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Influence of share ownership on repeat patronage

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Abstract Business researchers have recently become interested in how an individual's share ownership in a publicly-listed company may affect his/her repeat patronage towards the company's products and services. The purpose of this article is to investigate the influence of share ownership on repeat patronage, in conjunction with the influence of customer satisfaction. Survey data of a large sample of customers of a retail bank are examined. The results suggest that a customer's share ownership in a company decreases the probability that he/she will switch the company to another product or service provider. The results also suggest that customers who are simultaneously shareowners of the company will, on average, accept a lower level of customer satisfaction to repeatedly patronise the company and its services than non-share-owning customers. For managers, the findings highlight the importance of paying attention to the fact that same individuals may both purchase the company's products/services and own the company's shares as well as treating people who might do so as a special customer-owner segment.

Keywords Stock ownership, Repeat patronage, Customer satisfaction, Switching behaviour, Individual investor, Customer loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, individuals' consumption behaviour and investing behaviour have been studied in rather distinct streams of research. Nevertheless, both marketing (Schoenbachler, Gordon, and Aurand 2004; Vogelheim, Schoenbachler, and Gordon 2001) and finance researchers (Frieder and Subrahmanyam 2005) have recently begun to point out and find evidence of the fact that individuals who engage in buying and using the products and services of certain companies may also engage in investing in and holding the same companies' shares. In this light, it seems that managers have paid too little attention to and underestimated the significance of the segments of people who may act both as customers and shareholders to their companies. In effect, such a phenomenon in the interface of marketing and finance has considerable theoretical and practical significance, since publicly-listed companies are essentially exposed to markets and society both as providers of products and services and as investment targets. Moreover, the significance is ever-increasing due to the fact that participation by consumers and households in stock markets appears to be rapidly growing (e.g., Guiso, Haliassos, and Jappelli 2003; Wärneryd 2001: 4).[1]

Especially, there has been emerging interest in the effects of individuals' ownership of the shares of publicly-listed companies on their repeat purchases and patronage of those companies' products and services. For instance, Schoenbachler et al. (2004) recently investigated whether individuals' share ownership in companies increased their brand loyalty towards and repeat purchases of the products of those companies. Their findings suggested that individuals do tend to buy products from companies in which they hold shares.

In traditional consumer behaviour literature, in turn, a concept most often related to repeat patronage is that of customer satisfaction. There is ample evidence of the fact that satisfaction increases the likelihood that an individual engages in repeat purchasing (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Anderson and Mittal 2000; Bolton 1998; Bolton and Lemon 1999; Fornell 1992; Reichheld 1996). Nevertheless, there is also increasing interest in understanding why individuals may engage in repeat patronage towards a company regardless of their customer satisfaction, notably even when they are not (totally) satisfied with the company's products and services (Bozzo 2002; Colgate and Lang 2001; Day 1994; Gronhaug and Gilly 1991; Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997; Levesque and McDougall 1996; Ranaweera and Neely 2003; Zeelenberg and Pieters 2004) – i.e., why they will not switch product/service providers (Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Burnham, Frels, and Mahajan 2003; Colgate, Tong, Lee, and Farley 2007; Keaveney 1995; Patterson and Smith 2003; Roos 1999; White and Yanamandran 2004). Indeed, it has been suggested that researchers should remain alert to the reluctance of customers to change routine purchase behaviours even if expressing lack of customer satisfaction (Semon 2001).

