# Toward a theory of repeat purchase drivers for consumer services

**Michael Paul · Thorsten Hennig-Thurau · Dwayne D. Gremler · Kevin P. Gwinner · Caroline Wiertz**

**Abstract** The marketing discipline's knowledge about the drivers of service customers' repeat purchase behavior is highly fragmented. This research attempts to overcome that fragmented state of knowledge by making major advances toward a theory of repeat purchase drivers for consumer services. Drawing on means–end theory, the authors develop a hierarchical classification scheme that organizes repeat purchase drivers into an integrative and comprehensive framework. They then identify drivers on the basis of 188 face-to-face laddering interviews in two countries (USA and Germany) and assess the drivers' importance and interrelations through a national probability sample survey of 618 service customers. In addition to presenting an exhaustive and coherent set of hierarchical repeat-purchase drivers, the authors provide theoretical explanations for how and why drivers relate to one another and to repeat purchase behavior. This research also tests the boundary conditions of the proposed framework by accounting for different service types. In addition to its theoretical contribution, the framework provides companies with specific information about how to manage long-term customer relationships successfully.

**Keywords** Repeat purchase behavior · Means–end theory · Services · Relationship marketing

M. Paul (✉) · T. Hennig-Thurau
Department of Marketing and Media Research, Faculty of Media,
Bauhaus-University of Weimar,
99423 Weimar, Germany
e-mail: michael.paul@medien.uni-weimar.de

T. Hennig-Thurau
e-mail: tht@medien.uni-weimar.de

D. D. Gremler
Department of Marketing, College of Business Administration,
Bowling Green State University,
Bowling Green, OH 43403, USA
e-mail: gremler@bgsu.edu

K. P. Gwinner
Department of Marketing, College of Business Administration,
Kansas State University,
201 Calvin Hall,
Manhattan, KS 66506, USA
e-mail: kgwinner@ksu.edu

T. Hennig-Thurau · C. Wiertz
Faculty of Management, Cass Business School, City University,
106 Bunhill Row,
London EC1Y 8TZ, UK

C. Wiertz
e-mail: c.wiertz@city.ac.uk

## Introduction

For most service organizations, economic success depends on an ability to maintain long-term relationships with customers who purchase their offerings repeatedly (Reinartz et al. 2005; Rust et al. 2004). Understanding the reasons customers repeatedly purchase from a service firm therefore represents an issue of essential importance. Service research has identified a multitude of potential repeat purchase drivers; a literature review of nine leading marketing journals between 1983 and 2005 reveals 65 studies that report no fewer than 90 different repeat purchase drivers for consumer services.[1]

[1] The nine marketing journals (in alphabetical order) are: *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Marketing Letters*, and *Marketing Science*. The year 1983 provides a natural start date, because the term "relationship marketing" usually is attributed to Berry's (1983) article. Our search included articles published by October 2005.

However, despite the proliferation of research on repeat purchase drivers for consumer services, extant knowledge on this topic is highly fragmented, a concern for many marketing researchers. Gupta and Zeithaml (2006, p. 733) observe conceptual overlap in the definition and measurement of key variables influencing repeat purchase and warn "the pattern of relationships among the variables is not clear." Palmatier et al. (2006, p. 137) find that "many constructs [exist] with similar definitions that operate under different aliases and constructs with similar names but different operationalizations." Verhoef et al. (2007, p. 115) state, "it is difficult to deduce generalizable findings [on antecedents of customer retention], since the research is quite fragmented and results are mixed," and Zeithaml (2000, p. 76) deplores that "no studies have incorporated all or even most potential explanatory variables to examine their relative importance in keeping customers."

We attempt to overcome this fragmented state of knowledge by making major advances toward a theory of repeat purchase drivers for consumer services and thus contribute to marketing research in two important ways. First, we develop an integrative and comprehensive framework of repeat purchase drivers, using means–end theory and 188 laddering interviews. The framework is the first that identifies an exhaustive and coherent set of repeat purchase drivers which includes new drivers; provides means–end theoretical explanations for how and why drivers relate to one another and to repeat purchase behavior; hierarchically organizes these drivers; and systematically integrates extant research on repeat purchase drivers. Second, we use the framework to assess empirically the relative importance of repeat purchase drivers and their interrelationships, a task hitherto prevented by the fragmentation of extant research (MacKenzie 2003; Zeithaml 2000). We accomplish this assessment through a large, quantitative study based on a nationwide probability sample. The inclusion of different service types enables us to test the boundary conditions of our framework.

Scholars can use our framework to position themselves in this research field, make informed choices about drivers for their own studies, and compare their findings with other research. They further can use our findings about the importance of drivers to focus on key concepts when designing their research. Marketing managers require both a comprehensive and integrative framework of repeat purchase drivers and information about each driver's relative importance. With a coherent classification of all repeat purchase drivers at their disposal, they can judge the drivers' effectiveness, interactions, and restrictions. Our framework thus provides managers with a natural starting point for developing relationship marketing strategies and integrating their marketing efforts. The complete understanding of the scope of drivers also enables them to determine how to implement different strategies through a differential blending of drivers. Finally, information about driver importance enables managers to exert an appropriate emphasis and budget across all drivers.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: We first introduce a hierarchical framework of repeat purchase drivers in the context of consumer services based on means–end theory, identify specific drivers by conducting qualitative research in two countries, and provide a detailed discussion about the contributions of our framework. We then conduct a quantitative national probability sample survey to analyze the different drivers' importance for repeat purchasing. We conclude by detailing the implications of our theory development for service research and management practice.

## A theoretical framework of repeat purchase drivers for consumer services

### Means–end theory

Introduced by Gutman (1982), means–end theory posits that a customer's knowledge about products, stored in long-term memory, gets organized in three interlinked cognitive categories: attributes, benefits, and motivational values. Customers connect their knowledge of the concrete attributes of a product with more abstract ideas about functional and psychosocial consequences (or benefits), which they associate with even more abstract motivational values (Olson and Reynolds 1983; Walker and Olson 1991). Using a prominent example offered by Reynolds and Gutman (1988), customers might consume wine coolers at parties because the coolers have less alcohol than mixed drinks (attribute level), which enables them to socialize (they do not get drunk; benefit level), which in turn gives them a sense of belonging (part of a social group; motivational values level). Accordingly, because attributes represent means to achieve important ends (i.e., benefits and values), means–end theory provides an explanation for why customers buy certain products or services (Overby et al. 2004; Pieters et al. 1995).

### Application of means–end theory to repeat purchase behavior

We posit that a customer's motivation to buy repeatedly from a service provider results from the three general means–end categories of attributes, benefits, and motivational values. Repeat purchase behavior reflects the behavioral dimension of customer loyalty (Dick and Basu 1994), which implies that we are interested in any kind of repeat purchase behavior, irrespective of whether repeat purchases occur because of attitudinal loyalty.

We refer to the three fundamental means–end categories as service relationship attributes, relationship-driving benefits, and motivational values. Service relationship attributes refer to a customer's knowledge of the characteristics of a specific service provider, which drive his or her repeat purchases from that provider. Relationship-driving benefits describe a customer's knowledge of the advantages he or she receives from the service provider which prompt repeat purchases, beyond the advantages derived from the core service. Finally, motivational values refer to a customer's knowledge of his or her desired end states, which transcend specific situations and contexts and drive repeat purchases from the provider (Schwartz and Bilsky 1990).

Because benefits are considered more important for customer decision making than attributes and values (e.g., Gutman 1991), we focus on benefits in our analysis of means–end chain linkages by investigating how strongly attributes and motivational values relate to a given benefit, such that benefits influence attribute choice and determine value achievement. Such a focus acknowledges that motivational values, though connected to benefits, are not necessarily active driving forces in every consumption decision (Cohen and Warlop 2001). The left portion of Fig. 1 displays the three general categories of repeat purchase drivers, interconnected according to our focus on benefits with arrows from benefits to attributes and from benefits to motivational values.

