RELATIONSHIP INTENTION AND LENGTH OF CUSTOMER-FIRM ASSOCIATIONS IN TWO EMERGING MARKETS

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Abstract

Despite the benefits of following a relationship marketing approach, firms should use caution when targeting customers with relationship marketing strategies as not all customers want to enter into long-term relationships. Targeting customers based on the length of customer-firm association could also be flawed as the success of doing so is disputed. This study explored relationship intention under cell phone customers in two emerging markets, namely the Philippines and South Africa. Findings show that relationship marketing strategies should only be focused on customers displaying high relationship intentions rather than, erroneously, investing in relationships with customers based on association length.

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Building, enhancing and maintaining strong relationships with customers are paramount for successful marketing of intangible, heterogeneous, perishable and variable services which are produced and consumed simultaneously (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013). Such strong relationships between service marketers and their customers are mutually beneficial because customer needs and wants are better satisfied (Pride & Ferrell, 2010) while service marketers benefit from improved profitability (Liang & Wang, 2006).

The aforementioned predisposes inevitable relationships between service marketers and their customers. Firms, however, distinguish between transactional and relational customers (Baran, Galka, & Strunk, 2008) as not all customers want to enter into relationships with firms (Fernandes & Proença, 2013; Steyn, Mostert, & De Jager, 2008). Resources spent on building relationships with transactional customers will be wasted while the same resources will deliver a better return on investment if dedicated to relational customers (Liang & Wang, 2006; Kumar, Bohling, & Ladda, 2003). The challenge for service marketers is therefore to distinguish between relational and transactional customers (Delport, Mostert, Steyn, & De Klerk, 2010). This could be especially important for cell phone network operators since their customers might only stay in a relationship with them due to stipulations of a contractual agreement (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2013; Seo, Ranganathan, & Babad, 2008) and not because of any intention to remain in the relationship.

Marketers therefore often focus on those customers with who they have been associated with for an extended period of time since longer customer-firm association (i.e. association length) lead to greater profitability (Little & Marandi, 2003). However, some researchers have cautioned against assuming a relationship based on association length by arguing that relationships will not be formed based on the duration of contact (Ward & Dagger, 2007), nor that longer associations necessarily lead to greater profits (Kasper, Van Helsdingen, &

Gabbott, 2006). With this in mind, it may be necessary for firms to consider alternative (behavioral) segmentation variables in order to identify customers to build relationships with (Wei, Li, Burton, & Haynes, 2012). Kumar et al. (2003) offer one such alternative by proposing that, instead of considering association length, firms rather identify those customers with higher relationship intentions. Marketing resources will be better utilized if relationship marketing strategies are only aimed at customers with well-defined and identified relationship intentions.

Accordingly, the purpose of this research was first to determine whether customers from two emerging markets, namely the Philippines and South Africa, can be categorized according to relationship intentions. Secondly, the research wants to determine whether a relationship exists between relationship intention and the length of customer-firm association.

This study offer a number of contributions. Firstly, it investigates customers' relationship intentions in two emerging markets, thereby offering greater insights than would have been gained from a single-country perspective. Secondly, by successfully categorizing customers according to their relationship intentions, marketers are offered a unique opportunity to build a competitive strategy by focusing on those customers with higher relationship intentions. As a final contribution the study provides insights into the lack of a relationship between association length and customers' relationship intentions.

The paper is structured as follows. First an overview of relevant literature is provided as support for the hypotheses formulated for the study. This is followed by a discussion on the methodology and reporting of the results from the two samples. The results are subsequently discussed and managerial implications are offered. The study's limitations and recommendations for future research conclude the paper.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Formulation

Relationship Marketing

With the relationship marketing philosophy advocating building and maintaining mutually beneficial long-term relationships with customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), it is not surprising that firms increasingly pursue this approach as they realize the importance of retaining customers in increasingly competitive markets (Kumar, 2014). Building long-term relationships with customers hold a number of benefits to firms, including increased customer spending and spreading positive word-of-mouth (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011; Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, & Schumacher, 2003); increased customer satisfaction (Gilaninia, Almani, Pournaserani, & Javad, 2011); and enhanced customer life-time value (Gamble, Stone, Woodcock, & Foss, 2006) that leads to increased profitability (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011). These benefits culminate in a greater competitive advantage to the firm (Gilaninia et al., 2011).

