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When Does Commitment Lead to Loyalty?

Gordon Fullerton

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Customer commitment is now regarded as a key variable in marketing relationships. The article investigates the roles played by different forms of commitment in the relationship between customers and their service provider. It was found that when customer commitment is based on shared values and identification, it has a uniformly positive impact on customer loyalty. When customer commitment is based on switching costs and dependence, it has mixed effects on customer loyalty. In addition, it was found that there were significant interactions between these two forms of commitment on customer loyalty. If we are to understand the role of customer commitment, we must have a solid understanding of the nature of commitment present in the relationship. These findings have important implications for the development and management of service relationships because it is not necessarily the case that more customer commitment is better for either the service provider or the customer.

Keywords: *customer commitment; customer loyalty; service marketing; affective commitment; continuance commitment; customer relationship management*

The nature of services makes it particularly important that practitioners and researchers consider relationship marketing phenomena (Berry 1995; Bitner 1995). Although there are a number of views about the proper way to

manage organizational-customer relationships, customer commitment is increasingly regarded as a central construct in relationship marketing (Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard 1999). Customer commitment to the vendor has been found to mediate the effects of a number of transactional background variables such as quality, shared values, communication, and trust on a number of consumer behavioral intentions, including customer retention, advocacy, and acquiescence (Morgan and Hunt 1994). This implies that customer commitment to the service provider would be a very important driver of customer loyalty in services industries.

The relationship marketing literature has generally taken a "more is better" approach to the study of commitment. This might be appropriate if commitment is narrowly conceptualized as an identification- and attachment-oriented force that links the customer to the organization (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Marketing scholars and practitioners are now recognizing that customer commitment is a complex, multidimensional construct that includes at least an affective and continuance component (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000; Harrison-Walker 2001). This is interesting because it raises the possibility that the effects of different types of commitment on customer loyalty may not be of equal magnitude or even in the same direction. This has important ramifications for the management of customer relationships because marketer activities can build multiple forms of commitment, which may have differing effects and potentially interacting effects. The implication is

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that more commitment in the relationship may not be better for either the service provider or the customer.

Most recent examinations of the nature and role of commitment in marketing relationships have identified at least a partial mediating role of commitment on relational intentions (Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard 1999). However, researchers have generally taken a narrow perspective on commitment, defining it as an identification- or attachment-based attitudinal construct (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Even in those studies that have employed a multicomponent perspective on commitment, there has been no attempt to determine the existence of the interactive effects of various types of customer commitment (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000). The identification of interactive effects between the components of commitment may well go a long way to explaining the mixed feelings that consumers have about their relationships with organizations (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998). The existence of a moderating relationship between components of commitment may also explain the mixed effectiveness of customer loyalty enhancement programs in services industries (Bolton, Kannan, and Bramlett 2000; Deighton 2000; Dowling and Uncles 1997; Rigby, Reicheld, and Schefter 2002).

THE NATURE OF COMMITMENT IN MARKETING RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the fact that commitment is a central construct in the area of relationship marketing, there is little agreement on the nature of the construct. Frequently, *commitment* is defined as a desire to maintain a relationship (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Sometimes it is conceptualized as a "pledge of continuity" from one party to another (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987). Others have put forward that the root of commitment lies in sacrifice or the potential for sacrifice that a party faces in the event that the relationship ends (Anderson and Weitz 1992) or the forsaking of alternative options (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995). More recently, commitment has been defined as a resistance to change (Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard 1999) and a type of attitude strength (Ahluwalia 2000). These various conceptualizations make it difficult to develop a definitive view on what commitment means to customers and organizations.

Some marketing scholars have borrowed from the discipline of organizational behavior, bringing the Allen and Meyer (1990) multiple-component model of organizational commitment to our discipline (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000; Harrison-Walker 2001). For some time,

organizational behavior researchers and industrial-organization psychologists have recognized that commitment in employment relationships is a complex construct with at least an affective and a continuance component (Allen and Meyer 1990; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986). It is also recognized that different forms of commitment in the employment relationship have different consequences (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). Similarly, the various perspectives and definitions adopted by marketing scholars would lead us to conclude that customer commitment entails at least two components (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995). The first component of commitment is based on liking and identification, which Allen and Meyer have termed *affective commitment*. The second component of customer commitment is based on dependence and switching costs, which Allen and Meyer have termed *continuance commitment*. Each component of commitment will now be discussed in some detail.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is built on the "affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in the organization" (Allen and Meyer 1990, p. 2). Although the affective commitment construct was developed as a means of explaining employee attachment to work groups and organizations, it can be applied in situations when there is a consumption relationship between a consumer and an organization (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000). Marketing scholars have frequently made explicit reference to the affective nature of customer commitment, in that it represents an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Affective commitment is rooted in identification, shared values, belongingness, dedication, and similarity (Achrol 1997; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard 1999). In addition, when Morgan and Hunt (1994) demonstrated that commitment was a key mediating construct in the discipline, they operationalized relationship commitment as affective commitment, partially borrowing their measure of commitment from the Allen and Meyer (1990) affective commitment scale.