## Hierarchical classification of repeat purchase drivers

To organize repeat purchase drivers systematically within each general category of our framework (i.e., service relationship attributes, relationship-driving benefits, and motivational values), we suggest a hierarchical classification scheme of drivers, ranging from general and abstract to specific and concrete (Hunt 2002). The hierarchical classification accounts for the fact that customers perceive repeat purchase drivers on different levels of abstraction (Cohen 2000; Klein et al. 1994); it also reduces complexity by subsuming many concrete drivers into fewer more abstract drivers, thereby increasing the framework's readability and managerial usability. Specifically, we divide each general category into two hierarchical levels, first- and second-order drivers, as illustrated in Fig. 1. The first-order, general and abstract

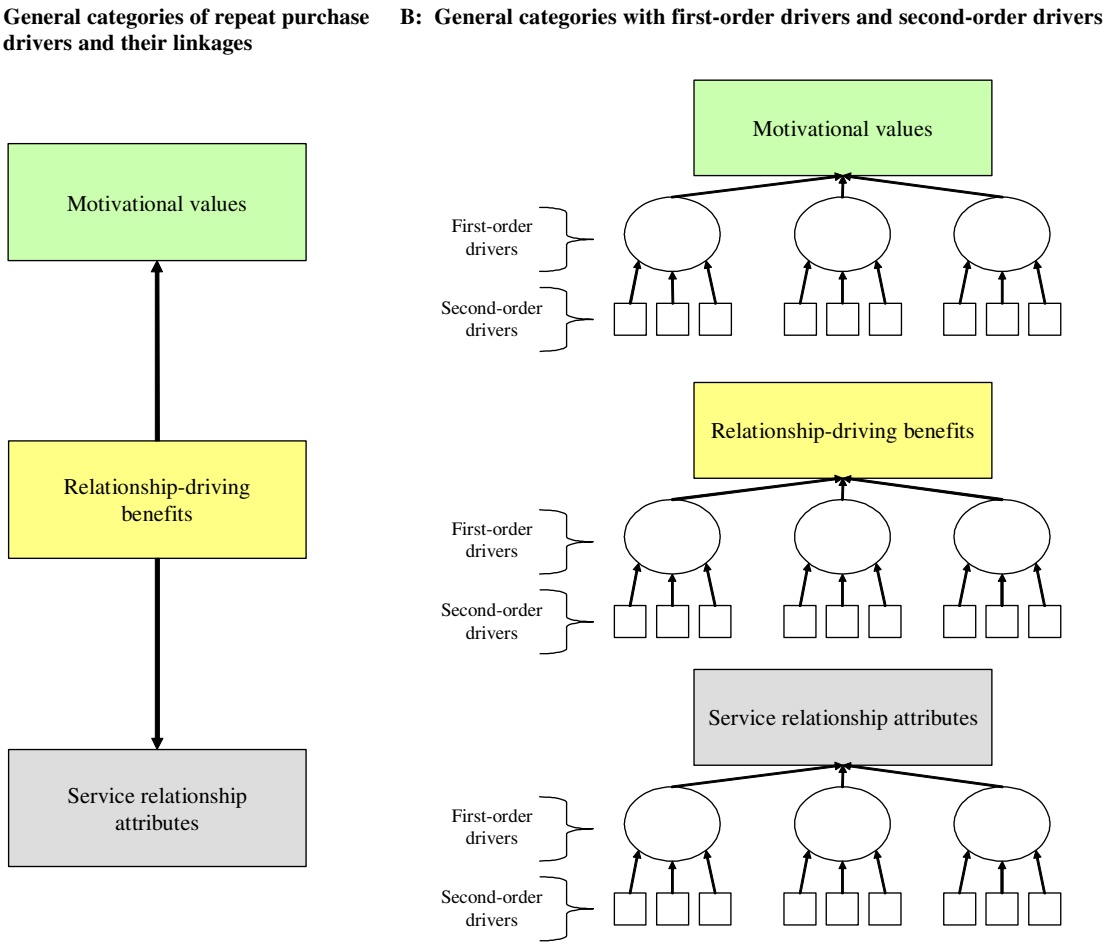



**Figure 1** Framework of repeat purchase drivers for consumer services.

drivers aggregate specific and concrete second-order drivers. For example, interaction quality is a general and abstract first-order concept that subsumes specific and concrete second-order concepts such as an employee's behavior and expertise (Brady and Cronin 2001). We inductively identify specific drivers within each general category using extensive laddering studies in two countries and then compare our results with extant literature.

## Empirical identification of first- and second-order repeat purchase drivers

*Data collection and coding of second-order drivers* To identify a comprehensive set of repeat purchase drivers at different hierarchical levels, we conduct two laddering studies with 188 face-to-face in-depth interviews in two countries (i.e., USA and Germany). The laddering method was created specifically to explore means–end chains by repeatedly asking respondents a series of "Why is this important to you?" probes to establish the linkages among attributes, benefits, and motivational values (Reynolds and Gutman 1988). In our first laddering study, three trained interviewers conducted 100 face-to-face interviews in a mid-sized German city with consumers who repeatedly purchased from a service provider. Respondent selection used quota criteria (i.e., age and gender) to reflect the German population (see Table 1). Interviews lasted 33 min on average (12–63 min, $\sigma$=10 min) and were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. Customers had shopped with their service providers for 1–40 years, with an average relationship length of 10 years.

The interviewers first asked respondents to think about a specific service provider, from a list of 34 service industries, from which they repeatedly bought services and whose offerings they considered personally important. The latter condition helps respondents access motivational values during laddering (Pieters et al. 1995). Using the direct elicitation technique (Bech-Larsen and Nielsen 1999), the interviewers then asked respondents to name those service relationship attributes that provided the main reasons for their repeated purchase from the selected firm. For each attribute mentioned by a respondent, they asked "Why is that important to you?" repeatedly, until the respondent named a benefit and, eventually, a motivational value. Interviewers stopped probing when a respondent could not name a benefit (or value) linked to an attribute (or benefit). Each response to each question represents a statement that serves as the unit of analysis.

Three service marketing scholars content analyzed all 100 interviews. The first analyst created a means–end chain map for each interview (Reynolds and Gutman 1988). Using the original tapes and transcripts, the second and third analysts then independently compared the transcript with each map for completeness (i.e., all statements of a respondent are identified) and semantic appropriateness (i.e., a label captures a statement's meaning). Statements identified by the first analyst were 94.7% complete and 98.1% appropriately labeled. Using the constant comparative method, the first analyst then

**Table 1** Description of final samples for all studies (percentages)

| | Laddering study (Germany) | Laddering study (USA) | CATI study (unweighted/ weighted) | National population[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age (years) | | | | |
| 18–29 | 24.0 | 37.9 | 24.8/17.6 | 17.0 |
| 30–39 | 19.0 | 19.5 | 19.7/19.3 | 18.9 |
| 40–49 | 22.0 | 15.0 | 22.0/19.5 | 19.3 |
| 50–64 | 30.0 | 21.8 | 23.7/22.9 | 22.8 |
| 65+ | 5.0 | 5.8 | 9.8/20.7 | 22.0 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 50.0 | 52.3 | 58.4/51.6 | 51.1 |
| Male | 50.0 | 47.7 | 41.6/48.4 | 48.9 |
| Household size (persons) | | | | |
| 1 | n.c. | n.c. | 18.6/17.9 | 17.5 |
| 2 | n.c. | n.c. | 32.6/31.7 | 31.9 |
| 3 | n.c. | n.c. | 22.2/19.7 | 19.9 |
| 4 | n.c. | n.c. | 18.3/20.8 | 20.7 |
| 5+ | n.c. | n.c. | 8.3/9.9 | 10.0 |
| City size (inhabitants) | | | | |
| Less than 10,000 | n.c. | n.c. | 38.5/27.7 | 27.4 |
| 10,000–30,000 | n.c. | n.c. | 27.7/24.2 | 23.5 |
| 30,000–50,000 | n.c. | n.c. | 15.7/18.3 | 18.3 |
| More than 50,000 | n.c. | n.c. | 18.1/29.8 | 30.8 |
| Education | | | | |
| Not graduated from school | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.4/2.8 | n.a. |
| High school | 39.0 | 34.6 | 75.3/73.3 | n.a. |
| University degree | 61.0 | 65.4 | 21.3/23.9 | n.a. |
| Profession | | | | |
| Employee | 44.0 | 14.1 | 44.1/38.9 | n.a. |
| Government employee | 5.0 | 31.7 | 5.7/6.1 | n.a. |
| Retired | 12.0 | 2.4 | 17.2/27.7 | n.a. |
| Self-employed | 10.0 | 9.4 | 8.1/7.8 | n.a. |
| Student | 17.0 | 40.0 | 4.7/3.6 | n.a. |
| Unemployed | 7.0 | 0.0 | 7.0/5.5 | n.a. |
| Other | 5.0 | 2.4 | 13.2/10.4 | n.a. |
| Marital status | | | | |
| Single | 50.5 | 43.9 | n.c. | 41.1 |
| Married | 35.4 | 51.2 | n.c. | 44.8 |
| Widowed/ divorced | 14.1 | 4.9 | n.c. | 14.1 |

*n.c.* Information not collected, *n.a.* information not available, *CATI* computer assisted telephone interview.
[a] Numbers refer to the German population.

decided to which general category each statement should be assigned and created initial second-order driver categories at the attribute and benefit levels by comparing each statement's similarities and differences with other statements (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In assigning statements, each driver category could be refined and redefined. Statements from at least two respondents were required to establish a second-order driver category. The coding procedure differs for the values category, because the context-overarching nature of values allows us to apply extant values typologies to the repeat purchase context (Schwartz and Bilsky 1990). We use Schwartz's (1992) typology of ten values, which builds on extant research (Rokeach 1973) and has been validated for more than 70 different cultural groups (Schwartz and Rubel 2005), to classify repeat purchase drivers at the second-order values level instead of defining new categories.