Taken together, there is thus increasing interest in repeat patronage effects of

[1] For instance in the USA, Canada, the UK, and Australia, the stock market participation has rapidly risen, in the 1980s and 1990s, from about ten or twenty per cent to even half of the population. In the USA, the share of families owning shares directly or indirectly (through e.g. mutual funds or various retirement vehicles) went up from 19 % in 1983 to 49 % in 1998 (Aizcorbe, Kennickell, and Moore 2003; ICI and SCA 2002); in Canada from 13 % in 1983 to 49 % in 1998 (Toronto Stock Exchange 2004); and in the UK from 9 % in 1978 to 34 % in 2000 (Muñoz 2006). In Australia, the share of individuals with direct shareholdings increased from 10 % in 1991 to 44 % in 2004 (Reserve Bank of Australia 1997; Australian Stock Exchange 2005).

share ownership, on the one hand, and in the relationship between (dis)satisfaction and repeat patronage, on the other. However, there has been no investigation of the influence of share ownership on repeat patronage, in conjunction with the influence of customer satisfaction. In this article, we address this research gap with an empirical study, utilising a very large sample of customers of a retail banking company. The results of the study suggest that an individual's share ownership in a company positively motivates his/her tendency to repeatedly patronise the company, independent of customer satisfaction. The results also suggest that customers who are simultaneously shareowners of the company will accept, on average, a lower level of customer satisfaction to repeatedly patronise the company and its services than non-share-owning customers.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Share ownership as motivation for repeat patronage

Concerning the effect of share ownership on repeat purchases, Schoenbachler et al. (2004) recently studied whether there is a relationship between individuals' owning the shares of a company and their brand loyalty towards the products of that company. Their findings suggested that individuals who own shares of a company are generally likely to buy products and services produced by that company. This was indicated by the mean response of the surveyed individual investors leaning towards "*definitely will*", when the question concerned the "*likelihood of purchasing products/services based on stock owned*" (mean = 3.72; 1 = definitely will not, 5 = definitely will). The authors speculated that this may be due to a shareowner's vested interest in purchasing the products of the company whose shares are owned.

Aspara and Tikkanen (2008) further link the vested interest to the individual's interest to support the business of the company whose shares he/she owns and, hence, willingness to buy its products and services (rather than those of competitors'). In theoretical terms of customer relationship research, there is then, on one hand, a special kind of economic/financial bond (e.g., Arantola 2002, 2003; McCall 1970) that motivates the continuity of the customer relationship. Namely, by repeatedly buying the products or services of a company whose shares he/she owns and by *not* switching to a competitor, an individual can make a contribution to the sales and cash flows of his/her "own" company and thus his/her own wealth as a shareowner. Accordingly, switching would, in a way, incur special economic switching costs (cf. Burnham et al. 2003; Colgate et al. 2007; Yanamandram and White 2006), on the individual's shareholder wealth.

On the other hand, since the actual contribution of one individual to the sales of a large company is usually minimal, the relational bond that motivates the continuity of the customer relationship is also likely to be in part psychological, i.e., cognitive and emotional (cf. Arantola 2002; Liljander and Strandvik 1995; Storbacka, Strandvik, and Grönroos 1994). Specifically, the shareowner is likely to have a *feeling* that he/she is supporting the company's business, sales, and cash flows when he/she is repeatedly buying its products rather than those of competitors – a feeling which he/she does not want to lose. Owning the shares of one company but supporting its competitor by buying the competitors' products would likely elicit feelings of (cognitive) dissonance (Abelson et al. 1968; Festinger 1957; Zajonc 1980), which the individual will try to avoid in order to maintain felt consistency between his/her cognitions and behaviour.

Thus, by repeatedly buying the products of the company whose shares he/she owns, the individual avoids psychological switching costs (cf. Burnham et al. 2003; Colgate et al. 2007; Yanamandram and White 2006).

In sum, the theory suggests that beyond the often-emphasised customer satisfaction, one possible extra motivation for an individual to maintain repeat patronage behaviours towards a company may be his/her share ownership in the company. Empirically, this should manifest in share-owning customers' increased probability *not* to switch product or service providers, when the effect of customer satisfaction is controlled for. Our first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: *An individual customer's share ownership in a company decreases the probability that the individual will switch the company to another product or service provider, independent of the level of his/her customer satisfaction.*