The essence of affective commitment is that customers come to acquire an emotional attachment to their partner in a consumption relationship. When consumers come to like (or, in some cases, love) brands or service providers, they are experiencing the psychological state of affective commitment. Friendship (Price and Arnould 1999), rapport (Gremler and Gwinner 2000), and trust (Doney and Cannon 1997; Morgan and Hunt 1994) are also closely associ-

ated with the affective commitment construct. Indeed, it may well be the case that these feelings of association lie at the core of the relationalism as it is generally regarded in a marketing context (Price and Arnould 1999).

Continuance Commitment

The continuance commitment construct was developed as a means of explaining the extent that the employees feel bound to an organization. Continuance commitment in employment relationships is built on side bets, switching costs, and scarcity of alternatives (Allen and Meyer 1990; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986). Continuance commitment represents a distinctly different perspective on the psychological forces that link the customer to the organization. Even though continuance commitment has rarely been identified as a distinct construct in marketing scholarship (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000), the essential ingredients that bring forward feelings of continuance have a good tradition of research in marketing scholarship. In marketing relationships, a consumer is likely to be committed to a relationship if he or she faces concrete switching costs or if the benefits that he or she receives from the partner are not easily replaceable from other potential exchange partners (Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995). Commitment can also be formed when one party perceives dependence on the other party to the exchange (Heide and John 1992). Anderson and Weitz (1992) established that parties become committed when one party takes specific actions that will bind it to another party. These actions include pledges, investments, and side bets (Becker 1960), as well as contracts or service agreements that limit free choice for the period of the contract (Anderson and Weitz 1992). Switching costs, dependence, and lack of choice are at the core of the continuance commitment construct in marketing relationships.

Feelings of attachment and identification (affective commitment) are very different from feelings of dependence and entrapment (continuance commitment). However, although affective and continuance commitments are distinct components of commitment, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive conditions (Allen and Meyer 1990). Researchers who have examined the dark side of marketing relationships (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Grayson and Ambler 1999) have implicitly recognized that commitment can have an effect on consumer behavior via both feelings of positive affect and feelings of continuance. A single relationship could be based on either affective or continuance commitment, both forms of commitment, or (if it was a very weak relationship) neither form of commitment.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF COMMITMENT IN SERVICE MARKETING RELATIONSHIPS

Given that researchers generally conceptualize commitment as an attitude or attitudinal variable, researchers in relationship marketing have logically attempted to identify the intentional and behavioral consequences of the commitment construct. Because commitment has been predominantly defined and operationalized as affective commitment, we have a good understanding of the consequences of affective commitment (Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Morgan and Hunt 1994). This being said, we have only an emerging understanding of how continuance commitment leads to important relational consequences (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000; Harrison-Walker 2001). Marketing scholars are only beginning to recognize the existence of distinct affective and continuance commitment constructs, and even though the constructs have a substantial tradition of research in organizational behavior, it will be necessary to draw on both the relationship marketing and the organizational commitment literatures to map out the consequences of each component of commitment.

Customer retention is an important area of investigation in marketing scholarship in that the entire relationship marketing paradigm is all about finding ways to improve customer retention rates (McKenna 1991). A substantial body of research has demonstrated that commitment of an affective nature is positively related to customer retention (Anderson and Weitz 1992; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner 1998; Joshi and Arnold 1997; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995).

Hypothesis 1a: There is a negative simple effect of affective commitment on customer switching intentions.

Customer advocacy is also regarded as an important consequence of customer commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Price and Arnould 1999). Customers who feel comfortable in their relationships with service providers can be expected to act as advocates for the service organization (Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Price and Arnould 1999). Although advocacy and positive word-of-mouth communications have a lengthy tradition of research in services marketing (E. Anderson 1998; Bansal and Voyer 2000), we know less about advocacy as a consequence of commitment in marketing relationships (Harrison-Walker 2001; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Advocacy can be viewed as a type of customer citizenship behavior. In the organizational commitment literature, it has been shown that there is a positive effect of affective commitment on organizational citizenship behaviors (Allen and Meyer 1990;

Mathieu and Zajac 1990). Organizational citizenship behavior is a multifaceted construct that includes employee advocacy and any outcome whereby employees go beyond the formal requirements of the job (Mathieu and Zajac 1990).

Hypothesis 1b: There is a positive simple effect of affective commitment on customer advocacy intentions.

