Intentions Are Plural: Towards a Multidimensional View of Intentions in Consumer Research

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Intentions are often included in consumer behavior research, but researchers have paid little attention to a discussion in psychology and philosophy indicating that different intention constructs may exist. The findings in this study suggest that researchers should indeed pay close attention to how intentions are conceptualized and operationalized. More specifically, our analysis shows that three proposed intentions constructs (intentions-as-expectations, intentions-as-plans, and intentions-as-wants) produce a good fit with a three-factor conceptualization. Our analysis also shows that these three intentions constructs are not associated with global evaluation variables (such as satisfaction, attitude, and delight) with the same strength.

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ABSTRACT

Intentions are often included in consumer behavior research, but researchers have paid little attention to a discussion in psychology and philosophy indicating that different intention constructs may exist. The findings in this study suggest that researchers should indeed pay close attention to how intentions are conceptualized and operationalized. More specifically, our analysis shows that three proposed intentions constructs (intentions-as-expectations, intentions-as-plans, and intentions-as-wants) produce a good fit with a three-factor conceptualization. Our analysis also shows that global evaluation variables (satisfaction, attitude, and delight) are not associated with the three intentions constructs with the same strength.

INTRODUCTION

One frequently employed variable in consumer research is labeled intentions. Typically, it is depicted as a final consequence in researchers' models, but it may also be used as an intermediate variable in attempts to explain behavior. Please notice the use of the terminology here; it is mainly as a *variable* (i.e., a method-related entity) that intentions appear in the consumer literature. The presence of a variable is predicated on the existence of a theoretical *construct*, and therefore one would expect that there are also intentions constructs in existing literature. However, this is rarely the case: very few consumer researchers have included a conceptual discussion of intentions in their papers. Not even a one-sentence definition is offered in the typical study. The lack of information on what intentions are becomes particularly striking in the light of all conceptual efforts devoted to antecedents to intentions (e.g., attitude and satisfaction).

With few exceptions, the situation is the same in fields such as organization theory and (perhaps more surprisingly) psychology. Yet a handful of scholars in psychology (e.g., Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw 1988; Warshaw and Davis 1985) and philosophy (e.g., Audi 1973; Kenny 1966) suggest that several different intentions constructs may exist. And some empirical research show that measures of what can be conceived of as different intentions constructs are not always strongly correlated with each other. These measures also produce different strength in associations with other variables (Fishbein and Stasson 1990; Norman and Smith 1995; Pickering 1984; Sheppard et al 1988; Söderlund 2002; Söderlund and Öhman 2003; Söderlund and Öhman 2005; Warshaw and Davis 1985). Studies of this type have yet to see wider diffusion, but they do suggest that the incautious selection of one intention variable over another may produce different results regarding intentions' role as antecedents and consequences in the nomological net.

The present paper, then, is based on the assumption that consumer behavior researchers need to pay more attention to intentions. The specific purpose of the paper is to examine (1) if intentions are plural in the sense that different intention constructs exist, and (2) how the associations between evaluative constructs (such as satisfaction and attitude) and intentions are affected when intentions are operationalized according to different theoretical constructs. With respect to purpose (2), it is clear that consumer researchers often view intention as a proxy for behavior—which may suggest that the really interesting link to explore is between intentions and behavior. We do not question that the intention-behavior link is important, but we do believe that this link should not be allowed to overshadow an interest in intentions per se. To form intentions, we argue, is to establish connections between oneself and the future before the future takes place, and this is a unique human capability. Without this capability, life would be very different and something most of us would not like to experience. In fact, we believe that the use of intentions to make connections with the future is so unique that it deserves something called an intentions theory, and such a theory needs to take account of both antecedents and consequences. Yet the sad fact is that this capability has been reduced to a mere variable status (i.e., a method-related entity) in the majority of all studies of consumer behavior. It is high time, however, that the variable is supplied with theoretical constructs, and in this paper we focus on antecedents and how they affect different types of intentions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intentions as propositions about future behavior

According to the tripartite intention view that we use as a framework in this paper (cf. Söderlund and Öhman 2003), an intention materializes when an individual makes a proposition that connects himself/herself with a future behavioral act. Generally, propositions of this type has the form "I–connection–future act," and they should be conceived of as windows on the future that help people perform tasks efficiently. Consequently, we expect that intentions are formulated continuously with regard to many different acts. This is reflected in the marketing literature; propositions about the future explicitly labeled intentions by marketing scholars cover several acts in the marketplace. Search for product information, purchasing a product for the first time, repurchases, word-of-mouth, complaints, and contributing money are some examples. As already indicated, however, consumer researchers (and many scholars in other fields) do not distinguish between different types of intentions in terms of the *connection* between the individual and his/her behavior. This connective aspect is in the centre of our interest in this paper.

A tripartite view of intentions

We argue that three different intentions constructs can be distinguished, given the use of intentions in existing research: intentions-as-expectations, intentions-as-plans, and intentions-as-wants. The main reason why we refer to the three types of intentions as three different intention constructs, and not merely three different ways of operationalizing intent in some general sense, is that they appear to tap into distinct types of orientations towards the future.