Share ownership, repeat patronage, and customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is indeed generally considered to be the main determinant of repeat patronage behaviours (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Anderson and Mittal 2000; Bolton 1998; Bolton and Lemon 1999; Fornell 1992; Reichheld 1996). Yet, as mentioned, it has been increasingly acknowledged that people may engage in repeat patronage towards a company even when there is a lack of customer satisfaction with the company's products or services. Consumers may simply remain inactive and take no action at all when dissatisfied, i.e., not switch product or service providers (Bozzo 2002; Colgate and Lang 2001; Day 1994; Gronhaug and Gilly 1991; Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997; Levesque and McDougall 1996; Ranaweera and Neely 2003; Zeelenberg and Pieters 2004). Numerous reasons for this kind of behaviour have been suggested, including switching costs, lack of alternatives, lack of perceived differentiation of alternatives, locational constraints on choice, time and money constraints, and habit (Colgate and Lang 2001; Colgate et al. 2007; White and Yanamandran 2004).

With hypothesis 1, we implied that another motivation why individuals may engage in repeat patronage towards a company, even if they are not totally satisfied with the company or its services, may be their share ownership. Specifically, it is likely that shareowners, having the share ownership as an extra motivation for patronising the company, will, on average, accept a lower level of customer satisfaction to repeatedly patronise the company than the non-share-owners. Share ownership would hence cause some inertia, in the sense of repeat patronage notwithstanding a decreased level of attitudinal satisfaction with the company or its products or services (cf. White and Yanamandran 2004). Our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: *Share-owning customers will accept a lower level of customer satisfaction from a company in order to act as its customers than non-shareowners do.*

METHOD

Empirical context

We test our hypotheses on large data from a retail banking company, which is a good context for our empirical analyses for several reasons. Retail banks have been at the forefront of developing relationship marketing practices towards consumers.

Accordingly, relationship marketing studies have often had individual retail banks as studied cases (e.g. Dibb and Meadows 2004; Rust and Zahorik 1993; Ryals 2005; Storbacka 1997; Zeithaml, Rust, and Lemon 2001). Moreover, banks are prime examples of publicly-listed companies that are highly visible and familiar to consumers, and thus conveniently available investment targets for their savings. Restricting our empirical context to a specific company also allows for comparability across customers and helps ensure against concerns about internal validity.

Data and sample

The sample of consumers was randomly selected from the population of current prioritised customers of a leading retail bank in a Nordic country[2]. The prioritised customers involved two customer segments determined by the bank, corresponding roughly to moderate and high relationship volume customers[3]. Customers with small accounts at the bank were excluded from the population of interest so as to improve the internal validity of the analysis, since a relatively high proportion of the customers with small accounts were likely to be "sleeping accounts", with no active relationship with the bank at all. The population was divided into sub-groups, i.e. strata representing the two prioritised customer segments. A stratified random sample was selected from both strata. The sample followed a proportional allocation, i.e. the sizes of the samples drawn from the segments corresponded proportionally to the respective sizes of the segments.

A survey questionnaire was administered among the sampled subjects. The survey had been originally designed as a customer satisfaction survey, but ideally for the purpose of testing our hypothesis, the bank registers included information of whether the respondent customer owned shares of the bank or not. In total, the survey sample consisted of 145,125 individual customers of the bank. The effective response rate was 32 percent, leaving 46,440 usable questionnaires. Demographically, the respondents represented fairly well the country's bank-using population – being customers of different offices of the extensive, country-wide branch office network of the bank.

Measures and study design

The research method involved a between-subjects design, based on whether the respondent was indicated by the company registers to own the shares of the company. Of the total 46,440 customer-respondents, up to 10.5 per cent (4,835) were share-owning customers.

Customer satisfaction was measured using a multi-item scale adapted from American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), introduced by Fornell et al. (1996). The three items included were as follows:

1. Based on all your experience with *The Bank* how satisfied are you overall? *(1= Very dissatisfied, 10= Very satisfied)*

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[2] It was agreed with the pan-Nordic bank whose customers were studied that the exact country where the present study took place would not be published.