It is recognized that consumer acceptance of price increases is an important issue in the study of services marketing and service relationships (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). Researchers in relationship marketing have a limited understanding of the extent to which consumers are willing to pay more for the benefits that they receive from a relationship. Morgan and Hunt (1994) found a positive relationship between customer commitment and customer acquiescence. Although not explicitly recognized by Morgan and Hunt, the acceptance of price increases is one area where affectively committed consumers could acquiesce to requests from service partners.

Hypothesis 1c: There is a positive simple effect of affective commitment on consumer willingness to pay more for a service.

There is a significant body of literature on the effects of dependence-based commitment in business-to-business markets (Anderson and Weitz 1992; Heide and John 1992; Joshi and Arnold 1997). When customers feel trapped in a relationship, it is difficult for them to switch suppliers (Anderson and Weitz 1992; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995). In service research, it has been noted that consumer perceptions about the ease of switching are a determinant of switching intentions (Bansal and Taylor 1999). Although ease of switching in itself is not continuance commitment, ease of switching and availability of alternatives are antecedent conditions for the psychological state of continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer 1990). The nature of investments, contracts, and dependence in marketing relationships is such that they help ensure that parties will continue to remain in the relationship (Anderson and Weitz 1992). Recent literature on marketing relationships in consumer markets has generally identified a positive effect of dependence-based commitment on customer retention (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Grayson and Ambler 1999). This being said, Gruen, Summers, and Acito (2000) found that continuance commitment had no effect on member retention in the context of a professional association.

Hypothesis 2a: There is a negative simple effect of continuance commitment on consumer switching intentions.

In the organizational behavior literature, the dominant finding is that there is a negative relationship between continuance commitment and employee organizational citizenship behaviors (Mayer and Schoorman 1992). When a party in a relationship experiences feelings of continuance commitment, the party will not engage in extra-role behaviors, including advocacy. Consumers who feel trapped and dependent on their relational partners are unlikely to act as advocates on behalf of the partner (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Harrison-Walker 2001).

Hypothesis 2b: There is a negative simple effect of continuance commitment on consumer advocacy intentions.

Consumers feeling committed because they are dependent on their partner may be unwilling to invest more in the relationship because they fear the partner will behave opportunistically (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995). Price increases may well be seen as opportunistic behavior on the part of the partner. Consumers experiencing continuance commitment in a service relationship can be expected to react against requests to accept price increases.

Hypothesis 2c: There is a negative simple effect of continuance commitment on consumer willingness to pay more.

The position that there are interactive effects between affective and continuance commitment has not been widely examined in the organizational behavior literature (Mayer and Schoorman 1992; Somers 1995). Although there may be positive relationships between both affective and continuance commitment and intent to remain, the effects of the constructs may not necessarily be purely additive (Mayer and Schoorman 1992). Somers (1995) found that the relationship between affective commitment and employee intent to remain in an employment relationship depended on the level of felt continuance commitment also present in the relationship.

The interactive effects of various types of customer commitment in marketing relationships have also been a relatively unstudied phenomenon (Joshi and Arnold 1997). A central tenet of the transactions cost framework is that relational norms in an exchange relationship only matter to the extent that customers are also committed through continuance (Heide and John 1992). Similarly, Joshi and Arnold (1997) found that relational norms moderated the relationship between dependence and opportunism on switching behavior. The implication of the findings in both the organizational behavior and marketing literatures is that the positive effects of affective commitment vary ac-

ording to the level of felt continuance commitment also present in the relationship.

Hypothesis 3a: There is an interactive effect of affective and continuance commitment on consumer switching intentions.

To date, there has been no attempt to examine the interactive effects of various types of commitment on dependent variables other than customer retention. The organizational behavior literature also offers no conceptual or empirical support for the existence of commitment-component interactions on dependent variables other than employee intent to remain in the organization. Thus, there is no empirical evidence supporting the existence of affective commitment-continuance commitment interactions on either advocacy intentions or willingness to pay more. However, in a service context, advocacy is an important component of consumer loyalty, closely correlated with customer retention and consumer willingness to pay more (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). Because there is some empirical evidence suggesting an interaction between affective commitment and continuance commitment on customer retention, the same interactive effects may well exist for both consumer advocacy and willingness to pay more.

Hypothesis 3b: There is an interactive effect of affective and continuance commitment on consumer advocacy intentions.

Hypothesis 3c: There is an interactive effect of affective and continuance commitment on consumer willingness to pay more for the service.

METHOD

This study uses an experimental design to examine the direct and interactive effects of the components of customer commitment to the service provider on a number of consumer relational intentions. The advantage of experimental designs in marketing is that they can tease out interactions between constructs better than survey-based research projects in which data are examined using correlational techniques. The inherent data distribution assumptions behind correlational approaches to data analysis make it difficult for researchers to detect interactions (Ping 1995).

