

## Preface

Beside traditionally discussed brand equity models the view of retailers as brands is gaining importance. Retail researchers started to focus on the topic of retail branding in the nineties and it became a top management research priority, as a company's brand is the most intangible asset also for retailers. However, on the one hand, retailers use their brand not only to differentiate themselves from their competitors in consumers' minds but also for brand extensions. On the other hand, customers benefit in considering retail brands due to self-identification and simplification of e.g. store choice. However, consumers perceive the "company-planned" brand position in a specific manner. Thus, detailed knowledge on how to create strong retail brands in relation to a retailer's corporate reputation, on how strong brands drive customer purchase behavior in the light of local competition of single stores, and how format-specific attributes drive retail brand equity across countries is of paramount relevance to retailers which aim to build on strong retail brands. The objective of Bettina Berg's thesis is to gain a deeper knowledge of retail brands as drivers of loyalty in the aforementioned important retail contexts and to give retailers some advice. Addressing these issues the dissertation of Bettina Berg deals with three studies:

- *Reciprocal Effects of the Corporate Reputation and Store Equity of Retailers:* This study examines the reciprocal interdependencies of the locally perceived retail brand in relation to retailers' corporate or chain reputation, considering their mutual influence on customers' loyalty. Based on cross-sectional, two longitudinal surveys as well as an experiment, the findings suggest that retail store equity interacts with corporate reputation and is a more important driver of store loyalty than corporate reputation. Thus, retailers should pay attention to reciprocal effects, especially when deciding on the relative allocation of investments across corporate and store levels.
- *Retail Branding and Local Competition – The Importance of Retail Brand Equity and Store Accessibility for Store Loyalty in Local Competition:* This study examines the retail brand effects on store loyalty in the light of local competition and in conjunction with store's locally perceived store accessibility, which is a highly relevant mantra in retailing. Based on surveys at 30 store locations of a

focal retailer and its strongest local competitor the findings show that store loyalty benefits more from a strong brand than from location, that location can benefit from a strong brand, that a competitor's brand equity has an negative influence on loyalty towards a focal retailer, and that the strength of these effects depends on the local competitive context.

- *International Transfer and Perception of Retail Formats – A Comparison Study in Germany and Romania*: This study examines the perception of retail brands and the drivers of retail brands in the light of different retail formats, considering retailers from developed markets doing business with the same retail formats in emerging countries. Based on consumer surveys in two countries the findings suggest that similar core attributes equally affect format-specific retail brands and store loyalty in both markets. The findings also suggest that retailers transferring their formats from their home to host countries should place particular emphasis on managing the core attributes of a specific format, as these attributes are of paramount importance for establishing retailers as a strong brand.

With her work Dr. Bettina Berg makes a significant contribution to retailing research. She significantly disentangles the interrelation of retailers' corporate reputation and store equities and advances knowledge on retail positioning as strong brands in different local competitive situations as well as formats in different countries. Her work impressed on the one hand with the extent of attention paid to the conceptualization but also with the combination of different types of studies and methodologies. I'm in particular very happy with her work, as Dr. Bettina Berg presents the tenth dissertation at my Chair for Marketing & Retailing at the University of Trier. I thank Bettina Berg for four years of working as research assistant at my chair. I got to know her as honorable and always kind minded person and I wish Dr. Bettina Berg very warmly all the best for her carrier as well as her private life in her future.

*Professor Dr. Prof. h.c. Bernhard Swoboda*

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