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Consumers' Intention to Stay with a Brand: An Examination of Potential Precursors for Brand Switching

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Abstract

This study addresses factors affecting consumers' intention to stay with a brand: in particular their cell phone brand. It aims to discover the extent to which consumers are influenced by age, satisfaction, brand commitment, the length of the consumer decision process, social groups, user experience and brand perception. The study subsequently seeks to determine the relationship between these factors and the intention of individuals to keep or change their cell phone brands. Research questions were answered by 137 respondents living in the Netherlands. Results indicate that, compared with other variables, brand commitment explains a remarkable part of the variance. Satisfaction proved to be a mediator not only of the relationship between brand commitment and the intention to stay but also between age and the intention to stay. This suggests that satisfaction has a major impact on individuals' intention to stay. Differences were found concerning the intention to stay with the brand when age, education and income were divided into groups. The older respondents and those with the highest income regarded satisfaction as an important factor, while the lower-educated respondents only took the type of brand into consideration. It can be concluded that age, education and income-specific behavior should be considered in marketing actions. Further research is needed to elaborate the relationship between the intention to stay with the cell phone brand and other factors. Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis should be executed to elucidate the relations between the different variables. Finally, a longitudinal study should be conducted.

Keywords: intention to stay, satisfaction; brand commitment, length of the consumer decision process, cell phone

1. Introduction

It may safely be stated that consumers are a brand's most important asset. This research study focuses on the retention of consumers in the cell phone industry. It is widely acknowledged that consumer retention is one of the most difficult challenges in the sector. The industry itself witnesses many rapid changes and its products have short expiry dates due to the constant flow of new inventions and innovations. In such an environment, factors influencing consumers' intention to stay with a particular cell phone brand are of major significance. Therefore, it is of interest to determine the nature of these factors: for instance whether the consumers' decision process and age influence the intention to stay with the brand, or whether there are other factors that predict consumers' switching behavior.

Hill and Gardner (1990) defined decision making as to refer to thoughts during the choice for a brand. According to Moe and Yang (2009), consumer search behavior has been studied only in a purchase setting, since it has always been considered to be an important stage in the decision-making process. Miller (1993) described search behavior as a method by which individuals develop a set of alternatives for consideration for making a choice among these. In addition, Kiel and Layton (1981) observed the consumer decision process and stated that consumers can be categorized as high, low, and selective searchers, depending on the information they encounter during this process. On the other hand, Lam and colleagues call brand switching as social mobility between brand identities (Lam et al., 2010). It must be borne in mind, however, that consumers' switching behavior is not

only found in the cell phone industry, but also in others. In these sectors, too, many factors need to be taken into consideration in attempts to retain consumers and to enhance their loyalty to the brand they are already using. Commitment to a brand would seem to have a relation with the intention to stay with the brand (Raju et al., 2009). Along similar lines, LaBarbera and Mazursky (1983) suggest that satisfaction influences consumers' switching behavior. Kiel and Layton (1981) argue that experience also influences the intention to stay with the brand, as well as education (Chance and French, 1972). Highly educated individuals are those who have finished a higher education program at a Bachelor's or Master's level (cf. Blomme et al., 2010) or who have completed a PhD study.

Other factors of interest include not only the influence that age may have on the intention to stay with the brand, but also the influences exerted by brand commitment and the length of the consumer decision process. That age is indeed an important factor to examine is demonstrated by the situation in the Netherlands. Here, the population group aged 50 or over is expected to increase by 23% until 2030: from 5.8 million to 7.2 million people (41%) in a total Dutch population of 17.4 million (CBS Statline). According to research carried out in 2010 by van Duin and Garssen for the Dutch Statistics Bureau CBS, this number will continue to rise until the expected maximum population is reached in 2040: 17.8 million individuals, of whom 25.9% will be aged over 65. After that point, population numbers are expected to decrease again. In 2060, the Dutch population will likely amount to 17.7 million, with people aged over 65 making up 24.8% of the entire population. In 2050, the aging population around the world will approximately amount to 2 billion, exclusive of the generation aged between 50 and 60. To illustrate the importance of this point: in 2003, the number of over-60s was a mere 600 million (United Nations, 2002). This substantial increase is due to increased life expectancy and declining birth rates (Yoon et al., 2005; Rowe and Kahn, 1998) resulting from the advances made in public health, immunization, nutrition and medical care. This process is also expected to take place in developing and underdeveloped countries in the years to come, as social services in these countries are currently undergoing certain marked improvements. In some countries, this group's composition is even expected to have doubled by 2030, a process which will have major market implications. This phenomenon called aging, initially referring to the group of people aged over 65, has grown exponentially during the last decade, (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent, 2010). Subsequently, the term aging has been extended and now also refers to the group aged over 50.

Neugarten (1974) and Block (1974) state that 55 to 75 year-olds are relatively healthy people who develop a variety of new needs. They have promising market potential for commercial firms to increase sales and profits, provided that these firms serve this group's needs effectively and efficiently. Nevertheless, Bartos (1980) warns not to look at older consumers as if they all belong to one or two groups, or as if they form a monolithic market. Furthermore, Wolfe (in Burnett, 1991) stresses that age is a correlate and not a determinant. Along similar lines, Mainer and Slater (2009) conclude that in order to ensure greater sensitivity in marketing intelligence, a marketer should split up the market into smaller segments. Several of these reasons concern the socioeconomic conditions that shape people's lives, which can be far more differentiating than age alone. According to Bartos (1980), people over 49 seek a multifaceted balance of time, money and health. She also distinguishes six profiles within the group of older consumers, i.e. those aged over 49. Three of these profiles are of little interest to marketers, but the remaining profiles comprise 77% of the older consumer group: the active affluents (40%); the active retirees (15%), and the homemakers (22%).