Despite these benefits, firms should selectively target customers to build long-term relationships with as not all customers want to enter in or remain in a relationship with firms (Gilaninia et al., 2011; Parish & Holloway, 2010). It is thus wise to focus relationship marketing strategies on customers with relationship intentions as they are more willing to reciprocate relationship building efforts (Conze, Bieger, Laesser, & Riklin, 2010; Kumar et al., 2003; Raciti, Ward, & Dagger, 2013).

Relationship Intention

According to the theory of reasoned action, people's behavioral intentions predict their behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The theory of planned behavior adds the notion that a stronger intention to perform a specific behavior more likely results in the behavior on

condition that the individual intending and exhibiting the behavior does so voluntarily (Ajzen, 1991). Following the logic of the two mentioned intention-behavior theories, Kumar et al. (2003) argue that customers' relationship intentions will determine their relationship behavior. Relationship intention is defined as customers' willingness to develop a relationship with a firm (Kumar et al., 2003). As far as relationship behavior goes, high relationship intention customers are willing to build long-term relationships with a firm (Conze et al., 2010) while low relationship intention customers are more interested in short-term transactional interactions (Grönroos, 1997). Targeting low relationship intention customers with relationship marketing strategies may thus not be profitable to the firm, and relationship building attempts with such customers may be wasted (Tai & Ho, 2010). Kumar et al. (2003) propose that customers can be grouped according to their relationship intentions, where each relationship intention group will differ in terms of relationship behavior and the willingness to enter into relationships with firms. The following hypothesis can accordingly be formulated:

H_1: Cell phone network customers can be grouped according to relationship intention level.

Relationship intention, also known as relationship proneness (Parish & Holloway, 2010), customer desire to engage in a relationship (Raciti et al., 2013) and customer motivation for relationship maintenance (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997), was conceptualized by Kumar et al. (2003) as comprising five constructs, namely *expectations, involvement, feedback, forgiveness and fear of relationship loss.*

Expectations are reference points against which customers measure service delivery (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Although automatically formed before a purchase (Kumar et al., 2003), expectations are also formed based on previous purchases (Harris, 2009). Managing

customer expectations is important as customer satisfaction hinges on the extent to which their actual service delivery expectations were met (Berry & Parasuraman, 1997). Customer expectations are indicative of relationship intention as it is believed that customers holding higher expectations will show more concern for firms and will thus be more likely to build relationships with firms than customers with lower expectations (Kumar et al., 2003). The following hypothesis can accordingly be formulated:

> H_2: Customers with higher relationship intentions will have higher expectations of their cell phone network providers than customers with lower relationship intentions.

Involvement refers to the degree to which customers engage in a relationship with a firm (Kumar et al., 2003). It has been postulated that customers who are more involved with service firms will be more willing to form bonds (Moore, Ratneshwar, & Moore, 2012) and build long-term relationships with them (Varki & Wong, 2003). The significance of customer involvement is underscored by the belief that customer commitment is a product of continuous involvement with a firm (Pillai & Sharma, 2003). It is thus not surprising that Kumar et al. (2003) consider involvement to be an indicator of customers' relationship intentions. Recent research support this assertion by establishing that involved customers show a greater emotional connectivity to firms (Glovinsky & Kim, 2015), are more receptive of relationship initiatives by firms (Ashley, Noble, Donthu & Lemon, 2011) and display a greater willingness to engage in relationships with firms (Varki & Wong, 2003). The following hypothesis can accordingly be formulated:

> H_3: Customers with higher relationship intentions will show greater involvement with their cell phone network providers than customers with lower relationship intentions.

Involved customers set high expectations of firms and communicate those expectations to firms (Kumar et al., 2003). Communication, or *feedback*, by customers to firms is critical as relationships cannot form without dialogue between customers and firms (Richey, Skinner, & Autry, 2007). Customer feedback can be positive or negative: positive feedback shows firms their strengths as perceived by customers, whereas negative feedback (mostly complaints) is a source to identify problem areas that should be improved (Wirtz, Tambyah, & Mattila, 2010). Customers with higher relationship intentions engage in positive feedback (Nasr, Burton, Gruber, & Kitshoff, 2014) and risk the possible adverse consequences of negative feedback (Lovelock, Wirtz, & Chew, 2009) to display customer citizenship behavior (Liu & Matilla, 2015). Customers with high relationship intentions are subsequently more prone to provide feedback than customers with low relationship intentions (Kumar et al., 2003). It can accordingly be hypothesized that:

> H_4: Customers with higher relationship intentions will be more likely to provide feedback to their cell phone network providers than customers with lower relationship intentions.

