

The queuing experience at large events

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There is an established body of literature on queuing, largely focused on operations management and service operations (e.g. Maister, 1985; Katz et al., 1991; Taylor, 1994). This research often positions queuing as a negative experience and focuses on how to make waiting less unpleasant. A smaller body of work notes the potential positive impacts of queuing, including signalling product quality (Giebelhausen et al., 2011) or value (Koo & Fishback, 2010), and stimulating positive word of mouth through social encounters (Krishen et al., 2020).

The average Briton spends 47 days of their life queuing (Independent, 2019) and the Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the prevalence of queuing in our lives (e.g. queuing for vaccines). Extant research has examined mundane queuing settings, such as public transport (Durrande-Moreau & Usunier, 1999), using experimental methods to assess queuer response (Taylor, 1994). However, not all queues are mundane in nature, and we therefore contend that it is time to look again at queuing, but through an experiential lens. This will shed light on the experience of queuing and the factors impacting on it.

Our research explores the experiences of fans queuing for tickets for The Wimbledon tennis Championships. The Wimbledon Queue is integral to this event and has arguably become a brand in its own right. It is also very different from more mundane queuing contexts; for example, it includes fans who have queued and camped overnight, and in some cases for multiple nights.

We undertook a quasi-ethnographic study (Murtagh, 2007), living *in* and *with* the Wimbledon Queue for one day and one night in June 2019. Informed by these ethnographic insights, we undertook eight focus groups and five interviews with fans who had queued at Wimbledon (with a combined total of 54 participants). Ethnographic field notes alongside interview and focus group transcripts were combined into a corpus of textual data, which we analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Our data allowed us to probe deeply into rich and 'thick' insights from queuers (Geertz, 1973), unearthing a series of key findings about the experience of queuing for large events:

- (1) Fans experience moments of anxiety associated with different phases of queuing;
- (2) Opportunities to interact with fellow queuers and a spirit of sharing within the queue are important factors in making queuing a pleasant experience;
- (3) Sponsor activations have the potential to enhance the queuing experience but often fail to deliver what fans want;
- (4) Queuing plays a significant anticipatory role for the wider event and can enhance the overall event experience by building excitement;
- (5) The act of queuing can become an expression of fans' commitment to their passion.

In unpacking these findings, we extend the body of work on queuing by exploring the experiential character of queues and how they can be leveraged as part of a wider consumption experience. Central to this is the pivotal role of the queuers themselves, through their (inter)actions within the queue and their interpretations of the queuing experience as part of a wider fan identity.

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