Income is an important factor in terms of the purchase strength of consumers. The average Dutch income is 24.6 thousand euros (Kasperski and Meuwissen, 2011) and the average gross income of the working population amounts to 36 thousand euros per head of the working population (Moonen and Pleijers, CBS, 2011). People with a lower education earn half as much as higher-educated people. The former group earns an average 26 thousand euros, while the latter group earns an average 49 thousand euros. Women earn less than men in all three categories: lower, middle and higher-educated groups. It can safely be assumed that market changes will cause many complications: new needs will develop on the part of consumers aged over 50, and various segments will have to meet these needs in different ways than they used to. A closer look should be taken into lifestyles and leisure activities of the over-50s for a better understanding. Since little has been written on the decision process and switching behavior of consumers, a more in-depth approach should be applied.

The current article consists of four sections. First, ten hypotheses are defined on the basis of which the relationship is investigated between the intention to stay with a brand and factors that influence this decision as indicated in previous studies. Second, methods and measures are delineated to test the hypotheses stated in this paper. The third section presents the outcomes of the analyses. Finally, the paper presents a discussion section in which the empirical results are compared with general theory and in which managerial implications are considered. This section also discusses study limitations. It ends with recommendations for further research.

2. Hypotheses

Lam et al. (2010) propose that when a new brand is introduced, this causes consumers of incumbent brands to rethink their connection with those brands and subsequently to decide whether or not to switch. This happens because some customers may perceive the new brand as having a more attractive identity than the brand they currently use. According to Farley et al. (1982), consumers quickly create strong relationships with different aspects of a new brand. What is interesting here is that Valentini et al. (2011) state that around 22% will shift to the new brand as newly acquired consumers, recruited from among the consumers contacted by the brand. Hamilton et al. (2009) also indicate that consumers are influenced by the introduction of a new product or a new brand. This means that the levels of their commitment to their initial choice decreases. Valentini et al. (2011) argue that the consumers' choice decision process develops over time. In contrast, Raju et al. (2009) suggest that when brand commitment is low, use is made of what is known as confirmatory processing. When, on the other hand, brand commitment is high, use is made of disconfirmatory processing. Confirmatory processing takes place when consumers focus on the similarities between their preferred brand and the competitor brand. Disconfirmatory processing is the opposite: here, consumers are focused on the dissimilarities between their preferred brand and the competitor brand. Nevertheless, as one particular study showed, when consumers had to made a choice in an online supermarket, they made their choice on the basis of the stock-keeping-unit level instead of brand and size loyalty (Cui & Wang, 2010), something which could also affect the consumers' decision process.

The above is also supported by Choi and Fishbach (2011), who note that consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they currently need it. Many scholars have so far addressed the consumer decision process, but they do not take into account how long it takes consumers to make their decisions, nor do they take into account the relationship that this duration has with the intention to stay with the brand. Only Blackwell et al. (1995) consider the decision process as if it were a continuum. They indicate that we can find limited problem solving consumer behavior (LPS) at the one end of the continuum, extended problem solving behavior (EPS) at the other end, with midrange problem solving in the middle. All elements are measured by their degree of complexity. Additionally, the researchers found that when a decision was made with the help of EPS, it was based on loyalty to the brand. Contrastively, a decision made with LP is based on doing things out of routine. In order for consumers to make a decision, Krishnan and Samu (2009) implied that a brand should be sufficiently distinctive and familiar to consumers to ensure that it will stay in their memory, be considered, emphasized, and finally selected on the basis of the brand name characteristics and brand exposure.

Nelson (1970) stated that there are two different kinds of goods: search goods and experience goods. Search goods are defined as goods or services whose value we already know in advance, for instance a bus ticket which takes us from point A to point B. Experience goods are goods that need to be experienced before people can value them, since quality and price are difficult to observe in advance. An example here is a bottle of wine that has not been drunk yet (Nelson, 1970). Klein (1998) disputes the assumption that during the pre-purchase stage consumers spend little time on their search for experience goods whereas they conduct more elaborate searches for search goods. This was also found by Shim et al. (2001) in the online behavior of consumers in terms of the number of pages viewed whenever there was an intention to buy and in terms of the in-depth character of the search performed. In this study, strong relations were observed between the length of the consumer decision process (Length of CDP) and brand switching. The following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The length of the consumer decision process has a relationship with the intention to stay with the brand.

Hypothesis 2: Brand commitment positively influences the intention to stay with the brand.

In their work, Burnham et al. (2003) confirm that the more satisfied consumers are with the service provider they use, the more determined they become in their wish to stay with the brand. From another perspective, LaBarbera and Mazursky (1983) say that switching behavior is likely to depend on the level of dissatisfaction resulting from earlier use of the brand. Nevertheless, Chiou and Droge (2006) state that satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) alone is not enough to indicate that consumers will stay loyal (or become disloyal) to the brand they purchased in the past. According to the researchers, there are more stimuli that may cause consumers to alter their choice. Coulter et al. (2003) argue that consumers who are satisfied with their present brand are less likely to switch to other brands. The above indicates that the intention to stay with a brand has a relationship with satisfaction. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The more satisfied someone is with a brand, the higher the intention becomes to stay with the brand.