Forgiveness refers to a change in the motivation of the offended to refrain from retaliation but rather to seek conciliation with the offender, despite the offender's upsetting actions (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). In the context of forgiveness as a customer coping strategy following a service failure (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011) and contrasting negative customer behavior such as exit, negative word-of-mouth, third party action, retaliation, avoidance or holding a grudge (Boote, 1998), Bejou and Palmer (1998) argue that emotionally attached customers are more forgiving of service failures as they are more understanding of problems and realities service firms face in delivering good quality service (Sengupta, Balaji, & Krishnan, 2015). Customers' willingness to forgive could thus be

indicative of relationship intention, where those with higher levels of forgiveness will display higher relationship intentions (Kumar et al., 2003). The following hypothesis can accordingly be formulated:

H_5: Customers with higher relationship intentions will be more likely to forgive their cell phone network providers than customers with lower relationship intentions.

Fear of relationship loss stems from customers' concern about the loss of the benefits associated with the relationship with a firm (Kumar et al., 2003). Customers may thus be reluctant to switch to competitors when they receive benefits from a relationship that has been formed with the firm (Leverin & Liljander, 2006). The benefits customers fear losing include functional benefits resulting from using the service (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), economic benefits resulting from cost, time or effort savings (Hur, Park, & Kim, 2010), psychological benefits originating from feelings of happiness, comfort, security and reduced anxiety as a result of using the service (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002), social benefits originating from customers' familiarity and friendships with, or personal recognition by, service employees (Chen & Hu, 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002), and special treatment benefits such as reduced prices, faster service or preferred, individualized attention (Liu, Huang, & Chen, 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). The fear of losing these benefits thus encourage customers towards relationship building, with customers displaying higher levels of relationship intention showing a greater fear of relationship loss (Kumar et al., 2003). The following hypothesis is accordingly formulated:

H_6: Customers with higher relationship intentions will have a higher fear of losing their relationship with their cell phone network providers than customers with lower relationship intentions.

Length of Customer-firm Association and Relationship Intention

Considering the advantages of a relationship marketing approach, firms increasingly invest in building customer relationships. The logic in doing so is vested in the belief that the longer the length of the customer-firm association (association length), the more valuable customers will be to the firm (Berger & Nasr, 1998). This view is supported by the notion that, as the association length increases, customers' involvement with, trust in, and attachment to the firm will increase, and thus also the relationship between the parties (Seo et al., 2008). This results in the assumption that longer term associations between customers and firms lead to greater profitability (Little & Marandi, 2003). Association length is thus often used to segment customers for relationship marketing purposes (Seo et al., 2008).

However, despite the apparent link between association length and the existence of a relationship, some researchers have cautioned that customer-firm relationships will not necessarily form, or be strengthened, based on the frequency or duration of contact between the parties (Ward & Dagger, 2007). Also, association length does not influence the type of relationship nor the emotional attachment between customers and firms (Coulter & Ligas, 2004; Homburg, Giering, & Menon, 2003; Kumar et al., 2003). Caution should thus be exercised to assume a link between association length and relationship intention (Kasper et al., 2006) as customers' relationship intentions might not depend on the association length with firms (Kumar et al., 2003). Previous research on relationship intention support this view by establishing that no relationship exists between association length and relationship intentions of short-term insurance (Steyn et al., 2008), cell phone (Kruger & Mostert, 2012) or banking (Delport et al., 2010) customers. It can thus be hypothesized that:

H_7: There is no relationship between association length and customers' level of relationship intention

Methodology

Data were collected through convenience sampling by means of a structured, self-administered questionnaire under cell phone customers in South African and the Philippines. As the purpose of the study was to determine relationship intention within an emerging market context, these two emerging markets were selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, South Africa and the Philippines are both classified as middle income countries by the World Bank (with South Africa in the upper middle income tier and the Philippines in the lower middle income tier) (World Bank Group, 2017a). Secondly, World Development Indicators for 2015 signify similarities between South Africa and the Philippines for the following: total literacy rates for people ages 15 and above at 96.62% for the Philippines and 94.60% for South Africa; value added by services in current USD at $172.44 billion for the Philippines and $193.38 billion for South Africa, and value added by services as a percentage of GDP at 58.96% for the Philippines and 68.73% for South Africa (World Bank Group, 2017b). Finally, relating to technology and internet usage, a 2015 Pew Research Center study found that 42% of South African adults and 40% of Filipino adults use the internet at least occasionally with both countries being below the global median of 67% (Poushter, 2016). Comparing these two countries could thus offer insights into relationship intention within a developing market context.