The three analysts met regularly over the course of more than six months to discuss the first analyst's classifications (Holloway and Beatty 2008). Each time the analysts could not agree on a coding decision or a category label, all three went back to the original tapes and transcripts and reconsidered their own interpretations. Because several concepts emerging from the interviews resembled drivers from extant research, the analysts also compared their concepts with existing literature to ground their interpretations and distinguish between new and established concepts. Then, building on their updated conclusions, the three analysts again made an effort to reach a final decision. Consistent with classification research, this iterative process continued until they reached a satisfying level of intercoder agreement (Holloway and Beatty 2008; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Prior to the last coding round in which all three analysts agreed on a final set of second-order driver categories and the assignments of statements, overall intercoder agreement on the assignment of statements to second-order categories reached 95.8%. When adjusting agreement rates by the number of categories (i.e., 50) and coders (i.e., 3) as suggested by Rust and Cooil (1994) to achieve more valid reliability scores, intercoder reliability is close to 100%. During the coding process, the analysts processed a total of 1,393 statements (average of 13.9 statements per respondent). In accordance with our definition of relationship-driving benefits, we exclude advantages derived from the core service.

We conducted a second laddering study to determine if (1) the list of repeat purchase drivers from the first study is exhaustive and (2) attributes, benefits, or motivational values are culturally specific (Harkness et al. 2003). Three interviewers conducted face-to-face laddering interviews in the USA with 88 service customers in a similarly-sized city to the one used in the German sample. The data collection procedure remained identical to that employed in the German study, and the samples are similar with regard to respondents' age and gender (see Table 1). Two service marketing scholars not involved in the analysis of the German interviews analyzed the US interviews following the same procedure applied in Germany, processing a total of 857 statements (9.7 statements per respondent). Intercoder agreement on the assignment of statements to second-order categories was 92.0% (with intercoder reliability being greater than 95.0% when accounting for the 50 categories and two coders; Rust and Cooil 1994). After this step, all five analysts compared and discussed the results of the two laddering studies with regard to conceptual equivalence. All second-order drivers identified in the German interviews (except for altruism benefits) emerged from the US sample, and no additional drivers were identified.

*Identification of first-order drivers* We then applied the constant comparative method again, this time to the set of second-order drivers. This enabled us to identify first-order driver categories, with each second-order driver assigned to one first-order driver. When searching for an adequate first-order representation of motivational values, we once more draw from Schwartz (1992), who suggests that the ten second-order values we replicate in the context of service relationships can be condensed into three first-order values. To validate our assignments of attributes and benefits, we asked 53 service marketing researchers (professors of all ranks and doctoral students) from seven countries to participate in an assignment task. We provided the experts with a questionnaire that contained our definitions of each second-order driver attribute and benefit, as well as our definitions of all first-order drivers, then asked the experts to assign each second-order driver to what they believed to be the most appropriate first-order driver. The unadjusted overall intercoder agreement is 61.2% for attributes and 67.2% for benefits among the 53 researchers. More importantly, intercoder reliability is close to 100% for both levels, when accounting for the number of categories (i.e., six attributes and three benefits) and the 53 coders involved as suggested by Rust and Cooil (1994). The final assignments based on our own and the experts' judgments appear in Table 2, along with first- and second-order driver definitions and illustrative customer comments.[2]

[2] The majority of experts assigned 39 of 40 second-order attributes and benefits to the proposed first-order driver, supporting our initial assignment. The only exception was fairness, which they predominantly assigned to the first-order driver of service delivery (instead of service product, as we proposed). We followed the experts' advice and changed the assignment of fairness to service delivery but retained all other assignments. Given the context-overarching nature of motivational values and the large amount of empirical and theoretical support for the classification used, we did not include values in the expert assignment task.

**Table 2** First- and second-order drivers of repeat purchase behavior

| First-order and second-order driver | Definition | Illustrative customer comment | Similar extant concepts and literature |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Service relationship attributes** | | | |
| Service product | Attributes that refer to the service as it is designed to be delivered | | Service product [Rust and Oliver 1994]; outcome quality [Brady and Cronin 2001] |
| Assortment | Depth and breadth of products and services offered | "They have a nice balance of products" (*supermarket*) | Overall assortment or variety of food products [Arnold et al. 1983]; product assortment [Borle et al. 2005] |
| Customization | Tailoring of service outcome according to customer needs offered to all customers | "She does my hair the way I want" (*hairdresser*) | Customized offers [Simonson 2005] |
| Equipment and materials | Technical equipment and materials used to produce the service offering | "They have the latest technology" (*veterinarian*) | Tangibles [Boulding et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Zeithaml et al. 1996] |
| Low price | Prices being lower than alternative offerings | "Cheaper than other flower shops" (*supermarket*) | Low overall price and weekly specials [Arnold et al. 1983]; sales promotion [Sirohi et al. 1998]; retail promotion [Drèze and Hoch 1998] |
| Price–quality ratio | Price of service offering relative to quality received is better than alternative offerings | "I am not charged too much" (*car repair*) | Price, quality, and value perceptions [Varki and Colgate 2001]; relative price [Sirohi et al. 1998]; value for money in generics [Arnold et al. 1983]; perceived value [Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Sirohi et al. 1998]; value [Blackwell et al. 1999; Sirdeshmuk et al. 2002] |
| Reliability | Consistent, accurate, and dependable service outcome | "They are always on time" (*airline*) | Reliability [Boulding et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Zeithaml et al. 1996] |
| Temporal availability | Times when service offerings are available (e.g., opening hours, flexible appointments, permanent access by telephone or online) | "They are available for appointments and are very flexible" (*hairdresser*) | Store operations [Sirohi et al. 1998]; mobile channel addition [Nysveen et al. 2005] |
| Uniqueness | Rare or unique service offering | "This type of haircut is hard to get in this town" (*hairdresser*) | Quality meat and produce [Arnold et al. 1983]; quality store brands [Corstjens and Lal 2000]; merchandise quality [Sirohi et al. 1998] |
| Value-added services | Additional service offerings provided above and beyond the core service | "He contacts me at home" (*physician*) | Direct mailing [De Wulf et al. 2001; Verhoef 2003] |
| Service delivery | Attributes that refer to the customer–employee interaction through which the service is produced | | Service delivery [Rust and Oliver 1994]; interaction quality [Brady and Cronin 2001] |
| Authenticity | Employees' natural and authentic emotional display toward all customers | "They do not just pretend to be friendly" (*retail clothing store*) | Authenticity of the emotional labor display [Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006] |
| Empathy | Employees taking care of and showing interest in all customers | "Shows interest in me and takes time to talk to me" (*veterinarian*) | Empathy [Boulding et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Zeithaml et al. 1996]; employee warmth during service encounter [Lemmink and Mattsson 1998]; friendly, courteous staff [Arnold et al. 1983]; personalization [Mittal and Lassar 1996] |
| Expertise | Employees' technical and advice-giving competence | "Employees are knowledgeable" (*book store*) | Assurance [Boulding et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Zeithaml et al. 1996]; |

**Table 2** (continued)

| First-order and second-order driver | Definition | Illustrative customer comment | Similar extant concepts and literature |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | personnel service perception [Sirohi et al. 1998] |
| Fairness | Integrity, honesty, and equity of service provider toward all customers with regard to the service offered | "He has integrity and honesty" (*physician*) | Payment equity [Verhoef 2003]; perceived equity [Olsen and Johnson 2003]; complaint management [Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987, 1988; Homburg and Fürst 2005; Tax et al. 1998] |
| Low pressure | Employees not pressurizing customers to buy | "Don't expect me to purchase" (*book store*) | Customer orientation [Beatty et al. 1996; Brady and Cronin 2001] |
| Motivation | Employees' good job attitude and demonstration of effort in service provision to all customers | "They go the extra mile" (*insurance broker*) | Responsiveness [Boulding et al. 1993; Cronin and Taylor 1992; Zeithaml et al. 1996] |
| Quickness | Prompt service provision and short waiting time | "The check-in process is quick" (*airline*) | Fast checkout counters [Arnold et al. 1983]; wait expectations [Grewal et al. 2003] |
| Service environment | Attributes that refer to the ambience in which the service is delivered | | Service environment [Rust and Oliver 1994]; physical environment quality [Brady and Cronin 2001]; store environment cues [Baker et al. 2002] |
| Audience | Other customers contributing to a good service atmosphere | "I know the other customers there" (*bar*) | Other customers [Grove and Fisk 1997; Gruen et al. 2007] |
| Cleanliness | Clean service setting | "The doctor's practice is sterile" (*physician*) | Store appearance [Sirohi et al. 1998] |
| Servicescape | Good overall physical surroundings and atmosphere | "Classical music in a historical atmosphere" (*coffee shop*) | Pleasant shopping environment [Arnold et al. 1983]; store atmosphere [Grewal et al. 2003] |
| Service location | Attributes that refer to the geographical location where the service is provided | | Retail location [Craig et al. 1984] |
| Location | Geographical location where the service is provided | "Location is on the way to work" (*dry cleaner*) | Easy to get to from home [Arnold et al. 1983] |
| Relationship characteristics | Attributes that refer to an ongoing relationship, which the service provider maintains with a customer and with other persons of importance to this customer | | Relationship characteristics [Reinartz and Kumar 2003; Seiders et al. 2005] |
| Connection | Customer having a personal connection to an employee or a symbolic connection to the place | "I have a personal connection with a manager of the bank" (*bank*) | Commercial friendship [Price and Arnould 1999]; interpersonal relationship [Jones et al. 2000]; rapport [Gremler and Gwinner 2000]; third place [Rosenbaum 2006] |
| Customer history | Service provider storing and using information about the individual customer gathered during previous visits | "They know my car well" (*car repair*) | Relational information processes [Jayachandran et al. 2005]; loyalty programs [Bolton et al. 2000; Kim et al. 2001; Sharp and Sharp 1997; Yi and Jeon 2003; Verhoef 2003]; tangible rewards [De Wulf et al. 2001] |
| Significant others | Friends or relatives of the customer also being customers | "Friends of mine are also his patients" (*physician*) | Social influence [Evans et al. 1996]; social factor [Heitman et al. 2007] |