Several studies have demonstrated that brands play a crucial role in consumer behavior and decisions (Rao et al., 2004; Schau et al., 2009; Sprott et al., 2009). Brakus et al. (2009) state that the experiences consumers have with a product can be described in various ways, one of which is consumption of the product by using it. According to Ratchford (2001), brand experimentation forms an intrinsic motivation for brand switching. This seems to be particularly true in terms of brand knowledge and the purchase of a new product. Johnson and Russo (1984) state that experienced users are less likely to fall for a new product or brand and give up their old familiar product. In contrast, Bettman and Park (1980) argue that consumers with moderate experience of a brand tended to search longer for information than individuals with high or low experience did in order to arrive at a decision. In the research study carried out by Coulter et al. (2003), it was demonstrated that the involvement construct is important in the relationship between the consumer and the brand, i.e. whether consumers have little or no interest in the product. The investigators also found that experimenting with brands is related to the level of involvement and commitment to these brands as demonstrated by consumers. Although consumers may be happy with a brand, they may nevertheless intend to switch to different brands. Choi and Fishbach (2011) imply that individuals are more interested in the products they may choose to buy when they have experienced them. In addition to this, Kiel and Layton (1981) state that consumers with longer past experience and with larger purchasing confidence are more likely to be low searchers. All in all, it can be assumed from the abovementioned studies that experience, involvement and the brand itself are closely related to the intention to stay with a brand. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 4: Experience with a brand has an impact on the intention to stay.

Hypothesis 5: Involvement has a relation with the intention to stay.

Hypothesis 6: The brand itself influences the intention to stay with the brand.

Other important elements in the decision process and the intention to stay with a brand include environmental factors (Blackwell et al., 1995). Brand switching for example, can be triggered by socio-psychological influences, since people derive their sense of identity from their ties with social groups (Rao et al., 2000; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Witt (1969) also indicated that consumers are susceptible to group influences in their purchase decisions. Bearden and Etzel (1982) state that the social influences affecting individuals also impact their consumer behavior. Strong relations can be observed between the susceptibility of individuals to social influences and their intention to stay with a brand. As such, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 7: Susceptibility to influences exerted on individuals by social has a relation with their intention to stay with the brand.

Another aspect that should be taken into account is age. The number of older consumers around the world is expected to rocket in the coming two decades, the effects of which could trigger firms to start reaping the benefits. A study held by Goldstucker et al. (1985) indicated that the elderly do not generally have different requirements and desires compared with the younger population. Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent (2010) argue that younger consumers often switch brands, whereas older consumers stay loyal to the same brand for a longer period of time. Empirical evidence suggests that the way older consumers search for information is different from the way younger people do this. Older consumers had difficulties when they were asked to integrate various different pieces of information (presented as verbal text) in order to make a brand choice decision (Cole and Balasubramanian, 1993; Schwartz et al., 2002). Elderly consumers, however are satisfied more quickly, which would seem to imply that they are searching less heavily and less precisely (Cole and Balasubramanian, 1993). They are also more brand-loyal than younger consumers (Yoon et al., 2005). Lambert (1979) indicates that the older consumers do not represent a homogeneous market segment, since their financial resources, needs, interests and concerns vary considerably. Economically speaking, they seem to be in a relatively healthy position, which could imply that they need not switch because of price rises. Similarly, Bartos (1980) claims that it would be a grave mistake to look at the older consumers' market as if they all belonged to one group. As Wolfe (in Burnett, 1991) stressed that age is a correlate and not a determinant. In sum, age seems to have an impact on the length of the consumer decision process, brand commitment, and the intention to stay with the brand. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

Hypothesis 8: Age influences the intention of a consumer to stay with the brand.

According to an academic study held by Chance and French (1972) on the brand switching behavior of housewives, income and education have an impact on the switching behavior of consumers. Foxall (1975) also supports the notion that socio-economic variables such as income and education affect consumer behavior. Moreover, in their research study, Petrin and Train (2010) found that income had an influence on the purchase of television sets. as Along similar lines, Bartos (1980) regards education and income rather than age as variables

that shape individual consumer behavior. As such, it can be assumed that education and income have an impact on the intention to stay with a brand. This leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 9: Income has an impact on the intention to stay with the brand.

Hypothesis 10: Education has an impact on the intention to stay with the brand.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

To collect the data for this study, people were invited through e-mail to fill in an online questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the perceived behavior of the participants, with the cell phone they were using at the time as the product under investigation: a search good. Participants were requested to indicate which brand their cell phone belonged to and the number of years they had been using this brand, indicating their experience with the brand. In the questions that followed, participants were asked to keep in mind the purchase of their cell phones. A total number of 350 people were invited through e-mail to complete the online questionnaire using a personal code. In total, 143 people filled in the questionnaire completely, resulting in a response rate of 40.8%. As this study concerned the Dutch market, a total number of 137 respondents proved to be relevant to the investigation, as they met the criterion of living in the Netherlands..

