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THE INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIP SHOCKS ON CUSTOMER COMMITMENT.

Abstract:

Since its induction, the concept 'relationship marketing' has evolved significantly and today it is acknowledged by marketing academics and practitioners alike. It is therefore not unexpected to learn that the marketing literature has progressively started to focus on the dimensions or building blocks of relationship marketing. One of the most frequently cited dimensions of relationship marketing is relationship commitment. However, despite several studies on the nature of relationship commitment, there still appears to be uncertainty regarding the management of commitment. One of these uncertainties is the possible influence of relationship shocks on customer commitment. It is often assumed that these shocks are detrimental to customer commitment, and by focusing on the management of relationship shocks, service providers are in a position to either restore or enhance the stability of a relationship. However, existing literature appears to focus primarily on an organisational context, with limited research addressing the customer perspective. It is against this background that this study investigated the influence of relationship shocks on customer commitment. For the purpose of this study, a multi-dimensional approach towards customer commitment was adopted, including both the affective and calculative sides of commitment. The study commenced with a pre-test in which the selected respondents were exposed to a number of relationship shocks. Based on the results of the pre-test, low-, medium- and high-shock scenarios were identified. During the next phase of the study, an experiment was conducted among 706 respondents in the mobile service industry. Three groups of respondents were created, and each of these three groups were exposed to a different relationship shock scenario. This was followed by an assessment of the respondents' commitment towards their mobile service providers. The data were analysed by means of the statistical program SPSS version 23. The findings of the study were somewhat unexpected, as no statistically significant differences emerged between the three different relationship shock scenarios and affective commitment, whilst calculative commitment was significantly influenced by the level of a relationship shock. The primary contribution of the study lies in the realisation that the extent to which an individual experiences a relationship shock does not influence their emotional attachment to their service provider. However, the extent to which an individual is 'shocked', does influence their awareness of the costs associated with ending the relationship with their mobile service provider.

Keywords:

Affective commitment, calculative commitment, relationship shocks, relationship marketing.

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