**Table 2** (continued)

| First-order and second-order driver | Definition | Illustrative customer comment | Similar extant concepts and literature |
|---|---|---|---|
| | (but may not necessarily visit the service provider at the same time) | | |
| Similarity | Customer liking the employee and/or having something in common with him/her | "We are both Greek" (*restaurant*) | Customer–employee similarity [Crosby et al. 1990]; rapport [Gremler and Gwinner 2000] |
| Special treatment | Treatment of regular customers by the service provider is better than treatment of non-regular customers | "I get appointments on short call because I have been a customer for many years" (*hairdresser*) | Preferential treatment [De Wulf et al. 2001] |
| Company characteristics[a] | Attributes that refer to the company overall (not to the quality of the service provided by the company) | | Corporate associations [Brown and Dacin 1997] |
| Corporate social responsibility[a] | Service provider supporting its employees, the community, and the environment | "They support the community" (*bank*) | Perception of corporate social responsibility [Maignan and Ferrell 2004] |
| Reputation[a] | Service provider's good public reputation | "They have a good reputation" (*insurance broker*) | Corporate reputation [Walsh and Beatty 2007] |
| Small and local company[a] | Service provider being small, privately owned, and local | "It is a privately owned barber, not a chain" (*hairdresser*) | Hometown ideology [Arnold et al. 2001]; hegemonic brandscape and consumers' anticorporate experience of glocalization [Thompson and Arsel 2004]; urban periodic farmer's market [McGrath et al. 1993] |
| **Relationship-driving benefits** | | | |
| Functional benefits | Benefits which are of a utilitarian or tangible kind | | Functional benefits [Reynolds and Beatty 1999]; functional motives [Beatty et al. 1996]; switching costs [Jones et al. 2000]; perceived relationship investment [De Wulf et al. 2001] |
| Convenience | The customer benefits because s/he saves time and effort | "It saves me time" (*bank*) | Convenience [Berry et al. 2002; Seiders et al. 2007] |
| Knowledge | The customer benefits because s/he gains expert knowledge and information about the service | "I learn new skills" (*electronics store*) | Consumer knowledge [Chiou et al. 2002; Ratchford 2001] |
| Money savings | The customer benefits because s/he saves money | "I don't have a financial loss" (*airline*) | Economic benefits [Gwinner et al. 1998] |
| Psychological benefits | Benefits which satisfy important intrinsic goals of the customer that are self-oriented | | Psychological benefits [Gwinner et al. 1998]; delight [Oliver et al. 1997]; perceived relationship investment [De Wulf et al. 2001] |
| Autonomy | The customer benefits because s/he feels that the service provider allows her/him to decide and act on her/his own with regard to using the service | "I am not seduced to buy" (*supermarket*) | Self-determination [Dholakia 2006] |
| Comfort | The customer benefits because | "My stress is removed or at | Comfort [Spake et al. 2003] |

**Table 2** (continued)

| First-order and second-order driver | Definition | Illustrative customer comment | Similar extant concepts and literature |
|---|---|---|---|
| | her/his anxiety concerning a service encounter has been eased, and s/he enjoys peace of mind and is worry free | least reduced" (*airline*) | |
| Confidence | The customer benefits because s/he has more confidence and feelings of trust in the service provider | "I can trust them" (*drugstore*) | Confidence benefits [Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002]; trust [Beatty et al. 1996; Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Macintosh and Lockshin 1997; Morgan and Hunt 1994]; trust in frontline employees or management policies and practices [Sirdeshmuk et al. 2002]; |
| Privilege | The customer benefits because as a loyal customer s/he feels privileged and special compared to other customers | "He makes me feel special as a loyal customer" (*hairdresser*) | Special treatment benefits [Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002] |
| Welcomeness[a] | The customer benefits because s/he feels welcome, appreciated, or being cared for in the service encounter | "I feel they enjoy my presence" (*physician*) | Relatedness [Thomson 2006]; relational cultural model [Ringberg et al. 2007] |
| Social benefits | Benefits which make people feel closer to each other or portray a desired image to others | | Social benefits [Gwinner et al. 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002; Reynolds and Beatty 1999]; social motives [Beatty et al. 1999]; perceived relationship investment [De Wulf et al. 2001] |
| Affiliation | The customer benefits because s/he has feelings of affiliation, connectedness, or identification with the service provider or other customers | "I feel connected to this airline" (*airline*) | Consumer identification [Arnett et al. 2003; Bhattacharya 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003] |
| Altruism[a] | The customer benefits because s/he can help others as a consequence of using the service provider | "It is just a good feeling if you can support others" (*bar*) | Altruistic motive [Bendapudi et al. 1996]; moral identity [Reed et al. 2007]; gift giving as agapic love [Belk and Coon 1993] |
| Communication | The customer benefits because s/he enjoys the social interaction and communication with the service employees or other customers | "I have enjoyable visits with people" (*bank*) | Communication [Duncan and Moriarty 1998]; interaction/communication [Crosby and Stephens 1987]; interpersonal communication [De Wulf et al. 2001] |
| Community[a] | The customer benefits because s/he can support the sustainability of the community s/he lives in as a consequence of using the service provider | "The money stays in town" (*hairdresser*) | Market embeddedness [Frenzen and Davis 1990]; brand community [Muniz and O'Guinn 2001]; social capital [Mathwick et al. 2008]; consumer ethnocentrism [Shimp and Sharma 1987] |
| **Motivational values** (from Schwartz 1992) | | | |
| Individual motivational values | Values that primarily serve the interests of the individual | | |
| Achievement[a] | Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards | "I can be more successful at work" (*optometrist*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |

**Table 2** (continued)

| First-order and second-order driver | Definition | Illustrative customer comment | Similar extant concepts and literature |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hedonism[a] | Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself | "I want to enjoy my life" (*movie theatre*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Power[a] | Attainment of social status and prestige, and control or dominance over people and resources | "I can maintain a high status in the community" (*bank*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Self-direction[a] | Independent thought and action — choosing, creating, exploring | "I have more independence and freedom in life" (*car repair*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Stimulation[a] | Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life | "I like variety in life" (*airline*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Collective motivational values | Values that primarily serve the interests of some collectivity | | |
| Benevolence[a] | Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact | "I want to help others" (*physician*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Conformity[a] | Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms | "I don't want to hurt others" (*car repair*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Tradition[a] | Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion impose on the individual | "It honors God if you treat others well" (*book store*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Mixed motivational values | Values that serve both the interests of the individual and some collectivity | | |
| Security[a] | Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self | "I don't want to have any concerns" (*hairdresser*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |
| Universalism[a] | Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of welfare of all people and for nature | "I want to protect the environment" (*bank*) | Overby et al. 2004; Steenkamp et al. 1999 |

[a] New repeat purchase driver for consumer services; related literature from other marketing research areas than repeat purchase appears in the right-most column.

## Results

Overall, across the three general categories, the analysis generated a total of 50 second-order drivers of repeat purchase behavior, condensed into 12 first-order drivers. At the service relationship attributes level, we find 28 second-order drivers to assign to six first-order drivers. Specifically, the first-order driver "service product" refers to a group of attributes that relate to the service as it is designed to be delivered (e.g., reliability of the service outcome). "Service delivery," another first-order driver, contains attributes that pertain to the customer–employee interaction that produces the service (e.g., employee empathy). The first-order driver "service environment" represents attributes that define the ambience through which the service is delivered (e.g., servicescape). The first-order driver "relationship characteristics" contains those attributes that refer to ongoing relationships between service providers and customers (e.g., employee–customer connection), and the first-order driver "company characteristics" includes those that refer to the company overall rather than the quality of the service it provides (e.g., service

firm's reputation). Finally, "service location," the geographical location where the service is delivered, constitutes a driver for which we identify no hierarchical structure.

On the relationship-driving benefits level, we identify 12 second-order drivers represented by three first-order drivers. The first-order driver "functional benefits" refers to customer benefits of a utilitarian nature. Such benefits include convenience, money savings, and knowledge (i.e., information acquired during repeat purchases). The first-order driver "psychological benefits" describes those customer benefits that satisfy important intrinsic, self-oriented goals of the customer. Specifically, psychological benefits include the second-order drivers of autonomy benefits, comfort benefits, confidence benefits, privilege benefits, and welcomeness benefits. "Social benefits," another first-order driver in the benefits category, make people feel closer to one another or portray a desired image to others. This driver combines the second-order drivers of communication and affiliation, as well as altruism benefits and community benefits.

Finally, on the motivational values level, we find evidence for all second-order and first-order driver values suggested by Schwartz (1992), with no additional motivational values identified in either laddering sample. The first-order drivers are "individual motivational values" (encompassing achievement, hedonism, power, self-direction, and stimulation), "collective motivational values" (benevolence, conformity, and tradition), and "mixed motivational values" (security and universalism).