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Of these respondents, 60.6% were male (n=83) and 39.4% were female (n=54). All respondents lived in the Netherlands, of whom 92.7% were Dutch (n=127) and 7.3% came from another country (n=10). The ages of the respondents varied from 20 to 79. As a result, responses in the age categories were not similar, and therefore respondents were classified as old or young. Of all respondents, 62% (n=85) were termed young, i.e. no older than 49 years of age, and 38% (n=52) were termed old, i.e. aged 50 and over. Almost half the number, 44.5%, of the respondents (n=61) were born in the 1980s. Members of the second largest group, containing 36 people (26.3%), were born in the 1950s.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

	N	%	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	83	60.6	3.76	1.05
Female	54	39.4	3.61	1.06
Age group				
Young (20-49)	85	62	3.57	1.12
Old (50-79)	52	38	3.91	0.92
Education				
Low	20	14.5	4.07	0.76
High	117	85.4	3.64	1.09
Income				
Low (Below €20,000 - €39,999)	59	48.8	3.59	.998
Middle (€40,000 - €69,999)	33	27.3	3.47	1.19
High (€70,000 - €90,000 or more)	29	24	4.16	.927
Brand cell phone				
Apple	58	42.3	4.25	0.69
BlackBerry	14	10.2	2.96	1.36
LG Electronics	10	7.3	2.65	1.11
DELL	1	0.7	2.5	-
Nokia	24	17.5	3.54	1.02
Samsung	28	20.4	3.5	0.91
Sony Ericsson	2	1.5	3.5	2.12
User experience				
Less than one year	30	21.9	3.95	0.77
A year	17	12.4	3.71	0.89
Two years	33	24.1	3.26	1.28
Three years	15	10.9	3.53	0.97
More than three years	42	30.7	3.93	1.06

As was done for the respondents' age, education was also split up into two groups: one for lower and one for higher-educated people. The majority had finished higher education: 85.4%. More specifically, 38% had a degree from an university of applied science (n=52), and 44.5% had a degree from a research university (n=61). Only 2.9% held a PhD degree (n=4). The number of lower-educated respondents was only 20, accounting for only 14.5% of the total response.

With respect to the respondents' gross annual income, the majority earned salaries up to €50,000, whereas 13.1% earned salaries of €90,000 or more per year. Of all respondents, 8.8% refused to tell what they earned and only 2.9% did not know. The respondents (n=121) were divided into three groups based on their income: low (48.8%), middle (27.3%) and high (24%). Only 121 respondents were taken into account, since 16 respondents did not want to tell how much they earned or did not know. The respondents were also asked to indicate which brand they used at that moment. As can be seen in Table 1, Apple (42.3%), Samsung (20.4%) and Nokia (17.5%) were the most popular brands among the respondents who completed the online questionnaire. The duration of cell phone use was also measured: almost 78% of the respondents had used that specific cell phone brand for more than a year.

3.2 Measures

To measure the relationship between the intention to stay with the brand and various constructs, validated scales were used that had been applied in former research studies. In total, six constructs were distinguished: intention to stay with the brand, length of consumer decision process, brand commitment, overall satisfaction, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (social groups), and finally involvement.

3.2.1 Intention to Stay with Incumbent Brand

The scale to measure intention to stay with the brand was developed and validated by Burnham et al. (2003). It consists of two items. The first item was measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *very unlikely* to *very likely*. The second item was measured in percentages on a 5-point scale stating *no chance I will stay* at the one end and *I will certainly stay* at the other end. The data coding of the second item was done in such a way that a higher score depicted a higher chance to stay with the brand the following year. The two items questioned were 'how likely are you to switch to a competing brand in the following year?' and 'what is the chance that you will stay with your brand in the following year?'. The data showed an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .82.

3.2.2 Length of Consumer Decision Process

The scale to measure the length of the consumer decision process was created especially for this study and consisted of two items on a 5-point Likert scale. The first item, 'Before I decide which brand to buy, I think .... about it', ranged from *less than an hour* to *a month*. The second item, 'It takes me … about which brand to buy', ranged from *no thought at all* to *a lot of thought*. The two items exhibited an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .70.

3.2.3 Brand Commitment

The brand commitment scale was created and validated by Eisingerich and Rubera (2010). Brand commitment was measured with four items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The four items showed an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .87. The four items were: I feel loyal towards this brand; even if this brand were more difficult to buy, I would still keep buying it; I am willing "to go the extra mile" to remain a customer of this brand, and finally I will not buy this brand in the future.

3.2.4 Overall Satisfaction

Westbrook (1980) developed a one-item scale of satisfaction in combination with a percentage scale. This means that the higher the score of the data coding becomes, the more satisfied the respondents are with the product. The item asked the following question: "Overall, how satisfied have you been with this product?".

3.2.5 Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

Bearden et al. (1989) developed and validated the scale measuring consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence. This scale consists of four items and was measured by means of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Analysis showed an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .79. The four items were as follows: I often consult other people to help me choose the best alternative available from a product class; to make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using; if I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product, and finally I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy it.

3.2.6 Involvement

The scale to measure involvement was developed and validated by Traylor and Joseph (1984). It consists of six items measured by means of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The six items showed an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .90. The six items were as follows: when other people see me using this product, they form an opinion of me; you can tell a lot about a person by seeing what brand of the product he/she uses; this product helps me express who I am; this product is "me"; seeing somebody else use this product tells me a lot about that person, and finally when I use this product, others see me the way I want them to see me.