[3] The bank defines moderate (high) relationship volume customers as being those who have a bank account with a regular income stream, use products or services from at least three (five) different product groups, and have savings and/or loans for a minimum value equivalent to 5,000 £ (25,000 £).

2. To what extent does *The Bank* meet your expectations? (1= *Not at all, 10= Fully)*
3. Try to imagine the perfect bank. How far from or close to this ideal is *The Bank? (1= Very far, 10= Cannot get any closer)*

The reliability of the used scale was good: the scale achieved an alpha score of .941.

For the purpose of testing the first hypothesis, we identified the subjects that would most likely switch service providers, based on the inverse 10-point-scale question: "*How likely is it that in 12 months' time The Bank is still your bank*?". This question measures repeat patronage intention and, conversely, the intention to switch service providers; the question is adapted from the repurchase intention item in Fornell (1992) and Fornell et al. (1996). The respondent was considered most likely to switch service providers in the case he/she gave answer 1 on the scale of 1 to 10 (1= Not likely at all, 10= Very likely), which was coded as value 1 on the outcome variable LIKELY TO SWITCH. The other responses were coded as value 0 on the same variable. Consistent with the fact that the overall customer satisfaction within the customer sample was very high (see Results), merely 1%, approximately, of the customers (375 cases of total 42,788 customers with non-missing data on switching) fell to the category of would-switch customers (LIKELY TO SWITCH=1), while 99% (42,413 cases) fell to the other category (LIKELY TO SWITCH=0).

With regard to basic descriptive statistics pertaining to share-owning vs. non-share-owning customers, the shareowners had a somewhat higher mean age than the non-shareowners (53 years vs. 49 years). Even if not very substantial, the difference was statistically significant by t test ($p<.001$) and is reasonable considering that young people are less likely to have accumulated wealth that could be invested in shares in the first place. Concerning the male/female split, the proportion of males was slightly higher among the share-owning customers than the non-share-owning customers (54.2% vs. 52.7%), a difference that was marginally significant by chi-square test ($p=.045$). The underlying reason might be that males are generally more active in the stock market or tend to more often take care of the stock investments by their families, on behalf of their female spouses.

Analytical procedures

Addressing hypothesis 1, we took a binary logistic regression approach to test whether share ownership affects the probability that an individual will (not) switch service providers when the effect of customer satisfaction is controlled for. In binary logistic regression, a dichotomous outcome variable Y (LIKELY TO SWITCH) follows a Bernoulli probability function that takes a value of 1 with probability π and 0 with probability $1 - \pi$, where π varies over the observations as an inverse logistic function of a constant and a set of explanatory variables. The explanatory variables in our model were SHARE OWNERSHIP (dichotomous, 1 or 0) and CUSTOMER SATISFACTION (continuous, three-item index).

Addressing hypothesis 2, we calculated the mean customer satisfaction among share-owning customers vs. non-share-owning customers, and performed an independent samples t test for difference in the means.

RESULTS

We report the binary logistic regression results for the dependent variable in Table 1. Logistic regression with the outcome variable LIKELY TO SWITCH was performed to analyse whether SHARE OWNERSHIP has an impact on an individual's probability to switch service providers, when the effect of CUSTOMER SATISFACTION is controlled for. The model is highly significant and sheds significant light on customers' likelihood to switch service providers (Nagelkerke R^2=.455).