## Discussion: a theoretical framework of repeat purchase drivers

*Drivers of repeat purchase behavior* On the attribute level, the first-order drivers service product, service delivery, and service environment correspond to Rust and Oliver's (1994) conceptualization of service quality. This aligns with the central role that researchers have assigned to service quality to explain repeat purchase behavior and might help integrate extant knowledge on those drivers (e.g., Boulding et al. 1993; Zeithaml et al. 1996). Several second-order drivers (i.e., audience, cleanliness, empathy, equipment and materials, expertise, motivation, quickness, reliability, servicescape, and temporal availability) assigned to the three service quality drivers previously have been considered facets of service quality (e.g., Brady and Cronin 2001). All other service product and service delivery attributes have been studied in isolation only (e.g., authenticity, Hennig-Thurau et al. 2006; customization, Simonson 2005). The classification of these drivers as part of our framework links them to a higher conceptual level and enables their integration into general marketing knowledge.

Regarding the other first-order attribute drivers, service location—though a long-established determinant of patronage in a retailing context (e.g., Craig et al. 1984)—rarely has been considered a driver of repeat buying by service marketing scholars. Another first-order driver, relationship characteristics, might serve as an umbrella for several hitherto non-integrated second-order concepts (e.g., commercial friendships, Price and Arnould 1999; customer–employee similarity, Crosby et al. 1990; significant others, Evans et al. 1996). This research is the first to identify relations among these drivers, opening the opportunity to synthesize knowledge from different research silos. Company characteristics and the associated second-order constructs have not been considered determinants of repeat purchase behavior in previous service research. Yet corporate social responsibility and reputation have been investigated in other contexts (e.g., Maignan and Ferrell 2004; Walsh and Beatty 2007), and consumer culture studies provide an understanding of why perceptions of small, local companies are of concern to customers (e.g., Thompson and Arsel 2004).

On the benefits level, the identification of three first-order drivers of repeat purchase behavior (i.e., functional, psychological, and social benefits) helps structure existing, but non-integrated knowledge. These three primary driver benefits resemble similar classifications in the means–end literature, which demonstrates their generalizability (e.g., Peter and Olson 2007). Evidence for the integrative potential of our framework emerges from the functional benefits category, which subsumes second-order convenience benefits (Berry et al. 2002); knowledge benefits referring to customer expertise (Ratchford 2001); and money-saving benefits corresponding to what Gwinner et al. (1998) label economic benefits. Psychological benefits include established drivers such as confidence and special treatment benefits (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002), but also the isolated concepts of autonomy and comfort (Dholakia 2006; Spake et al. 2003). Our conceptualization of social benefits integrates affiliation and communication (e.g., Bhattacharya 1998; Duncan and Moriarty 1998), which have not yet referenced each other, leaving their connection undetected to date.

We also identify new relationship-driving benefits. Assigned to the first-order driver of psychological benefits, welcomeness is a second-order driver not previously acknowledged in service relationship research. To ground this driver, one might link it to the concept of relatedness, with which it shares the notion of a customer's need for a sense of respect and being cared for (e.g., Thomson 2006). Altruism and community benefits, both associated with social benefits, also have not been considered repeat purchase drivers before. Altruism benefits accrue when the customer, as a consequence of repeatedly purchasing from a service provider, can do something good for either this provider or other people, and community benefits result

from the customer's support of the community in which he or she lives. Both concepts appear in research other than that on repeat purchase drivers. For example, an altruistic motivation explains why consumers help charities (e.g., Bendapudi et al. 1996), and community-like social structures are a defining element of embedded markets (Frenzen and Davis 1990).

Relationship-driving benefits as such extend the concept of customer relational benefits discussed by Gwinner and colleagues (1998), which are restricted by definition to those benefits that can be received exclusively by long-time customers. Unlike customer relational benefits, relationship-driving benefits, as defined here, cover customer benefits that can be received by both long-time *and* first-time customers (e.g., saving money through low prices).

On the motivational values level, our framework provides evidence that the full set of human values suggested by Schwartz (1992) is relevant in the context of service relationships. Although values represent a large part of human cognition and are important determinants of customer behavior (e.g., Steenkamp et al. 1999), this research is the first to consider motivational values as repeat purchase drivers for consumer services. As an element of a person's "core self," motivational values "give a person a sense of unity and identity and influence behavior across a wide variety of situations" (Walker and Olson 1991, p. 113). Motivational values thus capture a customer's general disposition to repeat purchase, which remains constant over time and across different service contexts. They also differ from other repeat purchase drivers; they are more stable and help explain why repeated purchase of a service has personal importance for a customer.

The collection of data from two countries offers some additional insights. We find that the repeat purchase drivers are conceptually equivalent in both countries, which stresses the generalizability of our framework. Altruism benefits, mentioned by 12% of the German respondents but absent in the US sample, represent an exception. However, extensive research on altruism demonstrates the construct's cross-cultural character (e.g., Paul et al. 1993), and we see no reason to assume that altruism is nonexistent in service relationships in the USA. We also note that the laddering interviews in Germany produced more statements per person than those in the USA. We are not aware of any studies that investigate cross-cultural differences in the number of concepts elicited in laddering studies; it seems an interesting avenue for further research.

*Relationships between drivers and repeat purchase behavior* The framework adds to our understanding of repeat purchase drivers by providing, for the first time, an integrative theoretical explanation of how and why drivers relate to one another. The means–end theoretical underpinning of our framework implies that all linkages between repeat purchase drivers represent cognitive associations in customers' long-term memory related in a means–end way (Olson and Reynolds 1983). This theoretical explanation also offers links for an augmentation of our framework by applying associative network models from memory research (Anderson 1983a). Following this logic, customers would acquire knowledge on repeat purchase drivers through exemplar learning (i.e., passive and automatic creation of increasingly abstract categories over time) or conceptual combinations (i.e., active manipulation of knowledge in memory) (Barsalou 1991); the retrieval of existing driver knowledge would entail a process in which activation spreads from node to node, depending on the strength of linkages between driver categories (Collins and Loftus 1975).

The means–end theoretical underpinning of our framework also extends the literature by providing the first general explanation for how and why drivers lead to service customers' repeat purchase behavior. Our framework states that customers repeatedly purchase from a service provider when they perceive attributes as means to achieve important ends (i.e., benefits and values; Overby et al. 2004). This explanation mirrors expectancy-value models of motivation research (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), which tell us that a consumer's propensity to act (i.e., visit a certain service provider repeatedly) depends on (1) the strength of his or her expectancy that the act will result in a consequence (i.e., that attributes are linked to benefits or values) and (2) the value of that consequence (i.e., the desired benefits or values) (Cohen and Warlop 2001). Accordingly, research might draw from the larger area of expectancy-value research to provide deeper insights on the link between drivers and repeat purchase behavior.

*Summary* Our framework provides evidence that repeat purchase drivers are multifaceted phenomena that require many hierarchically related concepts to be captured adequately. Our framework is comprehensive and coherent; it defines and delineates all drivers thoroughly from one another, and the analysts found redundancies in additional customer statements after they analyzed approximately half of the 188 laddering interviews. Prior research has not sufficiently accounted for this complexity, causing a lack of agreement among researchers about which drivers exist. We find that specific drivers can be grouped into general driver categories (i.e., service relationship attributes, relationship-driving benefits, motivational values) and organized on different levels of abstraction. Our hierarchical framework enables the systematic comparison and integration of drivers and thereby facilitates the future accumulation of knowledge in this important research area. Furthermore, our

discussion demonstrates that most of our empirically identified drivers relate to drivers from previous research, providing additional support of the power of our framework. This is also evidenced by the right-most column of Table 2, which explicitly links each driver to extant research. The redundancy among a substantial number of associated drivers apparent in Table 2 illustrates fragmentation and underscores the need for an integrated theory of repeat purchase drivers. Finally, our framework contributes to repeat purchase drivers research by providing a general explanation of how and why drivers relate to one another and to repeat purchase behavior.

## Assessing the importance of repeat purchase drivers for consumer services

### General remarks

We use our framework to empirically assess the relative importance of repeat purchase drivers and the strength of their linkages, which is necessary for an efficient allocation of resources among drivers (Zeithaml 2000). Although we refrain from offering formal hypotheses about the differential importance of the drivers, the number of extant studies concerned with drivers reveals something about the importance they assign to these drivers. We expect attributes referring to service quality (i.e., service product, service delivery, and service environment) to account for much of customers' repeat purchase behavior (Gupta and Zeithaml 2006). With regard to relationship-driving benefits, we assume that psychological benefits and social benefits are most important for service customers' repeat purchases (e.g., Gwinner et al. 1998; Spake et al. 2003). We are not aware of any research on motivational values in a service relationship context and therefore do not speculate about the relevance of different motivational values.

To test the boundary conditions of our findings about the importance of repeat purchase drivers and the strength of linkages between them, we include different services to determine whether the results remain stable. We use the taxonomy developed by Bowen (1990), one of the few comprehensive and empirically based service classifications applied by service researchers (e.g., Gwinner et al. 1998). It distinguishes among three service types: those directed at people and characterized by a high degree of customer contact with highly customized service solutions ("type I" services); those directed at objects for which low customer contact is the norm and the service can be customized only slightly ("type II" services); and those directed at people with standardized service solutions and moderate customer contact ("type III" services).