3.3 Data Analysis

For the statistical analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 18 was used. To compute the relationship of the intention to stay with the brand, the length of the consumer decision process, overall satisfaction, brand commitment, social groups, involvement, gender, education, age, brand cell phone and use experience's Pearson correlations were computed. Independent sample t-tests were used to determine whether there were any differences between the older and younger respondents, as well as between education level and gender. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine whether there were any differences in terms of income level. Hierarchical stepwise regression analyses were performed to check which variables explained most of the intention to stay for the entire group of respondents, the older and younger respondents, the lower, and highly-educated respondents and the ones with low, middle, and high incomes in separate groups.

4. Results

4.1 Mean Scores and Bivariate Correlations

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations of the constructs. For the intention to stay with the brand, two moderate and two strong correlations were found. Brand commitment correlated highly with the intention to stay ($r = .66$, $p < .01$), as well as satisfaction ($r = .64$, $p < .01$). In contrast, the length of the consumer decision process, age, income, social groups and involvement had low correlations with the intention to stay; the first variable correlated negatively ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$), the second one correlated positively ($r = .20$, $p < .05$), the third one positively ($r = .17$, $p < .05$), the fourth one correlated negatively ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$) and the last one correlated positively ($r = .215$, $p < .05$). The brand of the cell phone had a moderate negative correlation ($r = -.29$, $p < .01$). Interestingly, brand commitment and satisfaction correlated highly ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). In addition, age showed a low negative correlation with the consumer decision process ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$). The rest showed no significant correlations.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the intention to stay scores for males and females. No significant difference was found ($t (135) = .797$) and ($p > .05$). Additionally, no significant difference was found for the population aged over or below 50 ($t (135) = -1.50$) and $p > .05$) in terms of their intention to stay with the brand.

For the brand, one-way analysis of variance testing was used, indicating a statistically significant difference for the respondents' intention to stay with the brand: $F (5, 135) = 8.7$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that only two out of the three groups demonstrated a significant difference. The respondents' user experience for the intention to stay was measured with a one-way between groups analysis of variance test, which suggested that there was indeed a statistically significant difference between the groups at $p< .05$ level: $F (4, 132) = 2.5$, $p = .04$. Post-hoc comparisons with Sheffe's test indicated that the mean scores between the groups were not significantly different. To check whether any differences existed between the younger and older respondents in terms of the length of the consumer decision process, an independent-sample t-test was performed, which indicated that there was no significant difference ($t (135) = 2.34$) and ($p > .05$). An independent-sample t-test was conducted to examine whether age affected the brand commitment of consumers. No significant difference was found ($t (135) = -.154$) and ($p>.05$).

For the higher and lower-educated respondents, no statistical difference was found ($t (135) = -1.72$) and ($p > .05$). As a matter of fact, Hypothesis 8 could not be confirmed for the total group of respondents. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of income on the intention to stay. Subjects were divided into three groups according to their income level. A statistically significant difference was seen between the groups at the ($p < .05$) level: $F (2, 121) = 3.8$, $p = .02$. Post-hoc comparisons with Sheffe's test indicated that the mean scores of the groups were significantly different from each other ($p < .05$), except for the lower income group.

4.2 Regression Analysis

Hierarchical stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed to measure which construct explained more of the variance in terms of the intention to stay with the brand (Table 3). First, preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Next, the analyses were controlled for gender, age, education and income. Age, entered into the first step, explained 4% of the variance intention to stay for the total group. In the second step, the variables brand commitment, satisfaction, length of the consumer decision process, user experience with the cell phone and the susceptibility to social influence from groups explained in total 62.7% of the variance, F (6, 130) = 39.17, $p < .001$). The five control measures explained 60.4% of the variance in terms of intention to stay with the brand. In the final model, all the control measures were statistically significant ($p < .05$). The length of the consumer decision process explained only 3.4% of the variance intention to stay (beta = .18, $p < .001$). However, there was a low negative correlation. This means that the longer the decision process lasts, the lower the respondents' intent to stay with the brand becomes. This supports Hypothesis 1, which reported a relation between the two variables.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables

		μ	*SD*	*1.*	*2.*	*3.*	*4.*	*5.*	*6.*	*7.*	*8.*	*9.*	*10.*	*11.*
1.	Intention to stay	3.70	1.06											
2.	Gender	1.39	0.49	-.068										
3.	Age	1.36	0.48	.199*	-.081									
4.	Education	5.29	0.95	-.136	-.123	-.469**								
5.	Income	4.91	3.25	.174*	-.255**	.407**	-.032							
6.	Brand cell phone	4.53	3.50	-.285**	.225**	.142	-.162	-.149						
7.	Use experience	3.16	1.53	.007	-.115	.273**	-.094	.245**	.056					
8.	Length of CDP	2.88	1.00	-.218*	.045	-.246**	.123	-.173*	.04	-.192*				
9.	Brand commitment	3.22	0.89	.660**	-.086	.021	-.037	.146	-.377**	.191*	.055			
10.	Satisfaction	7.56	1.66	.639**	-.111	-0.02	-.072	.051	-.268**	.054	-.039	.615**		
11.	Social groups	3.24	0.79	-.234**	.029	-.270**	.109	-.195*	-.011	-.399**	.335**	-.092	-.129	
12.	Involvement	2.70	0.85	.215*	-.135	-.153	.115	.039	-.311**	-.109	.133	.387**	.313**	.059

**: $p < .01$; *: $p < .05$

Brand commitment and satisfaction showed the highest beta values, namely (beta = .38, $p < .001$) and (beta = .25, $p < .001$), respectively. The more committed the respondents were to the brand, the greater their intention to stay with the brand became. This outcome supports Hypothesis 2, which stated that brand commitment positively influences the intention to stay with the brand.