To examine the hypotheses, a 2 (affective commitment) \times 2 (continuance commitment) longitudinal experimental design was conducted. A key aspect of marketing relationships is that they evolve over time (Price and Arnould 1999). So although it is possible to examine the effects of marketing relationships in a study that involves a single

manipulation of independent variables (Handelman and Arnold 1999; Joshi and Arnold 1997), a longitudinal design that examines processes and conditions that develop over time is more appropriate for the study of marketing relationships (Rust et al. 1999). This is consistent with the recent advice of Sheth and Parvatiyar (2002), who argued that marketing relationship phenomena must be studied over time.

Affective and continuance commitment to the service provider was manipulated through a vignette study. This vignette study methodology is similar to those employed in some recent studies on relationship marketing phenomena (Handelman and Arnold 1999; Joshi and Arnold 1997). Organizational behavior researchers have also used this method to investigate the effects of organizational commitment-type variables (Barling and Hutchinson 2000). However, none of these vignette studies involved a longitudinal design.

The participants in this study were 108 undergraduate students at a midsized university in Canada. The students participated in this study for course credit, and they were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. The experiment involved five sessions. Twelve participants did not complete all five sessions, yielding a useable sample of 96 participants. The first three sessions took place over a 1-week period, with 2 days between the first and second sessions and 5 days between the second and third sessions. The fourth session took place 2 days after the third session, and the fifth and final session took place 5 days later.

In the first session, participants were asked to read a story about a new cellular telephone service provider that targeted a university-student market. Participants were then asked to imagine that they had recently signed a specified service agreement with the organization. In all four experimental conditions, participants were given identical information in the first three sessions. The purpose of this part of the experiment was to create and stabilize the relationship between the customer and the service provider. In the first three sessions, a base level of affective commitment was created by informing participants that the cellular telephone service provider was started by former executives of a major regional cellular telephone service provider who were also graduates of the university's undergraduate business program. Participants also read that the service provider made modest contributions to the university's scholarship program and provided some support to a local museum. The base level of continuance commitment was created by informing participants that they had signed a 2-year service contract with the cellular telephone service provider. In each of the first three sessions, participants answered questions measuring the manipulation checks and the dependent variables.

At the fourth session, the affective and continuance commitment manipulations took place. Affective commitment was manipulated by varying the extent to which the cellular telephone service provider, outlined in the vignette, undertook activities that would enhance or erode perceived shared values. Shared values are an important antecedent of affective commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). In the high-affective condition, participants were told that the owners of the cellular service provider had enhanced their contribution to the university's scholarship program and a popular local museum exhibit. In the low-affective condition, participants were told that the owners had sold the company to a major North American cellular service provider and the new owners were reviewing the organization's entire corporate donations program. Continuance commitment was manipulated by varying the extent to which the participant could easily exit the relationship. In the high-continuance condition, participants read that a friend had just read the fine print in the service contract and discovered that a \$100 security deposit required at the time that the service contract was signed would be entirely nonrefundable if the customer cancelled service before the end of the service contract. In the low-continuance commitment condition, participants were told that competitive pressures had forced the company to convert all remaining 2-year service contracts to month-to-month, 30-day service contracts. These switching costs and contractual obligations are essential ingredients of continuance commitment in marketing relationships (Anderson and Weitz 1992). The same manipulation checks and dependent variables that were measured in the first three sessions were also measured in the final two sessions.

In all conditions, the basic monthly service fee was \$30 with free local evening and weekend usage. This rate was comparable to rates offered by national and regional cellular service providers in Canada at the time of the study. In addition, participants were given information about peak time cellular rates and long-distance rates that were comparable with those offered by other regional and national cellular service providers at the time of the study.

Manipulation Checks

Affective commitment and continuance commitment were both measured with four items adapted from Allen and Meyer's (1990) affective commitment scale and continuance commitment scale, respectively. These scales exhibited acceptable reliability in all five sessions (see Table 1). Over the first three sessions, subject commitment to the service provider was stable, as shown in Table 2. Participant affective commitment in the first session ($\bar{X} = 14.51$) was not significantly different from their affective com-

mitment in either the second session ($\bar{X} = 14.54$) or the third session ($\bar{X} = 14.60$). Similarly, felt continuance commitment in the first session ($\bar{X} = 16.69$) was not significantly different from felt continuance commitment in either the second session ($\bar{X} = 16.22$) or the third session ($\bar{X} = 16.19$).

In the fourth session, the affective commitment manipulation was successful ($\bar{X}_{low} = 8.74$, $\bar{X}_{high} = 20.61$), as was the continuance commitment manipulation ($\bar{X}_{low} = 9.28$, $\bar{X}_{high} = 21.28$). Overall, participant feelings of affective commitment ($\bar{X} = 14.42$ and $\bar{X} = 14.15$) and continuance commitment ($\bar{X} = 15.02$ and $\bar{X} = 14.60$) did not significantly differ over the final two sessions in the experiment. In addition, the affective ($\bar{X}_{low} = 8.20$, $\bar{X}_{high} = 20.60$) and continuance commitment ($\bar{X}_{low} = 8.30$, $\bar{X}_{high} = 21.46$) manipulations held in the fifth session. This demonstrates that the manipulations were both effective and stable over time and that the initial relationship between the participant and the service provider had been changed over the course of the experiment.