### Data collection

We conducted a computer-assisted telephone interview study in cooperation with a professional market research company, drawing a probability sample of households that represent the German population using random digit dialing. To select individual respondents randomly within households, we employ the last-birthday method (Sudman and Blair 1998). The data collection occurred each day of the week (excluding Sundays), from 1:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., during a two-week period. Up to eight callbacks took place at different times and different days. The final sample consists of 618 service consumers, a response rate of 38.1%, which is well within the realms of similar studies (e.g., Council for Marketing and Opinion Research 2001). We weight each respondent's answers to account for deviations between the sample composition and the national population on four demographic variables—age, gender, household size, and city size—so we can generalize our results to the German population (Lehmann et al. 1998). Demographic information is in Table 1.

Respondents were asked to think of a specific service provider from which they repeatedly had purchased services in a randomly assigned choice set of three services, each representing one of the three Bowen service types. Each service was randomly drawn from a list of four different and widely used services (type I: full-service restaurant, hairdresser/barber, physician/dentist, travel agency; type II: bank, car repair shop, shoe repair shop, veterinarian; type III: bar/coffee shop, book store, drugstore, supermarket). If a respondent did not repeatedly buy from a service provider in any of the service industries proposed, the interview ended.

After the respondent had selected a service provider, he or she rated the importance of each of the 28 second-order driver attributes for repeat purchases (e.g., "For your repeated purchase at [COMPANY NAME], how important is it that [COMPANY NAME] *is very well located* [= location as ATTRIBUTE]?"; five-point scale, higher numbers indicate greater importance). The order of item presentation was fully randomized. Next, for the attribute that received the highest importance rating, the respondent rated the extent to which its importance was related to each of the 12 relationship-driving benefits. For example, if "location" was chosen as the highest-rated attribute, the respondent indicated agreement with the statement: "That [COMPANY NAME] *is very well located* [= MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE] is important to me, because it helps me to *save time and effort* [= convenience as RELATIONSHIP-DRIVING BENEFIT]" (five-point scale). Again, the order in which the benefits were read to the respondent was fully randomized. If a respondent believed an attribute was not linked to a specific benefit, the lowest score (1) on the scale was recorded. If

more than one service attribute received the highest rating, the respondent indicated which was most important.

Finally, focusing on the benefit rated highest in the preceding 12 attribute–benefit linkages (and, if necessary, using the same tiebreaking procedure as on the attribute level), we asked the respondent to rate to what extent that benefit's importance could be explained by its contribution to each of the ten motivational values. For example, if "convenience" received the highest rating on the benefits level, a representative follow-up question asked, "*Saving time and effort* [= MOST IMPORTANT BENEFIT] is important to me, because it helps me to *lead a safe or stable life* [= security as MOTIVATIONAL VALUE]" (five-point agreement scale). The order of items was fully randomized, and respondents could state that the benefit was not linked to a particular value. This approach enabled us to identify the most important means–end chain for each respondent.

## Measures and sample statistics

We used the definitions of the various drivers to develop a single-item measure for each second-order driver (Ter Hofstede et al. 1998). A 2-day pretest with 36 completed test interviews suggested rewording some of the items. The Appendix lists all items used to measure second-order drivers. The average relationship length in the sample is 11.2 years ($\sigma$=10 years), and the average share of wallet with the service provider is 86% ($\sigma$=20%). Thus, the sample adequately captures the phenomenon of interest (i.e., customers who repeatedly purchase from the same service provider). The randomization process provides similar coverage of the three service types (type I=31.8%; type II=31.7%; type III=36.5%). We highlight the key results on the first-order level in the next section and report them in detail in Fig. 2 and in Table 3.

## Interlevel analysis: relationships among driver categories

When analyzing the interlevel relationships between attributes and benefits and between benefits and motivational values, we consider each means–end chain linkage a "probability statement that one element will cause the occurrence of the other element" (Gutman 1991, p. 144), that is, an indicator of linkage strength. Consistent with our focus on relationship-driving benefits, we assume the proportion of participants connecting a specific service attribute to a given benefit provides a measure of the perceived importance of the attribute for gaining the benefit and that the proportion of participants linking a given benefit to a specific motivational value explains why that benefit is desired by customers. Figure 2 displays the strength of both attribute–benefit and benefit–value linkages for the three first-order driver benefits.

We find that 41.3% of the customers who repeatedly purchase from a service provider because of the functional benefits they receive consider the service product the most effective means for receiving such benefits. With regard to psychological benefits, service delivery is the most important attribute in 36.7% of the cases, and social benefits primarily result from relationship characteristics for 34.7% of customers. Regarding benefits–values linkages, all three first-order benefits associate more with individual motivational values than with collective or mixed motivational values (functional benefits 51.8%; psychological benefits 42.2%; social benefits 36.0%).

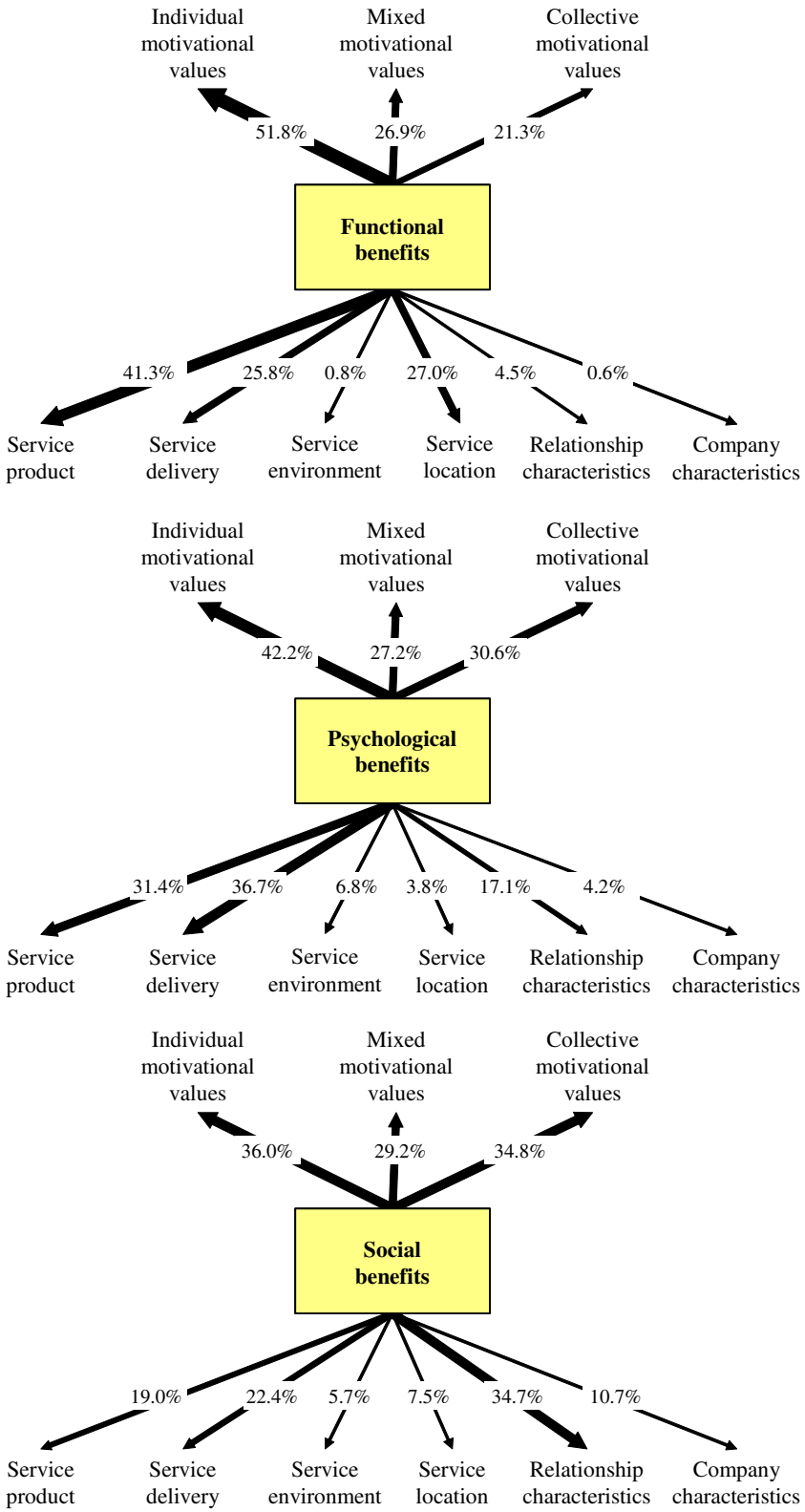
We test whether linkage strength is stable across service types by conducting a set of $\chi^2$ tests. The strength of the attribute–benefit linkages is largely unaffected by the service type involved; only four of the 18 attribute–benefit linkages differ significantly.[3] The type of service offered has no influence on the strength of benefit–value linkages, consistent with values' context-overarching nature.