With regard to customer satisfaction, we find, as intuitive, a negative effect on probability that an individual customer will switch service providers (β =-1.030, exp[β]=.357), which is highly significant (*p* <.001). Yet, as we propose in hypothesis 1, we also find a negative effect by share ownership on the probability that the individual will switch service providers (β =-.539, exp[β]=.583). The effect is negative and significant (*p* =.0014), even when the effect of customer satisfaction is controlled for. That is, an individual customer's share ownership in a company decreases the probability that he/she will switch the company to another product or service provider, independent of the level of his/her customer satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

With regard to the relative magnitudes of the effects of customer satisfaction and share ownership on probability that an individual customer will switch providers, it can be noted that the magnitude of the overall effect of customer satisfaction is clearly greater than that of share ownership – consistent with the notion that customer satisfaction is a key driver of repeat patronage. Specifically, each one-point increase in customer satisfaction (on a 10-point scale) decreases the odds of switching service providers by 64 % (1-0.357), whereas the presence of share ownership decreases the odds of switching service providers by 42% (1-0.583) compared to non-presence. Nevertheless, the latter result is also significant in suggesting that the odds a share-owning customer will not switch service providers are merely .58 the odds a non-non-share-owning customer does.

In hypothesis 2, we proposed that shareowners will accept, on average, a lower level of customer satisfaction from a company in order to act as its customers than non-shareowners do. As expected, the mean customer satisfaction scores are found to be consistently lower among share-owning customers than among non-share-owning customers: both for each of the three measure items respectively and for

TABLE 1 Logistic regression results: LIKELY TO SWITCH = 1

	β	**(exp[β])**	**Z / Waldχ^2**	*p*
Intercept	1.231	3.425	104.661	<.0001
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	-1.030	.357	1250.937	<.0001
SHARE OWNERSHIP	-.539	.583	6.007	.0014
-2 Log-likelihood	2398.658			
χ^2 (d.f.)	1900.861 (2), p < .0001			
Nagelkerke R^2	.455			

TABLE 2 Customer satisfaction among share-owning customers vs. non-share-owning customers

	Non-share-owning customers		Share-owning customers			
Item/measure	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	*t*	*p*
1. "Based on all your experience with *The Bank* how satisfied are you overall?"	7.930	1.627	7.847	1.623	3.415	<.001
2. "To what extent does *The Bank* meet your expectations?"	7.919	1.659	7.809	1.641	4.468	<.001
3. "Try to imagine the perfect bank. How far from or close to this ideal is *The Bank?*"	7.463	1.734	7.361	1.705	3.923	<.001
Index[a]	7.772	1.580	7.672	1.565	4.185	<.001

[a] obtained as the average of a respondent's answers on the above three items

an index obtained as the average of a respondent's answers on the three items. The mean scores are reported in Table 2, showing approximately 0.1 difference in mean scores among share-owning customers vs. non-share-owning customers for all the measures. Note that although not seemingly in absolute terms, this mean difference of 0.1 is substantial considering that the standard deviations for the scores were as small as 1.5-1.7. An independent samples *t* test shows that all the differences in the means were highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Thus, also hypothesis 2 is accepted.

DISCUSSION

Contributions to research

Despite the increasing interest in the effects of share ownership on repeat patronage (Schoenbachler et al. 2004; Vogelheim et al. 2001), on the one hand, and in the relationship between customer (dis)satisfaction and repeat patronage, on the other, business researchers have not so far investigated the influence of share ownership on repeat patronage, in conjunction with customer satisfaction. The present study addresses this research gap.

While not questioning the fact that customer satisfaction is a key driver of an individual's repeat patronage towards a company's products and services, the findings of the study suggest that an individual's share ownership in a company may also be an important motivation of his/her repeat patronage. We found that independent of the level of customer satisfaction, share-owning customers of a company, who also buy its services, are less likely to switch the company to another service provider than customers who do not own shares of the company. This finding complements and extends those of Schoenbachler et al. (2004), which suggested that individuals who hold shares in a company are generally likely to buy products and services offered by that company.

Second, our results add to the literature examining why individuals may engage in repeat patronage towards a company regardless of their customer satisfaction, and even when they are not totally satisfied with the company or its products and services. Specifically, we examined the level of customer satisfaction among customers of a company, distinguishing between share-owning and non-share-owning customers. We found that customers who own shares of a company exhibit a little but significantly lower level of customer satisfaction towards the company than customers who do not own the company's shares. This suggests that customers who are simultaneously shareowners of the company will, on average, accept a lower level of customer satisfaction to repeatedly patronise the company and its services than non-share-owning customers. In other words, the shareowners do not, on average, "require" as high a level of customer satisfaction to repeatedly patronise the company as the non-share-owners do. They have their share ownership as an extra motivation for patronising the company.