The questionnaire, compiled in English for the South African study, comprised predominantly closed-ended questions. Since English is widely understood in the Philippines, the questionnaire was adapted (e.g. changing the cell phone network providers to reflect those of the Philippines) and pre-tested among a group of Filipino students. Based on feedback received, small linguistic adjustments were made to clarify items and to ensure each item

conveyed the same meaning for both samples. Data were collected in Metropolitan Manila in the Philippines and in the greater Johannesburg-Pretoria metropolitan area in South Africa.

Relationship intention was measured with 15 items taken from Kruger and Mostert (2012) as it offered a valid and reliable adapted measure from the original measure proposed by Kumar et al. (2003). All items were measured on five-point Likert scales, ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree".

Data Analyses

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Version 24). Similar to Basfirinci and Mitra (2015), who conducted a cross cultural study between respondents from two countries, the authors first performed Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests to ensure that the Philippine and South African samples were not too significantly different from each other in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. A greater similarity between the samples is indicative of more robust research results (Basfirinci & Mitra, 2015). To reduce the dimensionality of the relationship intention data, and to confirm the construct validity of the measure used, exploratory factor analyses (EFA), using Principle Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation, were performed (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The reliability of the measure was determined by means of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient values. The hypotheses were tested by means of one-way ANOVAs. Effect sizes, indicating the practical significance of results, were measured by means of eta squared using the following formula (Field, 2013):

$$\eta^2 = \frac{SS_M}{SS_T}$$

In the equation, SS_M is the between groups effect and SS_T the total amount of variance in the data. According to Cohen (1998) eta squared values of 0.01 indicates a small effect; 0.06 a medium effect; and 0.138 a large effect.

Results

In total 1 445 respondents participated in the study – 581 from South Africa and 864 from the Philippines. From the demographic profile and cell phone network operator patronage information, shown in Table 1, it can be seen that the two samples were relatively well balanced, with the exception of age and average monthly cell phone expenses. The two samples were also compared in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and cell phone network provider patronage by means of Kolmogorov-Smirnov two sample tests (Basfirinci & Mitra, 2015). These results confirmed that, with the exception of age, the two samples do not significantly differ from each other in terms of gender, marital status, cell phone service provider contract option and duration of association with the cell phone network provider.

Doğanlar, Bal, and Özmen (2009) found no support for purchasing power parity between (amongst other emerging economies) South Africa and the Philippines. Average monthly cell phone expenses can therefore not be directly compared between South Africa and the Philippines. From Table 1 it is, however, clear that the average monthly cell phone expenses of non-contract customers expressed as a percentage of the average monthly cell phone expenses of contract customers were very similar for the two countries. The average monthly cell phone expenses of non-contract customers compared to the expenses of contract customers were 55.26% for South Africa and 48.69% for the Philippines.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics and cell phone network provider patronage

Variable	Philippines		South Africa	
	F	Percent	F	Percent
Gender				
Male	386	44.7	268	46.3
Female	478	55.3	312	53.7
Age				
24 years old and younger	259	30.0	186	32.0
25-30 years old	82	9.5	108	18.6
31-40 years old	122	14.1	110	18.9
41-50 years old	224	25.9	106	18.2
51 years old and older	177	20.5	71	12.2
Marital Status				
Single	427	49.4	320	55.1
Married or living with a partner	395	45.7	227	39.1
Divorced or separated	24	2.8	23	4.0
Other	18	2.1	11	1.9
Cell phone service provider contract option				
Non-contract customer	452	52.3	274	47.2
Contract customer	412	47.7	307	52.8
Duration of association				
Less than 3 years	184	21.3	133	22.9
3 years to less than 5 years	150	17.4	93	16.0
5 years to less than 10 years	271	31.4	206	35.5
10 years and longer	259	30.0	149	25.6
Average monthly cell phone expenses				
Non-contract customer		₱ 929.13		R 338.18
Contract customer		₱ 1908.13		R 612.00

Exploratory factor analyses were respectively performed for the two samples (see Table 2). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant for both samples (p-value < 0.0001). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures of sampling adequacy (MSA) were greater than the minimum suggested value of 0.5 (Field, 2013) for the Philippine (0.819) and the South African (0.770) samples. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were extracted for each sample. The total variance explained by the five factors were 65.1% for the Philippine and 60.2% for the South African samples. Considering the items that loaded on each factor, the five factors were labelled according to the constructs originally proposed by Kumar *et al.* (2003).