Next, in a second analysis, satisfaction was introduced in the second step of the analysis, following the control variables of gender, age, education and income and before the third step including the other variables. Satisfaction was shown to mediate partially the relationship between brand commitment and the intention to stay, as the beta coefficient of brand commitment decreased from .503 ($p < .001$) to .445 ($p < .001$). Satisfaction also mediated partially in the relationship between age and the intention to stay, since the beta value dropped from .178 ($p < .005$) to .149 ($p < .010$). To check the mediation of satisfaction on age and the intention to stay, the respondents were divided into a younger and an older group for which the same analyses were performed. No difference was found when satisfaction was introduced in between the control variables and the predictor variables. Satisfaction is also a predictor for the intention to stay (beta = .249, $p < .001$). It can be concluded that the higher satisfaction becomes, the higher the intention to stay becomes, which supports Hypothesis 3. Moreover, user experience with the cell phone also emerged as a significant predictor of the intention to stay (beta = -.215); the longer the use of the phone, the less likely respondents would stay with the brand. This is in support of Hypothesis 4, which states that experience has an impact on the intention to stay. Susceptibility of individuals to influences from social groups was another predictor of the intention to stay (beta = -.132). It can

be concluded that the less influence consumers experience from social groups, the higher their intention to switch becomes. Hypothesis 7 is confirmed as a relation is found between the two variables. Age is a predictor of the intention to stay for the total group, as can be seen in Table 3. Thus, Hypothesis 8 is confirmed, which states that age has an influence on the intention to stay with the brand.

In the third regression analysis we performed, the respondents were divided into young (below 50) and old (50 years and over), to check whether any differences existed in the explanation of variables in terms of the intention to stay. The predictors for the younger respondents with respect to the intention to stay were the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction, brand commitment, user experience and involvement - explaining 69.5% of the variance ($p < .001$).

Involvement with the brand was a predictor of the intention to stay (beta = -.172), as a result of which Hypothesis 5 can be partially accepted - since it concerns the total group and this only held for the younger consumers. On the other hand, for the older respondents only satisfaction, brand commitment and susceptibility to influences from social groups were predictors: these explained 52% of the variance in the intention to stay ($p < .001$). As a result, Hypothesis 7 is again supported by the fact that age has an influence on the intention to stay and the accompanying reasons for it. Still, when the respondents were divided on the basis of their level of education, a major difference emerged. For the highly educated respondents, the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction, brand commitment, user experience and susceptibility to the influence of social groups proved to be predictors of the intention to stay, while for the lower educated respondents only the brand of the cell phone was a predictor. As the brand of the cell phone was found to be a predictor of the intention to stay for the lower-educated respondents (beta = -.656), this indicates that a brand has influence on the intention to stay, thus partially confirming Hypothesis 6. Hypothesis 9 is supported by the finding that education impacts the intention to stay with the brand.

The last regression analysis considered the respondents in terms of their income levels: low, middle and high. Table 3 demonstrates that the respondents with lower incomes showed more predictors for the intention to stay with the brand than the middle and higher income respondents did. As a matter of fact, for the lower incomes the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction and brand commitment were predictors, explaining 62.9% of the variance. For the middle incomes, satisfaction and brand commitment were predictors, explaining 54.8% of the variance. Lastly, for the higher incomes only satisfaction was a predictor, explaining 41.8% of the variance. This is a remarkable and interesting observation, which lends support to Hypothesis 10 stating that income has an impact on the intention to stay.

Table 3. Separate hierarchical stepwise regression analyses to explain the intention to stay for the total group, for the different ages

			Age		Education		Income		
	Total group (n=137)		Young (n=87)	Old (n=50)	Low (n=20)	High (n=117)	Low (n=59)	Middle (n=33)	High (n=29)
	β^a	β^b	β	β	β	β	β	β	β
Step 1									
Age	$.178^{***}$	$.149^{*}$	-	-	-	$.177^{*}$	-	-	-
Step 2									
Length of CDP	$-.192^{*}$	$-.192^{***}$	$-.147^{***}$	-	-	$-.196^{***}$	$-.305^{***}$	-	-
Satisfaction	$.322^{***}$	$.360^{***}$	$.318^{***}$	$.588^{***}$	-	$.324^{***}$	$.486^{***}$	$.372^{***}$	$.663^{***}$
Brand commitment	$.503^{***}$	$.445^{***}$	$.693^{***}$	-	-	$.522^{***}$	$.401^{***}$	$.463^{***}$	-
User experience	$-.244^{***}$	-	$-.210^{***}$	$-.336^{***}$	-	$-.261^{***}$	-	-	-
Social groups	$-.132^{***}$	-	-	$-.425^{***}$	-	$-.134^{***}$	-	-	-
Involvement	-	-	$-.172^{***}$	-	-	-	-	-	-
Brand cell phone	-	-	-	-	$-.656^{**}$	-	-	-	-
Regression model									
Explained variance R^2	64.4%	59.6%	71.3%	55%	43%	65.1%	64.8%	57.6%	43.9%
Adjusted R^2	62.7%	58.3%	69.5%	52%	39.8%	63.2%	62.9%	54.8%	41.8%
F value	39.17^{***}	48.58^{***}	40.19^{***}	18.7^{***}	13.56^{**}	34.14^{***}	33.73^{***}	20.37^{***}	21.13^{***}

5. Discussion

In our analyses, we demonstrated that the intention to stay with the cell phone brand can be measured by means of the following constructs: the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction, brand commitment, user experience of the cell phone and susceptibility to influences from social groups. In addition to this, we presented exploratory analyses of consumer behavior exhibited by young and old respondents as well as lower and higher-educated respondents. We also showed that on the basis of lower, middle and higher incomes of the respondents different factors can be distinguished that may influence the decision process with respect to the intention to stay with the brand that the respondents were using at the time of the investigation.

