

Preface

I have been watching developments on the internet as well as the retail industry closely for many years now. During my time as a Ph.D. candidate, I talked to many executives working for large retail chains. Although the online channel had become the dominant shopping channel for my generation, the major questions many companies asked were “How can we prevent our online channel from cannibalizing our stores?” “How can we compete with these online players?” and soon also “How can we survive?” I above all became interested in this last question. Many important elements of our past, such as the music cassette, the phone booth, or the street map, have since been rendered obsolete by superior digital or IT-driven competitors, because they had no advantage over these innovations. Could large retail chains disappear in a similar fashion? In order to investigate opportunities instead of decline, I moved beyond the prevalent view of competition between offline and online channels and chose to look for opportunities of integrating the two in order to create competitive advantages. The results of these four years of searching, puzzling, discussing, and reflecting are depicted in the following five chapters.

My journey as a Ph.D. started in the “Operations and Information Systems” program offered by the University of Mannheim’s Center of Doctoral Studies in Business. As a part of the interdisciplinary Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences, I had the opportunity to attend a broad range of methodological, theoretical, and philosophical courses taught by internationally renowned scholars. Although a very challenging time, the investment in a “tool box” later allowed me to choose freely between the methods and theoretical perspectives most suitable for addressing my particular research puzzles. Throughout my Ph.D., my mentor Prof. Daniel Veit guided me and supported my development wherever possible. Without his active involvement and commitment, my project could never have evolved the way it did. The numerous international conferences attended, the Doctoral Consortium of the European Conference on Information Systems, and our yearly Danish–German Midsummer Colloquium at the Copenhagen Business School allowed me to meet many interesting people and learn about different approaches to research and academic life. And my time with Prof. Gerard Tellis

as a visiting scholar at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business was especially rewarding. On many occasions, Gerry's enthusiasm and his demanding and critical opinions pushed me to further refine my ideas.

At the beginning of my Ph.D., I was told that it would be a very intense time alternating between great euphoria and crises. And it was. Therefore, I am particularly happy that I had such great companions, who helped me through the crises and celebrated the victories with me. Though I cannot thank them all here, let me extend my thanks to a select few: First of all, my colleagues Jan Huntgeburth and Dennis Steininger, who shared my enthusiasm for pushing the envelope. Second, my fellows Behnaz Gholami, Ye Li, and Emilio Zamorano, who made the hard times at the graduate school worthwhile. Third, the new generation at our department, Sabrina Hauff, Amelie Sach, and An Bui, who foster our great team spirit. Fourth, my parents and my sister, whose unfailing faith has enabled me to go my own way. Last and most important, my partner Julia, who supported me through all the highs and lows of the Ph.D. and demonstrated once again why she is the most important person in my life.

It was an exhausting journey. But looking back, it was also a thrilling one that I would not want to miss for the world. And I am grateful for the many experiences gained and friendships made along the way.

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