Table 2: Results from the exploratory factor analyses

Factor	Country	No. of items	Percentage of variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Fear of relationship loss	Philippines	3	14.1	.872
	South Africa	3	12.7	.816
Forgiveness	Philippines	3	14.3	.868
	South Africa	3	12.3	.807
Feedback	Philippines	3	13.2	.839
	South Africa	3	12.3	.784
Expectations	Philippines	3	12.4	.807
	South Africa	3	11.5	.777
Involvement	Philippines	3	11.1	.778
	South Africa	3	11.5	.805

The validity of the relationship intention measuring scale for both countries could be established. Convergent validity was derived for both samples from the fact that all items had statistically significant factor loadings above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014) and that all items highly inter-correlated onto the same factor. Discriminant validity could also be established since the items comprising each factor did not cross-load on other factors (Cole et al., 2001). Finally, the relationship intention measure was found to be reliable when considering that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of each factor was above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). Based on the results, the items comprising each factor were combined to form five composite measures to be used in subsequent statistical analyses.

Hypotheses Testing

As suggested by Kumar et al. (2003), an overall relationship intention mean score was calculated for the 15 items used to measure respondents' relationship intentions. Respondents were accordingly categorized into three relationship intention groups by using the 33.3 and 66.6 percentiles as cut-points, resulting in three groups with low, moderate and high relationship intentions. The distribution of respondents according to their relationship intention levels are shown in Tables 3 and 4 for the respective samples.

One-way ANOVAs were subsequently performed to determine whether respondents categorized in different relationship intention groups differed significantly from each other in terms of their overall relationship intentions as well as the five relationship intention factors. From the Leven's test it could be concluded that, with the exception of the fear of relationship loss factor for the South African sample and the forgiveness factor for the Philippine sample, the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated (Levene's statistic < 0.05) (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2010). Although the Brown-Forsyth test or the Welch test can be used as robust tests when Levene's test is violated (Field, 2013; Tomarken & Serlin, 1986), it was decided to use the Welch test due to its power to detect an effect, if it exists (Field, 2013). From the robust test for equality of means, the Welch test values were significant ($p < 0.001$) for all factors from both samples.

Results show that, for the Philippine sample, the three relationship intention groups differ statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) in terms of overall relationship intention ($F = 1108.185$; $p < 001$); fear of relationship loss ($F = 321.021$; $p < 001$); forgiveness ($F = 121.860$; $p < 001$); feedback ($F = 341.997$; $p < 001$); expectations ($F = 67.956$; $p < 001$); and involvement ($F = 286.477$; $p < 001$) (see Table 3). For the South African sample, the three relationship intention groups differ statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) in terms of overall relationship intention ($F = 869.357$; $p < 001$); fear of relationship loss ($F = 141.597$; $p < 001$); forgiveness ($F = 57.390$; $p < 001$); feedback ($F = 195.974$; $p < 001$); expectations ($F = 15.329$; $p < 001$); and involvement ($F = 268.656$; $p < 001$) (see Table 4).

TABLE 3: ANOVA and effect size per relationship intention group (Philippines)

Factor	Relationship intention level			df	*F*-value (Welch test*)	p –value (Welch)	Eta squared (effect size)
	Low (n = 316)	Moderate (n = 317)	High (n = 231)				
Overall relationship intention	2.68	3.38	4.00	2	1108.185	0.000	.44
Fear of relationship loss	2.14	3.00	3.88	2	321.021	0.000	.24
Forgiveness	2.18	2.75	3.39	2	121.860	0.000	.41
Feedback	2.53	3.52	4.`07	2	341.997	0.000	.13
Expectations	3.78	4.18	4.52	2	67.956	0.000	.43
Involvement	2.77	3.43	4.15	2	286.477	0.000	.77

* Asymptotically *F* distributed

TABLE 4: ANOVA and effect size per relationship intention group (South Africa)

Factor	Relationship intention level			df	*F*-value (Welch test)*	p –value (Welch)	Eta squared (effect size)
	Low (n = 205)	Moderate (n = 207)	High (n = 169)				
Overall relationship intention	2.74	3.36	3.99	2	869.357	0.000	.34
Fear of relationship loss	2.14	2.99	3.68	2	141.597	0.000	.19
Forgiveness	1.97	2.39	3.08	2	57.390	0.000	.49
Feedback	2.60	3.33	4.17	2	195.974	0.000	.06
Expectations	4.21	4.52	4.62	2	15.329	0.000	.39
Involvement	2.79	3.57	4.42	2	268.656	0.000	.80

* Asymptotically *F* distributed

The Games Howell multiple comparison post-hoc test was selected due to the uncertainty that the variance between the groups are equivalent (Field, 2013) as was evident from the violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2010) and due to unequal group sizes (Pallant, 2013). The post-hoc tests showed statistically significant differences between the means scores for low and moderate, low and high and moderate and high relationship intention groups for overall relationship intention as well as the five relationship intention factors for the Philippine and the South African samples. Eta squared values were accordingly calculated to determine the effect size of the difference between the means (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2010) of the various relationship intention groups (see eta squared values in Tables 3 and 4).