## Intralevel analysis: driver importance

The frequency of selection of a driver as reported in Table 3 indicates its relative importance. On the service relationship attributes level, we find that the service product is the most important first-order driver of customers' repeat purchases, selected by 34.5% of the respondents; service delivery is the second most important (30.1%), followed by service location (14.8%), relationship characteristics (13.4%), service environment (3.9%), and company characteristics (3.3%). A series of $\chi^2$ tests to determine if the importance of first-order attributes remains stable across service types indicates differences for three of the six attributes, namely, the service environment (more important for service types I and III than type II), service location (more important for service types II and III than type I), and relationship characteristics (more important for service type I than types II and III).

On the relationship-driving benefits level, functional benefits are the most important first-order driver for repeat purchase behavior, named by 45.5% of the respondents. Psychological benefits are almost as important (43.0%), whereas social benefits represent the least important driver (11.5%). Applying $\chi^2$ tests, we find that the importance of all three benefits differs between service types. Specifically, functional benefits are more important for service types II and III than for type I, psychological benefits are more

[3] We find significant differences for the following linkages: relationship characteristics–psychological benefits (stronger for service type I than type III), company characteristics–psychological benefits (stronger for type III than types I and II), service location–functional benefits (stronger for type III than types I and II), and company characteristics–social benefits (stronger for type II than type III).




The numbers show the relative frequency with which attributes and motivational values, respectively, are linked to the focal benefit.

**Figure 2** Strength of linkages between first-order repeat purchase drivers

**Table 3** Relative importance of attributes, benefits, and motivational values for repeat purchase behavior

| Driver | All services | High contact/high customization services (type I) | Low contact/medium customization services (type II) | Moderate contact/high standardization services (type III) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Service relationship attributes | | | | |
| Service product | 34.5 | 33.4 | 37.9 | 32.5 |
| Service delivery | 30.1 | 31.3 | 35.0 | 24.7 |
| Service environment[a,c] | 3.9 | 6.6 | 0.0 | 5.0 |
| Service location[a,b] | 14.8 | 5.7 | 14.1 | 23.2 |
| Relationship characteristics[a,b] | 13.4 | 20.8 | 9.8 | 10.1 |
| Company characteristics | 3.3 | 2.2 | 3.2 | 4.5 |
| Relationship-driving benefits | | | | |
| Functional benefits[a,b] | 45.5 | 30.9 | 50.6 | 53.7 |
| Psychological benefits[b,c] | 43.0 | 57.6 | 44.1 | 29.2 |
| Social benefits[a,c] | 11.5 | 11.5 | 5.3 | 17.1 |
| Motivational values | | | | |
| Individual motivational values | 52.8 | 49.9 | 53.5 | 54.3 |
| Collective motivational values | 26.4 | 28.7 | 25.3 | 25.4 |
| Mixed motivational values | 20.8 | 21.4 | 21.2 | 20.3 |

All numbers are percentages of each first-order driver within its general category (i.e., attributes, benefits, or motivational values). The superscript "a" indicates that the importance of this driver differs significantly at $p<0.05$ between types I and II, "b" that it differs significantly between types I and III, and "c" that it differs significantly between types II and III. All other differences are non-significant.

important for types I and II, and social benefits are more important for types I and III.

Regarding the relative importance of motivational values, we note that individual motivational values are most important for 52.8% of the respondents. Collective and mixed motivational values are most important for only 26.4% and 20.8% of customers, respectively. $\chi^2$ tests show no differences between service types at this level.

## Discussion: relationships among categories and driver importance

The lack of an integrative and comprehensive framework of repeat purchase drivers for services has hampered the accurate assessment of the relative importance of each driver, a major drawback with regard to the desire of service managers to allocate resources efficiently among different repeat purchase drivers (Zeithaml 2000). Similarly, researchers hope to know which drivers are most important when designing studies about service relationships. We thus contribute to the literature by providing the first comprehensive assessment of driver importance and the strength of relationships among them. In the following, we compare our importance findings with the attention that specific drivers have received previously and attempt to determine in which areas future research attention might be particularly worthwhile.

*Relationships among repeat purchase drivers* By considering relationships among attributes, benefits, and values, we determine why certain attributes are important and which motivational values connect most strongly to a given benefit. The influence of several attributes on relationship-driving benefits differs strongly across first-order benefits. As a basic principle, service firms can use the service product and service delivery process to provide all three first-order benefits, though the service location primarily relates to functional benefits, and relationship characteristics are of primary importance when customers desire social or psychological benefits. Because extant research has almost completely neglected the interrelatedness of drivers, we suggest that future research should model driver linkages in a means–end way.

Our research establishes a systematic link between relationship-driving benefits and customers' motivational values and finds that the relevance of motivational values differs across benefits. Although respondents did not always link all benefits to motivational values, they in general had no difficulty moving up the ladder, and in all cases, a minimum of one benefit–value linkage existed. Although means–end theory generally allows for differences in means–end chain length, our findings suggest that, at least in the context of repeat purchase behavior, motivational values are almost always involved.

*Drivers of repeat purchase behavior* Our results show that the service product and service delivery provide the dominant reasons for repeat purchases on the service relationship attributes level for almost two-thirds of our representative random sample, consistent with their prominent role in extant research. That is, these two drivers may be considered *conditio sine qua non* for establishing

long-term relationships in consumer service settings. Our results also stress the relevance of the location of the service firm—a driver of repeat purchase that has received only minimal attention from relationship marketing researchers—and relationship characteristics, both of which are crucial for more than 10% of the respondents for all services and more than 20% of customers of type III and type I services, respectively. The marginal role of company characteristics (less than 5% for all service types) matches the lack of attention these drivers have received.

On the relationship-driving benefits level, we learn that customers' decision to purchase from the same service provider derives predominantly from functional and psychological benefits. Social benefits are the least important determinants, which contradicts the idea of interpersonal and relational drivers being prime success factors in a services context (e.g., Price and Arnould 1999). Our findings suggest that service scholars should expend more effort investigating functional and psychological benefits that have received little to no attention (convenience, money savings, and welcomeness in particular).

Finally, our findings imply that individual motivational values are the most important values for repeat purchases. In other words, most customers repeatedly purchase from service providers to serve their own individual interests, such as values of hedonism or self-direction, rather than any collective or social good. Extant research has ignored motivational values as drivers of repeat purchase behavior; studies that address this driver category would be welcome.

*Boundary conditions* Almost 75% of our results (i.e., 29 of 39 drivers and linkages) are unaffected by the service type involved. In particular, due to their context-overarching nature, the relative importance of motivational values remains the same for all service types (Schwartz and Bilsky 1990). The same general findings appear for attribute–benefit and benefit–value linkages; only four of the 27 results are not stable. Yet the results also point to important boundary conditions for our empirical findings and indicate the need to consider the service type as a context variable. For highly customized services that require a high level of customer–employee interaction, relationship characteristics are more important for repeat purchases than they are for other services, whereas functional benefits are less salient. This finding reflects customers' preference for personal relationships when a high degree of employee interaction is required for service provision. Social benefits and the service environment are more important for customers' repeat purchases of services directed at people than for services directed at objects, for which customers spend less time with service employees. Finally, we find that psychological benefits are less salient for repeat purchase behavior in the context of moderate contact, highly standardized services. Without intense interactions with service employees and with less customized and impersonal service offerings, the benefits referring to the self-oriented goals of the customer (e.g., psychological benefits) seem less relevant.

## Implications

### Implications for research and limitations

Fragmentation is not limited to repeat purchase but instead marks a widespread challenge in marketing (Anderson 1983b; McAlister et al. 2006; Varadarajan 2003). As this research shows, fragmentation can be overcome by theory-building research (Dubin 1978), which contrasts with the dominant approach of borrowing theories from other disciplines—such as psychology or economics—and testing them in a marketing context. Against this backdrop, we join calls for more theories that primarily organize knowledge about important marketing phenomena, not necessarily related to other disciplines, and urge marketing scholars to invest more time and effort in such original theory development (Rust 2006; Stewart and Zinkhan 2006).

We acknowledge that unanswered questions and limitations leave room for additional research, including the conditions in which different knowledge levels (i.e., attributes, benefits, and motivational values) have greater importance. For example, the degree to which customers make use of knowledge about their motivational values in decision making might depend on their level of involvement (Pieters et al. 1995). Does customer knowledge about repeat purchase drivers depend on the frequency of repeat purchases? Customers with higher purchase frequency might have more knowledge about repeat purchase drivers and weigh the importance of certain drivers differently (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). Furthermore, another issue that requires exploration is the extent to which repeat purchase drivers influence attitudinal constructs preceding behavioral loyalty (e.g., customer satisfaction and relationship commitment). We also encourage researchers to test our framework in contexts other than consumer services; the service-dominant logic perspective (Vargo and Lusch 2004) and the wide array of research questions to which means–end theory has been applied (Reynolds and Olson 2001) suggest that much of our framework may be usable in other contexts. We focus on theory development; further research should test our findings and determine additional boundary conditions and the discriminant validity of the attributes and benefits constructs.

