Preface

Over the last few years, companies paid more attention to managing customer relationships both effectively and efficiently. Among others, this led to an increased use of so-called self-service technologies (SSTs). For example, financial services are provided at lower costs and in an effective way through ATMs, airlines encourage their customers to use check-in machines, and online retailers offer advice through low-cost media only. Such SSTs require hardly any personnel, and the customer him/herself so to say designs and provides the service. This development is reinforced by new telecommunication media and information technologies as well as by the increased diffusion of the Internet. Given that services play an important role in retaining customers, both academics and practitioners are interested in the question of how an increased use of SSTs affects repeat purchase behavior and the attitude of customers. From an theoretical point of view, only a few publications focused on the effects of customer satisfaction, SST quality, trust, self-stated behavior, evaluation of a company's complaint management, customer knowledge about a firm's products and past purchasing behavior on repeat purchase intentions and repatronage. This literature gap is prevalent both conceptually and empirically. Roberta Nacif, who submitted this book as her dissertation at WHU (Otto Beisheim Graduate School of Management), filled some of this gap with her work.

Given the fact that there is a substantial link between customer loyalty and company performance, the issue of how SSTs affect customer repatronage behavior has to be considered to be crucial from a company's perspective.

If a positive (or not negative) effect of offering low-cost SSTs on customer loyalty can be proven, explicit recommendations on how to optimally design and offer SSTs could be derived. This is even more the case, if instrumental SSTs characteristics are investigated, which is the case in Roberta's work. Her studies are also relevant to marketing researchers since SST per se is an abandoned phenomenon in our science. Roberta's approach is particularly interesting to marketing academics since a unique combination of survey data about customers' attitudes and preferences as well as company data about actual purchase and return behavior were collected. Even in leading journals, only very few publications were based on such a rich data set. In her dissertation, the author considers both the general decisions of customers to repurchase (or not) and - in the case that they repurchase - how much money they spent. Thus, she adds not only to our insight to repurchase behavior with respect to SSTs, but also to current research about customers' economic value.

One strength of Roberta's work is a sound theoretical framework that serves as a foundation for her empirical work. This conceptual work is not only useful for researchers, but also for practitioners since insight into how and why customer behave in a special way can be gained. In addition to this theoretical work, Roberta's dissertation also impresses by a very high standard in the use of advanced multivariate techniques. In her work, she combines survey data and actual purchase data and analyzes the effects of psychometric and past purchase behavior data on future repatronage behavior. She operationalizes and validates all constructs by using confirmatory factor analysis and investigates the effects of psychometric and past purchase behavior data on repurchase decisions (logistic regression) and repurchase volume (TOBIT regression). In total, 28 different hypotheses were tested based on survey data (1,407 cases) and actual purchase data (515 cases). 22 hypotheses are supported by the empirical tests, and non-significant findings are explained (e.g., for variables such as returns or complaints). Many of the author's findings are interesting for both managers and researchers. In a

comparison of a model that entails both survey and customer purchase data with a model that consists of customer purchase data only, it is evident that the latter model explains most of the total variance of the first (full) model. In other words, companies can explain and predict repatronage behavior to a large degree by tracking past purchase behavior. Extensive primary research about customer preferences and intentions is not needed, but still adds some explanatory power. In another series of nested models, the author is able to show that more recent data from past purchase behavior better explain and predict repatronage than older data. If this finding can be generalized, this means that companies do not have to keep track of full customer histories, but only of the more recent purchase behavior of their clients.

Roberta Nacif's book is a rich source for researchers who are investigating effects of new media on customer attitude, preference, and behavior. Especially for researchers interested in economic effects of SSTs, this dissertation is a must. Practitioners can also profit from her work: several pragmatic and useful implications are derived that help to improve the design of SSTs, especially in online retailing.

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