From the analyses it could be concluded that, for both samples, respondents from the respective relationship intention groups differed statistically as well as practically

significantly from each other in terms of their overall relationship intentions. Hypothesis H_1 is therefore *supported*. From the results it can also be derived that, for both samples, respondents from the respective relationship intention groups differed statistically as well as practically significantly from each other in terms of the five relationship intention factors. Hypotheses H_2 to H_6 are thus *supported*. These differences between the respective relationship intention groups for both the Philippine and South African samples are clear when the mean scores for overall relationship intention as well as the five relationship intention factors are illustrated (see Figure 1). It is also clear that for overall relationship intention as well as for all five relationship intention factors, low relationship intention groups exhibit the lowest mean scores, followed by higher mean scores for moderate relationship intention groups and the highest mean scores for high relationship intention groups, for both the Philippine and South African samples (see Figure 1).

To determine whether relationships exist between respondents' relationship intentions and their association length with their cell phone network operators, one-way ANOVAs were performed. Since relationship intention is calculated as an average mean of 15 items, it is possible that respondents could differ on the individual factors comprising relationship intention when considering the duration of their cell phone network operator association. Respondents could thus differ on the various factors because of duration of support and not due to relationship intention. ANOVAs were subsequently performed to determine whether relationships exist between respondents' relationship intentions and their association length with their cell phone network operators for the five factors comprising relationship intention. The results for the Philippine sample are displayed in Table 5 and for the South African sample in Table 6.
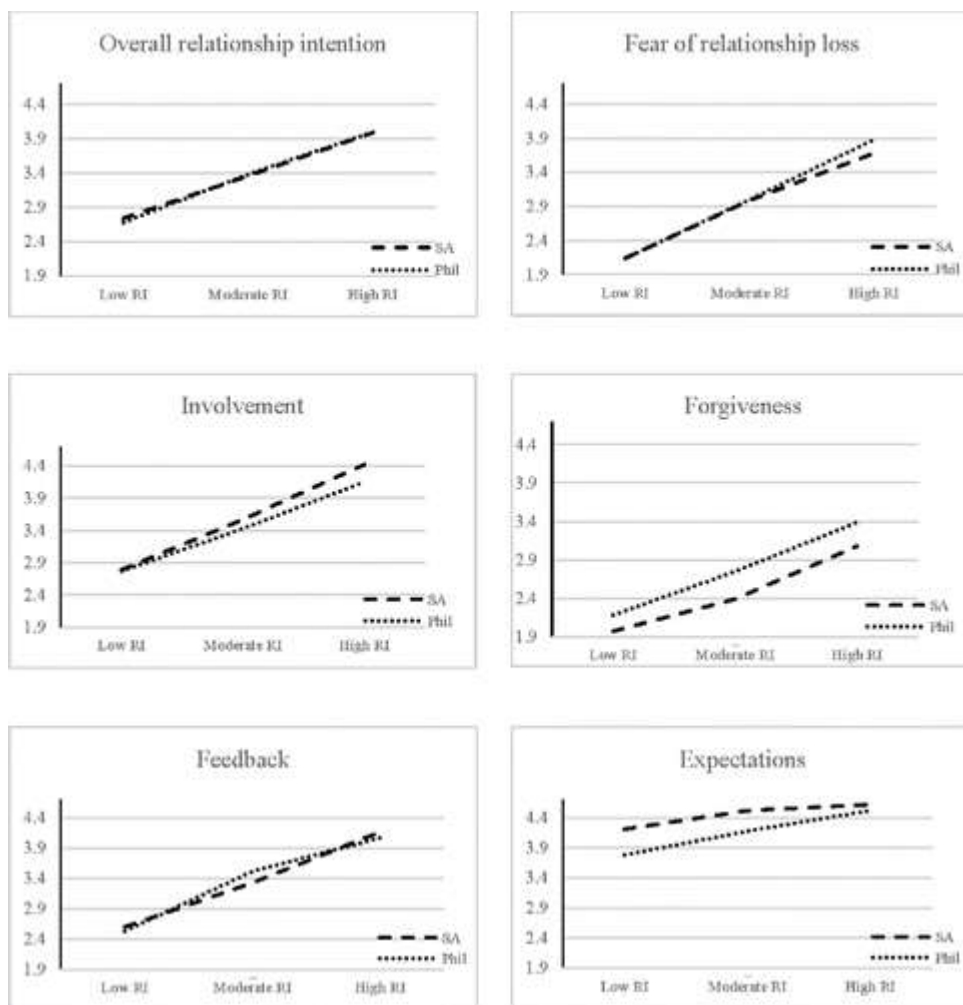
Figure 1. Overall relationship intention and relationship intention factors per relationship intention group.