Dependent Variables

Switching intentions, advocacy intentions, and willingness to pay more were each measured with three items. The advocacy intention items were taken from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman's (1996) five-item loyalty intentions scale, in which three of the items dealt with advocacy and positive word-of-mouth communications intentions. Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman measured switching intentions with two items, but one of their measures of complaining intentions (adapted in this study as SW3) had substantial face validity as a measure of switching intentions. Willingness to pay more for the service was measured with three items, in which two items (PM1 and PM2) were taken directly from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman and one item (PM3) was developed by the principal researcher. All three scales exhibited good reliability at each phase of the study (see Table 1). It is worth noting that the reliability of the scales improved throughout the course of the experiment, perhaps evidence of the observation that participants learn how to respond to multiple-item scales (Drolet and Morrison 2001). In addition, consumer intentions were stable over the first three parts of the study, as evidenced by the fact that advocacy intentions, switching intentions, and willingness-to-pay-more measures taken in the first experimental session were not significantly different from those measures taken in the second and third sessions (see Table 2). Consumer intentions were also stable after the experimental manipulation, as evidenced by the fact that the dependent variable means did not differ in the fourth and fifth sessions (see Table 2).

TABLE 1
Items and Reliabilities and Results of Confirmatory Factor
Analysis for Dependent Variables and Manipulation Checks

	<i>T1</i> α	<i>T2</i> α	<i>T3</i> α	<i>T4</i> α	<i>T5</i> α
Switching	.81	.87	.92	.95	.96
SW1 Do less business with X in the next year					
SW2 Take some of your business to a competitor of X					
SW3 Switch from X to another service provider					
Advocacy	.83	.87	.80	.96	.95
ADV1 Say positive things about X to other people					
ADV2 Recommend X to someone who seeks your advice					
ADV3 Encourage friends and relatives to do business with X					
Pay more	.73	.86	.86	.95	.96
PM1 Continue to do business with X if its prices increase					
PM2 Pay a higher price than competitors charge for the benefits you currently receive from X					
PM3 Accept higher prices if X raises its prices					
Affective commitment	.82	.86	.93	.97	.99
AFF1 I feel like part of a family as a customer of X					
AFF2 I feel emotionally attached to X					
AFF3 X has a great deal of personal meaning for me					
AFF4 I feel a strong sense of identification with X					
Continuance commitment	.88	.84	.88	.96	.98
CON1 It would be very hard for me to switch away from X right now even if I wanted to					
CON2 My life would be disrupted if I switched away from X					
CON3 It would be too costly for me to switch from X right now					
CON4 Right now, staying with X is as much a matter of necessity as it is of choice					

TABLE 2
Means for Manipulation Checks
and Dependent Variables

	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>T3</i>	<i>T4</i>	<i>T5</i>
Affective commitment	14.51	14.54	14.60	14.42	14.15
Continuance commitment	16.69	16.22	16.19	15.03	14.60
Advocacy intentions	13.44	13.05	13.03	11.70	11.48
Switching intentions	8.52	8.72	8.86	10.96	11.34
Willingness to pay more	9.98	10.17	10.14	8.82	8.73

RESULTS

Discriminant validity of the dependent variables and the manipulation checks was established according to the advice provided by J. Anderson (1987). In no case, for any phase of the study, did a 95% confidence interval for any pair of dependent variable constructs or manipulation checks include or surpass 1.0. Given the theoretical expectation that the three dependent variables were correlated, MANOVA was selected as the procedure to assess the hypotheses. First, the hypotheses were examined on the dependent variable data collected after the manipulation (Session 4). To demonstrate the validity of the manipulation over time, the hypotheses were also examined on the data collected in Session 5 of the experiment. The treat-

ment means in each experimental condition (Sessions 4-5) for the switching intentions, advocacy intentions, and willingness-to-pay-more dependent variables are shown in Table 3.