A significant variable influencing the intention to stay with the cell phone brand proved to be age. The older the respondents, the more likely they were to stay with the brand they used. Satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between age and the intention to stay: the older the respondents, the more satisfied they were and the more they intended to stay with the brand they were using. What is remarkable is the fact that age has an influence on the predictors of the intention to stay with the brand. From the outcomes, it appears that for the younger individuals the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction, brand commitment, user experience and the involvement with the brand were predictors of the intention to stay, whereas for the older individuals only satisfaction, user experience and social influence from groups were of importance. Thus, the following statements can be formulated for the younger consumers: the shorter the time it takes to decide which cell phone brand they want to buy, the higher the intention to stay becomes; the more satisfied they are, the higher the intention to stay; the more committed to the brand of cell phone, the higher the likelihood they will stay with the brand; the less experience they have with the brand of cell phone, the higher the probability becomes that they will stay with the brand, and the less involved they are with the cell phone, the higher their intention to stay becomes. For the older consumers, the following statements hold true: the more satisfied they are with the brand, the higher their intention to stay; the less experience they have with the brand of the cell phone, the higher the probability they will stay with the brand, and the less they feel susceptible to influences from their social groups, the greater their intention to stay with the brand becomes.

Interestingly, for the older consumers satisfaction would seem to be more important than for the younger consumers, and user experience with the cell phone was a higher predictor of the intention to stay with the brand. This suggests that the older consumers value satisfaction with the brand of the cell phone more highly than younger consumers (Yoon et al., 2005), although they are more easily satisfied with a product (Cole and Balasubramanian, 1993). Still, it should be mentioned here that this research study is in contrast with the findings reported by Goldstucker et al. (1985), who state that the elderly do not have different requirements compared with younger consumers.

From the variables that were used to measure the intention to stay with the brand, satisfaction and brand commitment proved to be the most significant predictors in comparison with the other variables. Firstly, the more satisfied individuals were with the brand of cell phone they used, the greater the possibility became that they would remain with the same brand. This result appears to support the outcomes of a former study in approximately the same field, even though this study investigated the use of service providers (Burnham et al., 2003). It is also in line with research reported by Coulter et al. (2003), who state that when consumers are content with the brand they use they are less willing to switch to a different brand. Nevertheless, as Chiou and Droge (2006) have already indicated, satisfaction is not enough to stay loyal to the brand, and this is confirmed by the fact that brand commitment has a major impact on the intention to stay with the brand.

Secondly, the more committed individuals are to their cell phone brand, the less likely it becomes that they will switch brands. Besides this, satisfaction also mediated partially in the relationship between brand commitment and the intention to stay, which suggests that the more committed individuals are to the brand of cell phone they use, the more satisfied they are, and in turn the more they want to stay with the brand. The outcome confirms similar results reported in research studies performed in other fields on the topic of brand commitment (Coulter et al., 2003). LaBarbera and Mazursky (1983) supported the assumption that satisfaction has an important role in the switching behavior of consumers, except for brand commitment, and this is confirmed in the current study on cell phones.

Another predictor of the intention to stay with the brand is the length of the consumer decision process, which implies that the shorter the decision process for the brand of cell phone the individuals buy, the greater the intention to stay with the brand becomes. This is, in a way, also suggested by Choi and Fishach (2011), who argue that when consumers need a product they buy it, which implies a shorter decision process, while they also need experience with these products. User experience of the cell phone also proved to be a predictor of the

intention to stay with the brand, which is also validated by former research studies (Brakus et al., 2009). This would explain the fact that the less user experience individuals have with the cell phone brand, the greater their intention to stay with the brand becomes.

Education also proved to have an impact on the intention to stay and on the variables that individuals considered in deciding whether or not to stay with the brand. For the higher educated respondents, the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction, brand commitment, user experience and susceptibility to influences from social groups were predictors of switching behavior, whereas for the lower educated respondents only the brand of the cell phone that they were using was a predictor. This implies that higher-educated individuals demonstrate the same type of behavior as the total group, while it can be said for lower-educated individuals that the more famous brands of cell phones they use, the more they want to stay with the brand they are using. This is also supported by scholars such as Rao et al. (2004), Schau et al. (2009) and Sprott et al. (2009), who showed that brands may play a significant role in their relationship with consumers.