TABLE 5: ANOVA per length of association (Philippines)

Factor	Length of association				*F*-value	Sig. (p)	Eta squared (effect size)
	< 3 years (n = 184)	3 < 5 years (n = 150)	5 < 10 years (n = 271)	≥ 10 years (n = 259)			
Overall relationship intention	3.25	3.27	3.26	3.36	1.600	.188	.00
Fear of relationship loss	2.95	2.99	2.83	2.96	1.082	.356	.00
Forgiveness	2.80	2.65	2.71	2.69	.780	.505	.00
Feedback	3.20	3.25	3.28	3.43	2.423	.065	.01
Expectations	4.00	4.01	4.17	4.23	3.978◊	.008◊◊	.01
Involvement	3.32	3.44	3.29	3.48	2.782	.040	.01

◊ Asymptotically *F* distributed; ◊◊ Welch' test

TABLE 6: ANOVA per length of association (South Africa)

Factor	Length of association				F-value	Sig. (p)	Eta squared (effect size)
	< 3 years (n = 133)	3 < 5 years (n = 93)	5 < 10 years (n = 206)	≥ 10 years (n = 149)			
Overall relationship intention	3.30	3.32	3.35	3.32	.160	.923	.00
Fear of relationship loss	2.93	2.79	2.88	2.94	.458	.712	.00
Forgiveness	2.54	2.61	2.42	2.30	2.242	.082	.01
Feedback	3.23	3.38	3.27	3.42	1.164	.323	.01
Expectations	4.36	4.29	4.50	4.52	3.054	.028	.02
Involvement	3.46	3.53	3.67	3.44	2.343	.072	.01