There was a significant simple effect of affective commitment on switching intentions ($F_{(1, 92)} = 341.5, p < .001$) in the Session 4 manipulation ($\bar{X}_{low} = 14.1, \bar{X}_{high} = 7.6$). The results from the fifth session ($F_{(1, 92)} = 742.3, p < .001$) showed a similar simple effect of affective commitment on switching intentions ($\bar{X}_{low} = 14.9, \bar{X}_{high} = 7.4$). Overall, these results offer good support for Hypothesis 1a. There was also a significant negative simple effect of continuance commitment on switching intentions ($F_{(1, 92)} = 4.00, p < .05$) in the first manipulation ($\bar{X}_{low} = 11.2, \bar{X}_{high} = 10.4$), which was stable ($F_{(1, 92)} = 8.1, p < .01$) in the fifth session ($\bar{X}_{low} = 11.6, \bar{X}_{high} = 10.8$), confirming Hypothesis 2a. The estimates of effect size indicated a much stronger effect of affective commitment ($\eta^2 = .79, \eta^2 = .89$) than continuance commitment ($\eta^2 = .05, \eta^2 = .08$) on switching intentions in both manipulation sessions. Finally, there was a significant interaction in both Session 4 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 196.5, p < .001$) and Session 5 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 383.5, p < .001$) of affective and continuance commitment on switching intentions, supporting Hypothesis 3a. The raw cell means for the switching intention dependent variable from Session 5 are graphically portrayed in Figure 1. In the interests of space, the dependent variable cell-mean graphs are only shown for the results of Session 5.

TABLE 3
Experimental Means for Dependent Variables

	<i>T4</i>				<i>T5</i>			
	<i>Low-Affective Commitment</i>		<i>High-Affective Commitment</i>		<i>Low-Affective Commitment</i>		<i>High-Affective Commitment</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>	<i>Continuance</i>
	(n = 26)	(n = 24)	(n = 24)	(n = 22)	(n = 26)	(n = 24)	(n = 24)	(n = 22)
Switch	17.03	11.25	5.29	9.64	18.00	11.83	5.12	9.73
Advocacy	10.19	6.46	18.12	12.18	9.62	5.75	18.25	12.50
Pay more	5.50	7.42	12.58	9.36	5.69	7.46	12.88	9.18

FIGURE 1
Cell Means: Switching Intentions

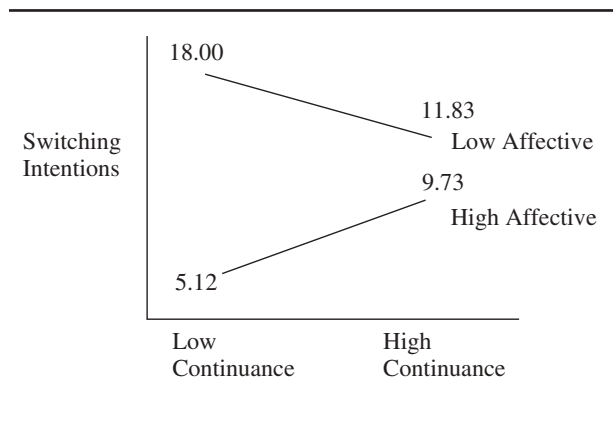
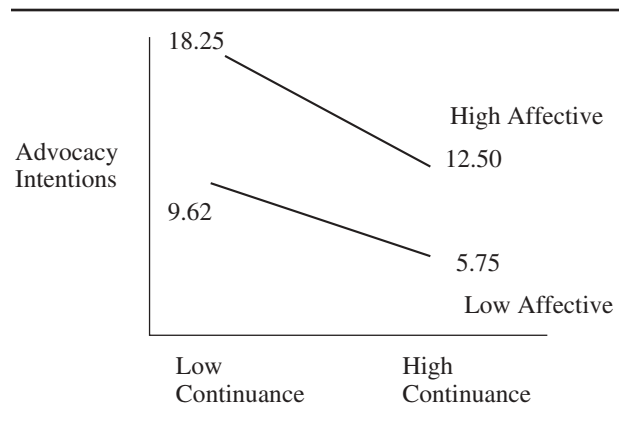


FIGURE 2
Cell Means: Advocacy Intentions



In testing Hypothesis 1b, there was a significant positive simple effect of affective commitment on advocacy intentions ($F_{(1, 92)} = 285.1, p < .001$), confirming the hypothesis ($\bar{X}_{low} = 8.3, \bar{X}_{high} = 15.1$). This effect ($F_{(1, 92)} = 406.9, p < .001$) was stable over the fifth session of the experiment ($\bar{X}_{low} = 7.7, \bar{X}_{high} = 15.4$). There was also a significant and negative simple effect ($F_{(1, 92)} = 143.1, p < .001$) of continuance commitment on advocacy intentions ($\bar{X}_{low} = 14.2, \bar{X}_{high} = 9.3$), which also held ($F_{(1, 92)} = 161.1, p < .001$) in the second manipulation session ($\bar{X}_{low} = 13.9, \bar{X}_{high} = 9.1$), confirming Hypothesis 2b. The effect size estimates for the affective commitment manipulation ($\eta^2 = .76, \eta^2 = .82$) and the continuance commitment manipulation ($\eta^2 = .61, \eta^2 = .64$) were comparable and similar over time. There was also a significant interaction of affective commitment and continuance commitment on advocacy intentions, which was stable over Session 4 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 7.46, p < .01$) and Session 5 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 5.9, p < .05$), confirming Hypothesis 3b. Figure 2 shows the raw cell means, indicating the simple and interaction effects of affective and continuance commitment on advocacy intentions in Session 5.