Income was also shown to have an effect on the variables that individuals consider in their intention to stay with the brand. For the consumers with lower incomes, the length of the consumer decision process, satisfaction and brand commitment proved to be predictors. For consumers with middle incomes, satisfaction and brand commitment were predictors, and finally for the higher-income consumers, only satisfaction was a predictor of their intention to stay with the brand. As such, it seems that different variables are important for consumers in terms of education as well as income level, which was also confirmed by scholars such as Chance and French (1972) and Foxall (1975). As Burnett (1991) reported: age is just a correlate. In this study, differences could be seen in consumer behavior by checking control variables such as education and income, and by supporting and confirming Bartos' (1980) claim that the older consumers should not be looked at as one single monolithic market.

5.1 Managerial Implications & Recommendations

This research study suggests that satisfaction, brand commitment, the length of the consumer decision process, age, user experience, the susceptibility to influences from social groups and involvement explain the degree to which consumers intend to stay with the brand of cell phone they use. The outcomes of this study can be used in the industry and related technological industry sectors, as crucial information is provided about the different variables that probably predict the intention of consumers to stay with the brand they are using. This more thorough and in-depth analysis regarding the attitude and behavior of consumers in the cell phone industry can be used to improve future products and brand development, marketing, and the relationship of the brand with its consumers. When individuals plan to buy a cell phone brand, they use different criteria in order to make the purchase, and they are also influenced by various other stimuli. Here, we suggest that the intention to stay with the brand is income-dependent and affected by age and education.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that when consumers decide to purchase a specific cell phone brand, they have a set of expectations concerning the brand they are going to purchase, be it the one they already use or a new one. Since the brand has either explicitly or implicitly communicated what it can provide in terms of user experience, involving satisfaction and brand commitment, this creates certain expectations on the part of the consumers. Should these expectations not be met, the intention to stay with the brand will decrease, and switching to another brand will be the result. To address such managerial implications, certain recommendations were formulated during this research study to help cell phone brands retain their customers.

First, it is recommended that cell phone brands "walk their talk"; so, what they preach in the advertisement campaigns with respect to the use of the cell phone should also be practiced in reality. As a result, consumer expectations will be met when they use the cell phone. Second, when marketing and selling a specific product, firms should consider the age, education, and income of the consumers. This will enable them to make correct decisions and prevent any potential future frustration on the part of the consumers. Third, firms should create an image of the cell phone brand that matches the expectations of the target group they are aiming at; the image should become more age, education and income specific. Fourth, cell phone companies should stimulate the relationship of its consumers with the brand concerned by getting them involved and by offering them the feeling of belonging to this group. By involving consumers and inviting them to the join the cell phone brand's events and activities, firms can offer consumers the unique experience they promised to give them. If a firm applies correct and appropriate marketing techniques, , consumers will develop a connection with the brand and develop feelings of satisfaction. It is factors like these that increase consumers' intention to stay with brand they are using.

5.2 Limitations & Further Research

After careful data analysis, this research study indicated several important factors that influence consumers before they purchase a cell phone brand and that also determine whether these consumers intend to stay with their current brands or whether they wish to switch to another one. This study offers an important contribution to the literature in terms of new knowledge about the length of the consumer decision process, brand switching, attitude and behavior demonstrated by older consumers. Still, the study is based on data concerning only one single product in one single country, which demonstrates its limitations: findings and conclusions may not apply to other products and countries. Nevertheless, building on prior research concerning the decision process and brand switching of consumers in the cell phone industry, we offered information about influences experienced by consumers and discussed whether factors such as age, education and income have an impact on their behavior. As was mentioned in the measures section, this study used exploratory factor analysis; however, it is advised that future researchers use confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis so that more precise relations between the different variables can be depicted and analyzed.

The sample size of the total group of respondents was quite small, especially if separate analyses within the groups in terms of gender, age, education and income are taken into account. To remedy this effect, the population was divided into younger and older respondents and different education and income levels. Future studies should carefully balance the subgroups in terms of gender, age, education and income, so that a better image of the population can be provided. Still, the outcomes reported here do in fact provide an indication that there are different aspects that concern younger and older consumers, namely the level of education and income. Another important factor is that the questionnaire was phrased in English, while respondents were Dutch. If additional levels of education need to be included to obtain a broader view of Dutch society, the Dutch language should be used in a new questionnaire. It should also be considered here that the respondents' answers regarding their attitude towards switching cell phone brands was only measured as an intention. As a result, it cannot as yet be said that the results are definite, unless they are measured in a longitudinal study. This implies that individuals should be followed and tested for a longer period of time to monitor their attitude and behavior, so that their intention to stay with a brand yields even more valuable information.

Satisfaction and brand commitment proved to be significant predictors of the intention to stay with the brand. In addition, these factors were highly positively related to each other and the intention to stay, as depicted in the correlation analyses. From these analyses, satisfaction emerged as a mediator, although on the basis of other analyses that were performed there could be a chance that brand commitment is a moderator of satisfaction and the intention to stay. Further correlation analyses are needed to determine whether a higher brand commitment on the part of consumers has an impact in terms of higher satisfaction levels and a higher intention to stay with the brand.

Finally, in the multivariate regression analyses, the older consumers' reasons supporting their intention to stay with their brands proved to be highly related to satisfaction, user experience and influence from social groups. For the lower-educated respondents, the cell phone brand was the only factor related to the intention to stay with the brand. This could be explained by the fact that these consumers have other priorities that they consider to be important for their decision to stay or switch brands. More in-depth research is needed to outline specifically how age and income influence the decision to purchase a cell phone or any other product. To obtain more detailed information about older consumers' decision making and switching behavior, this group should be studied in greater detail on the basis of different products and brands.

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