerlessness, meaninglessness, social alienation and self-estrangement. The findings revealed that the retail workers do feel a sense of powerlessness while work at SSTs. This was mainly due to their jobs being a standard process and having structured lunch breaks. Some retail workers portrayed that their job was meaningful due to providing good customer service. Other workers claimed that their jobs were meaningless and that they contribute negatively by reducing jobs. Social alienation was also evident in the findings as some workers claimed that they haven’t talked to other staff members properly for weeks due to working with SSTs. The findings also showed how some retail workers may be self-estranged working with SSTs as they all claimed that financial reasons were the main reason that they work their specific roles. None of the interviewed retail workers work with SSTs for their own self-fulfilment.

Overall the retail workers that were interviewed had mixed feelings towards working with SSTs with some saying the like working them and some saying they dislike working with them. Working with SSTs had more of a negative than positive impact on the retail workers quality of work life. They had a predominantly low level of work satisfaction. And alienation was evident in some of the work lives of retail workers that work with SSTs.

Regarding future study in this area, I would argue that a larger scaled qualitative study would yield more insightful and in-depth results. As this research only focused on one large retail store that has implemented SSTs, future research could focus gathering data from a wider range of retail stores and chains. A wide-scale quantitative study may be useful to gather data from all retail chains around Ireland.

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Information sheet and consent form.

Appendix 2: Interview guide.

Appendix 3: Interview transcript.

**Appendix 1: Information Sheet and Consent form**

**Information Sheet**

I am Liam O’Neill , a 3rd year undergraduate student in the Department of Sociology at Maynooth University.

As part of my programme of study, I am undertaking research into Self-Service Technologies in retail stores in Ireland. This project is designed to examine the impact that Self-Service Technologies has on retail workers. I would value your participation in this project.

Participants will be involved in a short interview that will last between 45-60 minutes. I will be using a mobile device to record this meeting.

You are under no obligation to continue with the research once it is underway and can request that any interview be stopped at any time.

All data will be anonymised and deleted directly after completion of this module. Completed research projects containing anonymised data will be kept securely in the Department of Sociology for no longer than two years. These assignments will be viewed by Examiners from within the Department and may in certain circumstances, be reviewed by appointed External Examiners.

While we try to keep all information confidential, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation, or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable legal steps to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

If you have any queries before or after this research, you can contact my supervisor at the Department of Media Studies:

Madhu Kambamettu

Department of Sociology

Maynooth University

Maynooth, Co. Kildare

Tel: (01) 708 3624

Email: madhu.kambamettu@mumail.ie

If you are willing to be involved in this project, please sign the attached consent form. Your participation is appreciated.

Signature:

liam.oneill.2017@mumail.ie

**Consent Form**

Researcher name: Liam O’Neill

Researcher contact details: liam.oneill.2017@mumail.ie

Supervisor contact details: Madhu Kambamettu

Department of Sociology

Maynooth University

Maynooth Co. Kildare

Tel: +(0)1 708 3624

Email: madhu.kambamettu@mu.ie

Project title: How do retail workers feel about Self-Service Technologies (SSTs) and what impact does it have on their quality of work?

I give consent to my involvement in the above titled research project.

I have been provided with information about this project and understand what is required of me. I understand that I am able to withdraw my participation at any time.

I understand that I will be recorded using a mobile device.

I understand that my data will be anonymised and deleted after use.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