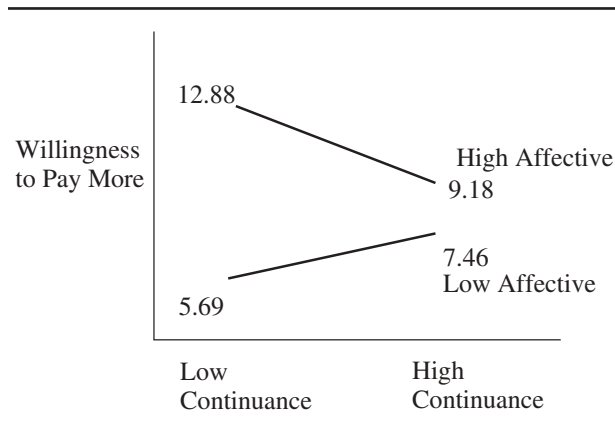
As for the willingness-to-pay-more dependent variable, there was a significant positive simple effect of affective

commitment on willingness to pay more ($F_{(1, 92)} = 82.7, p < .001$) in the first manipulation ($\bar{X}_{low} = 6.5, \bar{X}_{high} = 11.4$), which was stable ($F_{(1, 92)} = 73.0, p < .001$) in the fifth session ($\bar{X}_{low} = 6.6, \bar{X}_{high} = 11.0$), supporting Hypothesis 1c. There was no significant effect of continuance commitment on willingness to pay more for the service in either Session 4 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 3.34, p = ns$) or Session 5 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 3.42, p = ns$), providing no support for Hypothesis 2c. Finally, there was a significant affective commitment-continuance commitment interaction on willingness to pay more for the service in both Session 4 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 29.1, p < .001$) and Session 5 ($F_{(1, 92)} = 27.4, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 3c was supported in this study. For willingness to pay more for the service, the graphed cell means from Session 5 are shown in Figure 3.

DISCUSSION

This study has extended some important findings in relationship marketing by providing some causal evidence of the effects of the different components of customer commitment in marketing relationships. In particular, the

FIGURE 3
Cell Means: Willingness to Pay More



confirmation of Hypotheses 1a and 2a demonstrate that committed customers are less likely to switch than consumers who lack commitment to the organization. This being said, affective commitment would seem to be a more powerful determinant of customer retention than continuance commitment, given the difference in effect size estimates. This mirrors the work in organizational behavior, in which it has been found that employee affective commitment to the organization has a greater influence on intent to remain in the organization than continuance commitment (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). This finding is also consistent with recent work in the relationship marketing area suggesting that customer relationship management (CRM) programs that tie the consumer to the seller may not have the anticipated positive effects on customer retention (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Grayson and Ambler 1999).

At the same time, there was an interactive effect of affective and continuance commitment on customer switching intentions (Hypothesis 3a). This builds on the work of Somers (1995) in organizational behavior and the work of Heide and John (1992) and Joshi and Arnold (1997) in relationship marketing. The finding suggests that the impact of affective commitment to the seller on customer retention depends on the level of continuance commitment also present in the relationship. In the absence of customer affective commitment toward the seller, it appears that felt continuance commitment makes a positive impact on customer retention. However, when the customer feels affective commitment toward the relational partner, feelings of continuance commitment have a deleterious effect on customer retention. Overall, these findings suggest that although both affective and continuance commitment in the relationship make a positive impact on customer retention,

the type of commitment present in the relationship matters significantly.

The results of this study also show the positive impact of affective commitment on customer citizenship behaviors, such as advocacy (Hypothesis 1b). This is also consistent with the role that employee affective commitment to the organization plays in the organizational behavior literature (Meyer and Allen 1997). Increasingly, marketers of both services (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996) and products (Moore 1999) are recognizing the positive role of customer advocacy. The implication is that if marketers want to have customer advocates, they must accomplish this through the development of affectively committed customers. On the other hand, continuance commitment has a negative effect on the willingness of customers to act as advocates for the organization. Although continuance commitment builds customer retention, when consumers feel trapped in a relationship due to switching costs or lack of choice, they respond to these feelings by withdrawing support in the form of positive word-of-mouth communications. The significant interaction between affective and continuance commitment (Hypothesis 3b) indicates that the positive effects of affective commitment on advocacy can be tremendously undermined by the presence of continuance commitment in the relationship.