With regard to the importance of repeat purchase drivers and the strength of their interrelationships, our findings are

limited insofar as we concentrate on the most important means–end chain per respondent. Additional studies might explore whether the results differ when more than one means–end chain per respondent is elicited. However, methodological limitations should be taken into account when considering alternative approaches for studying the drivers of repeat purchase behavior. The association pattern technique suggested by Ter Hofstede and colleagues (1998) would require each respondent to answer a total of 456 questions in our case. We tested this method in advance and found it unusable in the context of our study due to the extremely high defection rate (almost 100%). Also, it might be valuable to allow for more than three means–end chain elements and examine interrelationships among drivers within the same general driver category (i.e., attribute–attribute, benefit–benefit, and value–value), as well as study interactions among drivers (e.g., interaction of two benefits might drive the importance of an attribute).

Our analysis focuses on benefits, consistent with extant means–end research, but it might be insightful to concentrate on attributes or values, which would require calculating the strength of linkages with attributes or values as points of reference. Finally, we concede that our results do not address potential temporal changes that might occur over the course of a service relationship (Johnson et al. 2006). For example, a customer might consider functional benefits most important at the beginning of a relationship, but then value social benefits more at a later stage. Additional research should investigate such shifts in driver importance during an ongoing relationship.

## Implications for service managers

Our key contributions, namely the development of a theoretical framework and the assessment of driver importance, are valuable for service managers. Our framework demonstrates that many hierarchically related concepts drive repeat purchase behavior, which provides managers with the first nonoverlapping, comprehensive classification of repeat purchase drivers. One of the most prominent (and effective) unifying frameworks within marketing, the 4Ps of the marketing mix, establish the general importance of classification schemes for managers (McCarthy 1960). With regard to repeat purchase drivers, managers need a clear classification to judge each driver`s effectiveness. The availability of such a classification should reduce both confusion about which drivers exist and how they interrelate, as well as the danger of overlooking powerful drivers.

Moreover, managers can use our empirical findings to allocate marketing investments across relationship marketing strategies and thus achieve higher returns (Reinartz et al. 2005; Rust et al. 2004). Whereas first-order driver categories can serve as strategic investment categories, second-order drivers provide information about how to implement such strategies. Specifically, we find that functional and psychological benefits are most important for customers of all service types, so service firms should ensure their customers receive such benefits. To implement these first-order benefits, firms might offer convenience and money savings, as well as feelings of confidence and welcomeness. In addition, managers should consider the differences among service types, because driver importance and strength of linkages are not generalizable to all types. Specifically, services with a high degree of customer contact and customization (e.g., hairdresser) should prioritize psychological rather than functional benefits, whereas the opposite is true for services that offer standardized service solutions with moderate contact (e.g., supermarkets). Yet all service managers need to recognize that social benefits, such as enjoyable communication and feelings of affiliation, are *not* the main reasons customers return. Social benefits may still serve to differentiate a provider when all competitors adequately meet the customer's needs for functional and psychological benefits.

The strength of the intercategory linkages can help companies better understand which action is most effective for providing certain benefits to customers and thus indicate where to allocate marketing resources. As in our framework, linking service relationship attributes to customers' desires (i.e., benefits and values) reflects a crucial marketing principle, namely, that customers buy a product not for the product's sake but for what the product can do for them (Levitt 1960). The most effective way to provide customers of all service types with both functional and psychological benefits is to invest in the first-order driver attributes of service product and service delivery. Improving the perception of reliability, the price–quality ratio, and the service employees' expertise and quickness help create such benefits. In addition, functional benefits can accrue by optimizing the service location, and psychological benefits can be enhanced through relationship characteristics, especially a personal connection between customers and service employees.

Intercategory linkages between benefits and values suggest why certain benefits are important for their customers. On a general level, whereas customers' valuation of service relationship attributes and relationship-driving benefits might change over the course of time, and thus require service firms to adapt their relationship marketing activities, motivational values represent stable aspects of customer knowledge and therefore provide the basis for more long-term retention strategies. Our results show that both functional and psychological benefits connect primarily to individual motivational values such as hedonism and self-direction. Moreover, security values

are strongly interrelated with focal functional and psychological benefits, such as money savings and confidence benefits. These findings demonstrate that customers repeatedly purchase from the same provider as a means to enjoy their life and attain a sense of independence and security. Service firms that regularly contribute to the achievement of these motivational values might be able to realize a competitive advantage in retaining their customers that is difficult for competitors to imitate.

Finally, information about driver importance and the strength of linkages among drivers can be used to segment customers and position the service offering. Ter Hofstede et al. (1999) propose a segmentation method based on linkage strength that might apply to identify different loyal customer segments. For example, segments could differ in terms of the strength with which they connect service relationship attributes and motivational values to functional, social, or psychological benefits. In addition, customers' perceptions of different service offerings and their links to benefits and motivational values might help a company refine its positioning strategy (Reynolds and Olson 2001). Such refined positioning can provide the basis from which to select attributes for new product development and formulate an adequate communication strategy that focuses on those customer benefits and values most strongly connected to the selected product attributes.

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## Appendix

List of items used to measure second-order drivers

| Driver | Item |
|---|---|
| | "For your repeated purchase at [COMPANY NAME], how important is it that ..."[a] |
| Service product | |
| Assortment | ... [COMPANY NAME] has a great assortment of offerings for sale |
| Customization | ... [COMPANY NAME] customizes the service for your specific needs to a large extent |
| Equipment and materials | ... [COMPANY NAME] uses the best equipment and/or ingredients. (*Example for physician/dentist. Exact wording was adapted to each service*) |
| Low price | ... [COMPANY NAME] has very low prices |
| Price–quality ratio | ... for the amount of money spend you get excellent value |
| Reliability | ... [COMPANY NAME] is very dependable |
| Temporal availability | ... [COMPANY NAME] is always available when you need him/her |
| Uniqueness | ... [COMPANY NAME] offers products or services that no other provider offers |
| Value-added services | ... [COMPANY NAME] offers many additional types of service beyond the basics |
| Service delivery | |
| Authenticity | ... its employees behave completely naturally |
| Empathy | ... employees really care about you |
| Expertise | ... the employees provide excellent advice and/or are exceptionally competent |
| Fairness | ... [COMPANY NAME] is exceptionally fair with customers |
| Low pressure | ... this provider does not pressure you |
| Motivation | ... employees go out of their way to do a good job |
| Quickness | ... [COMPANY NAME] provides very fast service and/or has very short waiting times |
| Service environment | |
| Audience | ... the provider's other customers are there |
| Cleanliness | ... [COMPANY NAME] has exceptionally clean facilities |
| Servicescape | ... [COMPANY NAME] has a great environment and/or atmosphere |
| Service location | |
| Location | ... [COMPANY NAME] is very well located |
| Relationship characteristics | |
| Connection | ... [COMPANY NAME] knows you well and you are very familiar with him/her |
| Customer history | ... [COMPANY NAME] knows your service history very well |
| Significant others | ... family members or friends are also customers |
| Similarity | ... you like the employees very much and you have a lot in common |
| Special treatment | ... [COMPANY NAME] gives you special treatment compared to other customers |
| Company characteristics | |
| Corporate social responsibility | ... [COMPANY NAME] supports good causes |
| Reputation | ... [COMPANY NAME] has an excellent reputation |
| Small and local company | ... [COMPANY NAME] is a small and/or local company |
| | "That [COMPANY NAME] [MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE] is important to me, because ..."[b] |
| Functional benefits | |
| Convenience | ... it helps me to save time and effort |
| Knowledge | ... it allows me to feel informed |
| Money Savings | ... it helps me to save money |
| Psychological benefits | |
| Autonomy | ... it allows me to decide and act on my own |
| Comfort | ... it helps me to feel less stress when there |
| Confidence | ... it helps me to trust [COMPANY NAME] |

(continued)

| Driver | Item |
|---|---|
| Privilege | ... it makes me feel like a preferred customer |
| Welcomeness | ... it makes me feel welcome as a customer |
| Social benefits | |
| Affiliation | ... it creates a feeling of attachment to [COMPANY NAME] or other people there |
| Altruism | ... it allows me to do something good for [COMPANY NAME] or others |
| Communication | ... it allows me to have enjoyable interactions with the employees or other customers |
| Community | ... it helps to ensure that I can live in a thriving local community |
| | "[MOST IMPORTANT BENEFIT] is important to me, because ..."[b] |
| Individual motivational values | |
| Achievement | ... it helps me to achieve and be successful in life |
| Hedonism | ... it helps me to enjoy life |
| Power | ... it helps me to be recognized by others or to influence others |
| Self-direction | ... it helps me to be independent and choose my own goals in life |
| Stimulation | ... it helps me to lead an exciting life with much variety |
| Collective motivational values | |
| Benevolence | ... of my desire to do something good for my friends and to maintain a close relationship |
| Conformity | ... of my desire to avoid upsetting or harming others |
| Tradition | ... of my desire to respect tradition |
| Mixed motivational values | |
| Security | ... it helps me to lead a safe or stable life |
| Universalism | ... of my desire for peace, justice, tolerance—or the protection of nature |

[a] We measured the importance of service relationship attributes using a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 = "not at all important" to 5 = "of utmost importance."

[b] We measured the evaluation of statements about attribute–benefit and benefit–value linkages using a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree."

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