*If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.*

**Appendix 2: Interview Guide**

**1)** What do you like about working on self-service checkouts?

**2)** What do you dislike about working on self-service checkouts?

**3)** So overall, do you feel satisfied or dissatisfied while working on self-service checkouts and why?

**4)** What opportunities are there career progression and development?

**5)** How was the training in preparation for working on self-service checkouts?

**6)** Do you feel enthusiastic and engaged in your work? Why/Why not?

**7)** What is your opinion on your job security?

**8)** Do you feel you can control the work you do?

**9)** What do you feel is your purpose?

**10)** What is the interaction like with customers?

**11**) What is the interaction like with other colleagues?

**12)**  What is the self-service checkout functionality like?

**13)** Doyou feel like you have power over your work activities?

**14)** Do you feel that your work is meaningful and that you have a contribution?

**15)** Does working on self-service checkouts impact your friendship with colleagues in the workplace?

**16)** Why do you work here?

**Appendix 3: Interview Transcript**

**RESPONDENT A**

**Interviewer:** What do you like about working on self-service checkouts?

***Respondent*:** I like that you are constantly busy. You are looking at eight self-checkouts at any given time. The day goes quick enough you are so busy. I also like working with customers. That’s all I can think of really. Well I suppose you’re not really packing so it’s not too labour intensive. However, you are on your feet constantly so you’re not sitting at a till like you would be traditionally. That’s it really.

**Interviewer:** What do you dislike about working on self-service checkouts?

***Respondent:*** You are on your feet all day and with regards to the uniform protocol you are supposed to be wearing certain shoes, so comfort isn’t priority. It’s overwhelming. The amount of work is overwhelming.

**Interviewer:** How is it overwhelming?

***Respondent:*** You are looking at eight different tills at any given time. I mean they break down quite regularly and you have to attend to customers constantly. Ehm a lot of the time the self-checkouts work efficiently, and you don’t have to do much but that is never the case here. It basically happens quite regularly that you just have to maybe fix three self-checkouts at any given time which happens a lot and if there is some that are out of service, the queue gets even more intense. Another thing I don’t like is that you can’t provide good customer service. You don’t have time to interact with customers socially or staff members. Sometimes you can’t even get a break to go to the bathroom because you are being so depended on to stay there because it is such a vital service and you can’t get cover. You know it’s not available to you at that time.

**Interviewer:** So overall, do you feel satisfied or dissatisfied while working on self-service checkouts and why?

***Respondent:*** Oh dissatisfied. It’s too much to do for one person. You almost become robotic socially with customers because you don’t get to interact with people. All I say to people is will I fix that? Have you any identification? And all the normal checks. So, you socially kind of withdraw yourself because there is not enough interaction. I suppose the workload and not being able to talk to people, customers and staff included. Being on your feet constantly in a small area where you don’t have enough space to walk up and down or pace is a lot worse than being on your feet lifting heavy things but being able to walk and pace everywhere with no restrictions.

**Interviewer:** What opportunities are there career progression and development?

***Respondent:*** Well, there is none. That’s the thing there is none because it is self-scan and that’s all you are ever going to be doing is maintaining the equipment. That’s all you are. You don’t have a role.

**Interviewer:** How was the training in preparation for working on self-service checkouts?

***Respondent:*** The training was overwhelming. It was fine when you were accompanied by another to lessen the load but as soon as you were left on your own and the technology decided to glitch and the feedback wasn’t there and it didn’t work the way it should have that’s when the problems start.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel enthusiastic and engaged in your work?

***Respondent:*** Oh god no.

**Interviewer:** Why?

***Respondent:*** Well it’s a meaningless job. You feel almost like the little job you have, and its contribution, is miniscule compared to the amount of jobs that have been lost as a result of self-service checkouts.

**Interviewer:** What is your opinion on your job security?

***Respondent:*** It is not secure. If they work out some algorithm or software that constantly reboots and maintains itself then your assistance is not required whatsoever. If they had a system where it could ask for someone’s identification and it could be a barcode, let’s say all identification became barcoded in the next ten or fifteen years. There’s no one even needed at self-service then. If the technology never glitches, never breaks down, never goes out of service and no one needs to ask you for identification if you have alcohol you have to scan a card but you might have to have to prove that person is that person there has to be a sensor or camera looking at that person while they are scanning the card so there is face recognition. No one is even needed there. I mean if they could pack the shop floor with robots they would.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel you can control the work you do?

***Respondent:*** Well you don’t have many options to do anything. You’re not actually doing much. All you are doing is maintaining the equipment for customers to scan and purchase their products and go on their way. It is pretty straight forward. There is no room for expansion, no room for development. So, to be in control ehm, yes you are in control of what you’re doing because you know what you’re doing all the time, but you can’t do what you want to do. You have no freedom. There’s no freedom to do anything else. There’s no freedom to innovatively do your job differently. Like you could be on the shop floor packing something and you might after and year or two get the hang of something and find out that there is a quicker way to do this, but you don’t have that when working on self-checkouts.