Finally, the results of this study indicate that commitment has a positive effect on customer willingness to accept price increases. Consumers experiencing high levels of affective commitment to the seller are more likely to accept price increases than consumers who do not feel affectively committed to the selling organization (Hypothesis 1c). This finding is consistent with the recent literature in relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Surprisingly, the study found no significant effect of continuance commitment on willingness to pay more for the service because both the relationship marketing literature (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995) and the organizational commitment literature (Meyer and Allen 1997) suggest that continuance commitment undermines relationship enhancement. However, the presence of continuance commitment in the relationship levers down the positive effects of affective commitment on willingness to pay more, as demonstrated by the significant Affective \times Continuance interaction (Hypothesis 3c). Together, the confirmation hypotheses (Hypotheses 3a and 3c) suggest that consumers feeling continuance commitment may be willing to stay in a relationship and acquiesce to requests for price increases only so long as they feel comfortable affectively committing to the service provider. In the absence of affective commitment, efforts to bind the consumer to the organization will likely have a limited impact on consumer willingness to accept price increases.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Managers should be aware that not all forms of customer commitment are equally beneficial to the organization. This study provides good evidence of the potential benefits to the seller when consumers are committed through positive affect and identification rather than continuance. Specifically, although both affective and continuance commitment can improve customer retention, affective commitment has a much more pronounced effect. This means that relationship management programs that build identification and shared values-based commitment and support (Handelman and Arnold 1999) are likely to be more effective at building customer retention than those programs emphasizing bondage and switching costs (Anderson and Weitz 1992). In addition, managers must recognize that programs that build affective commitment have a strong positive effect on the softer aspects of customer loyalty such as advocacy and willingness to pay more for the service.

This study only examined the effects of affective commitment built through shared values. Service providers may also build customer affective commitment through responsive communications with customers (Morgan and Hunt 1994), reliability and responsiveness of service performance (Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000), and trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Overall, it is likely that simple service quality will have a significant effect on the development of affective commitment to the service provider. The key point is that the marketing manager has a number of tools that can be applied to build and enhance customer affective commitment to the service organization.

Despite the empirical support for the benefits of affective customer commitment, many relationships are significantly built on economic and psychological switching costs (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995; Rigby, Reicheld, and Schefter 2002). In particular, this study demonstrates the limited benefits of relationships built on the continuance commitment inherent in the service contract. Although continuance commitment has a weak effect on customer retention, it has a negative effect on the softer aspects of customer loyalty, such as advocacy, and no effect on acceptance of price increases. This is particularly important for those services, such as cellular telephone services, that frequently rely on service contracts as the basis for the relationship. If customers do not feel affectively committed to the service provider, the provider may experience substantial customer attrition rates at the end of the service contract.

Although this study manipulated continuance commitment via monetary switching costs and contractual relationships (Anderson and Weitz 1992), continuance commitment can be formed through any mechanism

whereby a "side bet" is created in the relationship. For example, an airline loyalty program that confers special benefits (upgrade certificates, access to airport lounges, fast check-in) to customers who have achieved a certain "status" based on their cumulative or annual patronage levels is partly rooted in continuance commitment. These programs bond the consumer to the program sponsor because the side-bet benefits are likely forgone if the consumer switches (Dube and Shoemaker 2000). Although these loyalty programs may also build affective commitment because they offer consumers a positive value proposition (Bolton, Kannan, and Bramlett 2000), managers should be aware of the potential effects of each form of commitment resulting from the loyalty management program and also be aware that there may be an interaction between the two forms of commitment.

Because continuance commitment can also be created when the consumer has limited choice (Allen and Meyer 1990), service providers in quasi-monopolistic markets (cable television, local telephone service, some national airlines) must not assume that customer commitment is irrelevant. In fact, these organizations may experience benefits in the form of increased customer retention, in the event of a regulatory or technological change that enables greater consumer choice, if they have tried to build affective customer commitment instead of relying on the inherent continuance commitment that exists in these service industries.

Given that loyalty management programs are now in vogue in services industries, managers must understand which components of their loyalty management efforts build which types of customer commitment. Although the benefits of loyalty programs that enhance affective commitment are clearly identified in this study, it is less clear how affective commitment is developed and nurtured. Consumers must feel comfortable committing to the organization that they do business with and that this comfort emerges as a result of the totality of their interactions with and evaluations of the service provider. Yet, it is instructive to note how affective commitment was diminished as a result of an erosion of shared values in the low-affective commitment manipulation condition. In particular, service marketers should recognize that a potential breach of a psychological contract between an individual consumer and the service organization might have drastic consequences in terms of customer commitment.

CONCLUSION

In our attempts to understand marketing relationships, we should recognize that relationships might be built on both affective commitment and continuance commitment.

For the most part, marketing scholars have erred in defining and operationalizing commitment primarily as affective commitment. The results of this study suggest that our understanding of the effects of affective commitment in a relationship must be viewed in light of the degree to which continuance commitment is also present in the relationship. If we fail to consider the existence of both types of commitment in consumer-organization relationships, we will likely fail to completely understand why, in some situations, consumers maintain and value a relationship, but in others, they are only weakly attached to the relationship and leave given an opportunity.

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