Although not providing direct evidence of why individuals who own the shares of a company are likely to engage in repeat patronage towards it, the results are consistent with the suggestion that an individual may have vested interest in purchasing the products and services of a company whose shares he/she owns (Aspara and Tikkanen 2008; Schoenbachler et al. 2004). In terms of customer relationship research, share ownership is likely to act as a special kind of relational bond, economic/financial as well as psychological/emotional, unidentified in earlier research (Arantola 2002, 2003; Liljander and Strandvik 1995; McCall 1970; Storbacka et al. 1994). Specifically, by repeatedly buying products or services from a company to which he/she is bonded by share ownership, rather than from a competitor, an individual can make a contribution to the sales and cash flows of his/her "own" company and, hence, to his/her own wealth as a shareowner – or at least sustain the feeling of making such contribution. In terms of switching costs (cf. Burnham et al. 2003; Colgate et al.2007; Yanamandram and White 2006), the individual then avoids economic switching costs that would incur on his/her shareholder wealth in case he/she would switch service providers, as well as psychological switching costs that would incur due to cognitive dissonance from owning the shares of one company while switching to support its competitor through product/service purchases.

Implications for managers

The results of the study have important managerial implications. Traditionally, customers (current and potential) vs. shareowners (current and potential) have been considered isolated in companies, by marketing and finance departments, respectively. Now, if individuals who own shares of a publicly-listed company are predisposed to engage in repeat purchasing and patronage of the company's products and services, they should be paid attention to as a special customer group or segment. Note that as publicly-listed companies often have tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of individual shareowners, the special customer group or segment constituted of them is indeed considerable. On the other hand, the shareowners that engage in repeat patronage behaviour towards the company as customers should be paid attention to as a special shareowner group or segment.

The first aspect to note relates to (dis)satisfaction among shareowners that are customers of the company and repeatedly patronise its products or services. Even if the results of this study suggest that shareowners that lack satisfaction as customers tend not to easily switch service providers, the evident risk is that when dissatisfied enough or for longer time, they will not only switch product/service providers but also sell the shares of the company. This dual effect is potentially considerable: the market valuation of the company is pushed down both (a) due to lost current and future sales and cash flow and (b) due to shareowners' willingness to sell their shares in the stock market. A further, substantial risk is that after switching providers and selling the shares, the individuals will get out to engage in substantial, negative word-of-mouth behaviour concerning the company, due to the prior dissatisfaction. Indeed, negative word-of-mouth is something that the share ownership might keep the individuals from performing even if they were dissatisfied with the company – but only as long as they did hold its shares. All in all, preventing customer dissatisfaction with adequate product and service quality as well as service recovery are, hence, paramount in the case of shareowners that are simultaneously customers.

Beyond customer (dis)satisfaction, managers have the opportunity to strengthen and benefit from the predisposition of individual shareowners to engage in repeat patronage behaviour towards the company's products and services. The company's products and services can be actively promoted for individual shareowners of the company to purchase. It may be that in many cases, shareowners will only have to be reminded of the current products and services of the company and provided with opportunity to conveniently purchase them, e.g. through the Internet, mail, or a local store. Having the contact information of shareholders readily available within the shareholder register makes it rather easy to contact these individuals with direct marketing offers. This is evident also for companies that do not usually have direct contacts to the end-buyers or users of their products, such as manufacturers who otherwise rely on retailers as to the interface to the end-users. New product or service introductions can also be promoted actively to the individual shareowners for them to try and adopt; attempts can be made even to engage them in the actual product development as voluntary feedback-givers.