From the Leven's test it could be concluded that, for the Philippine sample, the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated (Levene's statistic < 0.05) (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2010) for the expectations factor. It was decided, for this factor only, to use the Welch test due to its power to detect an effect, if it exists (Field, 2013). From Tables 5 and 6 it can be derived that, for both samples, no statistical nor practical significant differences exist between respondents' overall relationship intentions and their association length with their cell phone network operator. Hypothesis H_7 is thus *supported*. Concerning the relationship intention factors, it can be concluded that, despite statistical significant differences for the expectations factor, for both samples, and for the involvement factor for the Philippine sample, no practical significant differences exist (eta squared ≤ 0.02) between the relationship intention factors and respondents' association length with their cell phone network operator (see eta squared values in Tables 5 and 6). The lack of difference between the various lengths of association is clear when the mean scores for overall relationship intention as well as the five relationship intention factors are illustrated for both the Philippine and South African samples (see Figure 2).
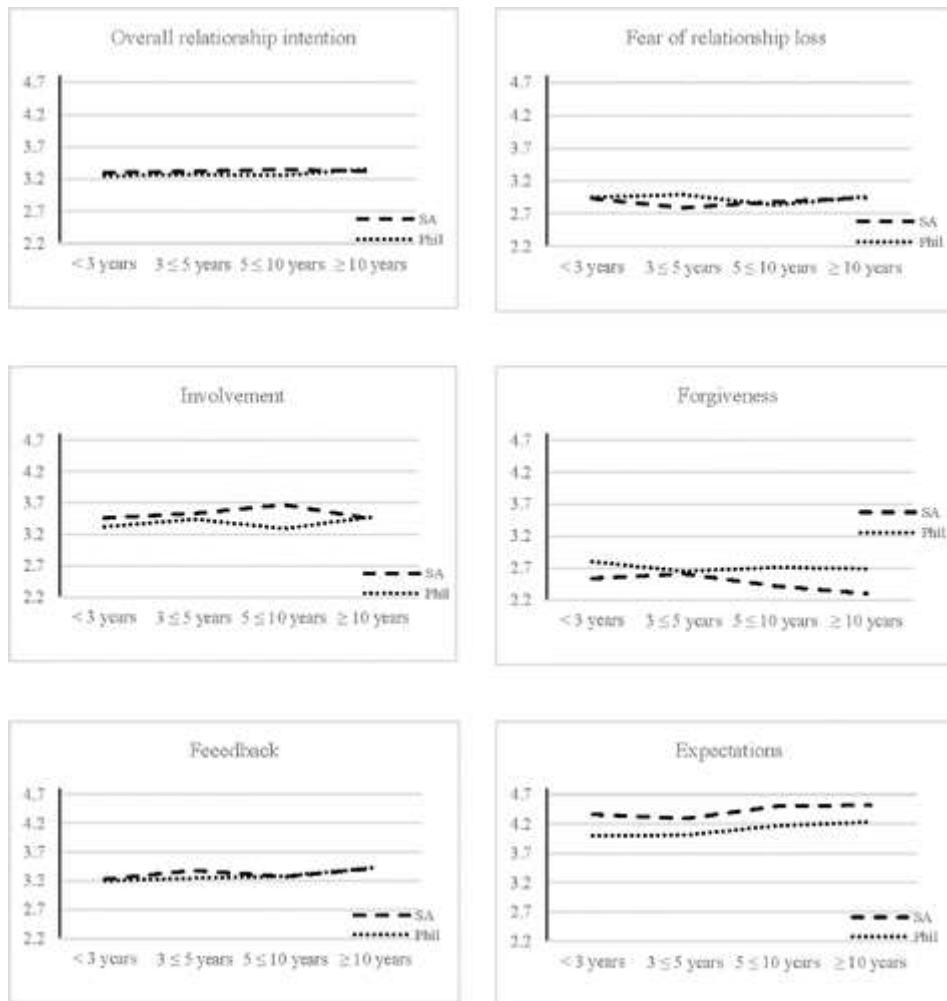
Figure 2. Overall relationship intention and relationship intention factors per association length.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

Findings from this study indicate that it is possible, as suggested by Kumar et al. (2003), to categorize respondents, from both countries, according to relationship intention levels. Cell phone network operators in the Philippines and South Africa can thus use the relationship intention measure to categorize customers according to relationship intention level and focus their relationship marketing strategies on those customers displaying higher levels of relationship intentions. It was furthermore established, as suggested by Kumar et al. (2003), that respondents with different relationship intention levels differ from each other in terms of the five relationship intention factors. Results indicate that respondents with higher levels of

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relationship intentions showed more involvement with the firm; had a greater fear of losing their relationship with the firm; held higher expectations of the firm; showed a greater willingness to forgive the firm in the event of a service failure; and are more prepared to provide feedback to the firm than those respondents with lower levels of relationship intentions. Based on these findings, marketers from cell phone network operators can more easily identify customers leaning towards a relationship orientation by considering the five factors constituting relationship intention.

No relationships were found between association length and relationship intention for either of the samples, thereby supporting previous research that neither an emotional attachment nor a relationship necessarily form between customers and firms as associations become more lengthy (Coulter & Ligas, 2004; Homburg et al., 2003; Steyn et al., 2008). It was also established that no relationships exist between the association length and any of the five relationship intention factors. It can thus be concluded that none of the five factors comprising customer relationship intention can be attributed to the length of the customer-firm association. It can accordingly be recommended that marketers from Philippines and South African cell phone network operators focus their relationship marketing strategies on those customers displaying high relationship intentions rather than, erroneously, investing in relationships with customers based on association length. By focusing on the five factors comprising relationship intention, firms will be more successful in building customer relationships which should result in improved profitability.

Marketers of consumer services in emerging markets should be encouraged by the findings from this study since the results showed that not only is it counterproductive to focus on association length when deciding on marketing budget resource allocation, but also that a

competitive advantage can be obtained by identifying and focusing on customers with higher levels of relationship intentions.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings from this study is firstly limited by the convenience sampling method used for both samples. A second limitation stems from the differences between the two samples in terms of respondents' age distribution. Should the age groups have been more directly comparable, it may have been possible to determine the influence of generations on respondents' relationship intentions.

Future studies could replicate this study within developed markets to identify the applicability of relationship intention beyond developing countries. Future research could also establish if relationship intention leads to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty as proposed by Kumar et al. (2003). The antecedents of relationship intention could also be established by future research.

Funding

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