**Interviewer:** What do you feel is your purpose?

***Respondent:*** You are a facilitator. You facilitate technology to do your job.

**Interviewer:** What is the interaction like with customers?

***Respondent:*** Oh it is rushed. You can’t really express yourself. You can’t be overly helpful. I mean even training in here and in retail alone they specify that you don’t take too much time with too much customers because it is going to have a knock-on effect on the queues. You don’t have time to talk to them. It is very rushed. It is not normal interaction that you would have down the town. It is in a high stress environment and plus the customers want to come in and get their shopping done so they might be a little bit rush themselves. But for a lot of customers that come in sometimes for a talk or chat they can be very pleasant, but you can’t afford to be pleasant back. You have to be direct, you have to be short and go onto the next person. It effects the way you talk to customers being under that workload.

**Interviewer:** What is the interaction like with other colleagues?

***Respondent:*** Staff wise there is no social interaction, period. So I mean you wouldn’t get a chance to talk to them. You can talk to them for a brief moment at the end of the night. You can talk to them then but generally you wouldn’t get to talk to staff.

**Interviewer:** When comparing self-service checkouts to the manually operated checkouts, do you feel there is a difference in the social interaction?

***Respondent:*** Completely because the manually operated checkouts are one to one. The next customer won’t be served until the current one is dealt with and that purchase is complete. So, you are going from one customer to the other. It’s a completely different interaction. It is face to face, its eye to eye, you are not rushed to go onto the next customer and if you are you still have at least 1-3 minutes devoted time to speaking one on one with each customer with no other interruptions. Whereas at self-service checkouts it is the opposite. There is a queue already with five people, the machine isn’t working, you’re going from one to the next and you know there is four people already waiting with their hands in the air complaining. There is no allotted time when you know there will be face to face interaction.

**Interviewer:** What is the self-service checkout functionality like?

***Respondent:*** They glitch a lot. Sometimes certain products will scan, and it will require staff assistance whether you have to punch in a code to unlock the system or grant permission for a customer to buy a certain product whether it is pharmaceutical things or alcohol. They constantly glitch and are out of service all the time. And also, I think customers have a hard time, especially elderly people, trying to adapt to the technology. I think they have a hard time trying to go through a transaction through a machine that they are not familiar with. Whereas if they go to a person, they know that they are more capable of doing that for them.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel like you have power over your work activities?

***Respondent:*** You don’t have any control over your job. It is a standard process that has to be adhered to at any given time. You have to do it in a specific way because it is technology and you wouldn’t have the education to actually try and do it differently because it is complex coding and technology. It is sort of a standard approach to work all the time and its definitely monotonous which isn’t really encouraging. So yeah, it’s boring and monotonous.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel that your work is meaningful and that you have a contribution?

***Respondent:*** The only thing you feel that you contribute to is the minimization of staff allocated hours and customer service. You only feel like you contribute to the grander scheme which is essentially reducing jobs and I think even if you are reducing jobs you are also contributing to the de-socialization of customer and staff interaction because it becomes robotic. Almost like you’re not even talking to them about the product anymore or asking them how their day was. That one on one when your scanning their products and having a bit of chit chat and then their going about their day. You are going from one customer to the next and the next and the next and the next and you don’t have that interaction anymore.

**Interviewer:** Does working on self-service checkouts impact your friendship with colleagues in the workplace?

***Respondent:*** Oh yeah, I haven’t talked to them properly in weeks. If you’re not talking to anyone staff wise or even customer wise and you go for a training day or if you go to a staff party or go into the canteen, you haven’t talked to people in weeks, but you have been there five days a week. These people are even in my department and I haven’t talked to them in ages and I think how is that? It’s because of the self-checkouts.

**Interviewer:** Why do you work here?

***Respondent:*** Oh its completely physical. Its financial. It’s for financial gain.