A further opportunity is to provide encouraging incentives to shareowners for them to engage in positive word-of-mouth about the company's products and services and recruit new customers for the company. Evidence from an era (Watson 1949) when the managers of customer relationships vs. investor relations were perhaps not as isolated in companies as they are today suggests that such encouragement may be highly effective. For instance, a company's products would be mailed at discounted prices and even in free, attention-catching gift boxes to shareholders before holidays. This would promote the company's products to be present and visible at the shareholders' homes so as to become targets of good-spirited "chit chat" if friends and family came by.

In general, since share ownership in a company may be a motivation of an individual's repeat patronage towards the company's products and services, managers should explore the opportunity of targeting same individuals with marketing them both the company's shares and the company's products and services. Getting an individual to purchase the shares of the company will result in increased likelihood of his/her repeatedly patronising the company also with respect to products and services. Moreover, it is likely that customers that repeatedly patronise the company's products and services, particularly if satisfied as customers, exhibit increased willingness and interest to invest in the shares of the company. In any case, it should also be taken into account that share-owning customers of a company or customers with increased willingness to invest in the company's shares might represent somewhat higher-than-average income or social class, so as to have at least some savings to be invested in the stock market. This may be the case even if participation in the stock market by consumers and households is increasing overall (see footnote 1).

Limitations and further research

Concerning the interpretation of the results, it must be noted that the sample size of the study was exceptionally high, rendering the statistical power high and hence even small differences in proportions and means as statistically significant. Even if not very large, however, we feel that the differences between the share-owning customers and non-share-owning customers are considerable. In addition, it can be noted that as the sample company was a bank, the size of the effect of share ownership on repeat patronage may even be underemphasised compared to other kinds of companies. Namely, due to the trouble in switching one's accounts, credit cards, loans, etc. to another bank, bank customers are likely to have relatively large switching barriers and costs also other than share ownership. Thus, the marginal effect of share ownership on likelihood to switch service providers may not be as highlighted as in the case of companies where the *other* switching barriers or costs are low or non-existent.

A second limitation is that particularly concerning the second hypothesis, we cannot be absolutely sure of the causal direction of the effect. That is, whether customer satisfaction appears to be lower among share-owning customers (1) because the share ownership gives extra motivation to stay as customer that is independent of customer satisfaction or (2) because share ownership leads to decreased customer satisfaction (e.g. due to increased expectations which may not be met). While the first explanation – on which our hypothesis primarily relies – is the most plausible overall, also the second one would be worth studying in more detail in further research, in so far as share ownership may raise a customer's expectations to harder-to-meet levels.

In an attempt to overcome the limitations, further research should test our hypothesis with different kinds of companies and samples, as well as apply more sophisticated qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the effect of share ownership on repeat patronage.

Furthermore, concerning the underlying reason, beyond customer satisfaction, of why individuals who own the shares of a company are likely to engage in repeat patronage towards it, further research should analyse more deeply the extent to which share ownership is related to individuals' overall attitudes to or cognitive-emotional bonds with the companies (cf. Aspara and Tikkanen 2008; Aspara et al. 2008). Moreover, further research should examine also other than purchase consequences of share ownership: e.g. willingness to support the company in new product introduction and tendencies to recruit new customers to the company and promote the company through social and physical means. This kind of research will be important in providing deeper understanding of how to potentially promote the same individuals both with the company's shares and the company's products and services, as well as the feasibility of such strategies.

Concerning the lack of satisfaction which shareowners may exhibit while still repeatedly patronising the company, further research should examine whether, how, and at what point such shareowners possibly "get fed up" in their lack of satisfaction and cease patronising the products or services. Furthermore, it should be examined whether and at what point they possibly even go and sell the shares of the company and to what extent the potential lack of satisfaction or dissatisfaction contributes to the selling decisions.

Finally, the contribution of the satisfaction individuals have with companies as their customers and consumers of their products and services to their decisions to purchase and hold the companies shares should be studied. It is a highly interesting question whether customer satisfaction with a company leads to increased willingness to invest in the company and own its shares.

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