One frequently used intention construct refers to the individual's assessment of the probability that he or she will perform a particular behavior in the future. Typically, this is measured with questionnaire items such as "The likelihood that I would do A is…," "The probability that I will do B is…," "Rate the probability that you will do C," and "How likely are you to do D?". Consequently, behavioral expectations are sometimes labeled self-predictions (Fishbein and Stasson 1990). We refer to intention of this type as *intentions-as-expectations* (IE). In consumer-related research, IE seems to be the most popular of the three constructs covered by the tripartite view. The core cognitive activity for this construct, we argue, has to do with prediction in terms of the estimation of probabilities of an outcome. In our view, then, intentions-as-expectations are outcome-oriented. From a pure conceptual point of view, such propositions may not contain any assessments of why the act needs to be carried out. Moreover, they do not necessarily signal anything about what stage the individual is in when it comes to how prepared he or she is to carry out the act.

Another intention construct is closely related to the dictionary notion of intention, and it refers to the individual's plan to carry out a particular behavior in the future. It has been argued that intentions in this sense capture motivational factors that influence behavior; "they are indicators of how hard people are willing to try, of how much effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (Ajzen 1991, 181). Similarly, Bandura (1986) views intentions as "the determination to perform certain activities or to bring about a certain future state of affairs." Moreover, intentions in this sense involve choosing or deciding to carry out the act (Conner et al 1999; Malle and Knobe 1997). In typical applications, measurement items are "I plan to…," "I intend to…," "Do you intend to…," "I will choose...," "I am going to choose…," and "I will select…." Here, we refer to intention of this type as *intentions-as-plans* (IP). We argue that they tap into a preparedness-orientation, because they involve effort, determination, and choice. But intentions-as-plans do not necessarily comprise an assessments of outcomes—or assessments of why an outcome is desired.

An additional intention construct is a conceptualization in terms of wants. It has been referred to as an intention construct by Fishbein and Stasson (1990) and Norman and Smith (1995). This construct is found in several formal models of intentionality and in the folk concept of intentionality (Malle and Knobe 1997). Measures of this type of connection with the future usually consist of Likert-type statements such as "I want to…" Measures in terms of "I am willing to…" are also used. In the present paper, we label them *intentions-as-wants* (IW). It can be noted that in relation to IE and IP, IW is the least frequently used intention construct in marketing-related research. Nevertheless, and given that wants serve to connect the individual with his/her future acts, we refer to them as an intentions construct in this paper. We argue that intentions-as-wants are problem-oriented in the sense that they involve perceptions of a gap between a current and a desire future state of mind. Yet these perceptions may not involve any probability estimates or assessments of action readiness. For example, impulse purchases can be seen as driven by intentions-as-wants, but for this particular act we expect that intentions-as-expectations and intentions-as-plans play only a minor role. Another situation in which we assume that intentions-as-wants dominate in the individual's connection with the future is when s/he is engaged in wishful thinking and daydreaming about an act that may never materialize (e.g., "I really, really want to live in Buckingham Palace"). Thus, in relation to some authors who suggest that wants are an antecedent to intentions in a planning sense (cf. Bagozzi and Edwards 1988), we assume that intentions-as-wants may exist independently of other types of intentions.

Thus, a main premise in this paper is that the three types of orientations co-exist in every individual, but also that they are accessed to a different extent with regard to one specific act. From a conceptual point of view, then, statements such as "It is very likely that I will have to teach in an additional course, but I have not prepared for my participation, and I certainly do not want to teach in this course" and "I really want a nice Mercedes, but I do not expect that I will ever own one" involve no contradictions. Taken together, existing evidence suggests that the three intention types can be conceived as three different constructs, and our aim in the present paper is to examine the issue in empirical terms. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H1: Intentions-as-expectations, intentions-as-plans, and intentions-as-wants represent three different theoretical constructs

Intentions: a proper label?

Given the three proposed intentions constructs and our argument that they appear to tap into distinct types of orientations towards the future, one may question the use of intentions as a general label. We believe that another label may indeed be more informative (e.g., "propositions about future acts" or "prospective act-orientations"), but we use the label intentions here in order to make contact with previous research. Before an alternative label is to be established, however, we believe that it is necessary to examine the relationship between a proposition explicitly phrased in terms of intention (e.g., "I intend to buy a Mercedes") and propositions phrased in terms of intentions-as-expectations, intentions-as-plans, and intentions-as-wants in the mind of the consumer. Very little, however, is known about the extent to which people actually refer to their own cognitive activities in terms of intentions, because empirical studies of this issue are in short supply. Yet this issue deserves attention, and we use the label intentions-as-intent to capture propositions in which the word intention is explicitly used to establish connections with the future. Given that the dictionary notion of intention (in which "plan" is usually stressed) is more closely related to intentions-as-plans as opposed to intentions-as-expectations and intentions-as-wants, the following is hypothesized:

H2: From the consumer's point of view, intentions-as-intent are more closely related to intentions-as-plans compared to intentions-as-expectations and intentions-as-wants

The three types of intentions and the nomological net

Given that the three types of intentions represent different intentions constructs, we expect that they are affected by—and affect—other variables in their nomological net with different strength. Previous studies (e.g., Sheppard et al 1988) indicate that this is indeed the case, in the sense that self-prediction (intentions-as-expectations in our terminology) appear to predict behavior better than do intentions with a motivational component (intentions-as-plans in our terminology). Considerably less attention, however, has been devoted to the relationship between different intentions constructs and their antecedents, and this is the focus in the present paper.

Many different antecedents appear as the immediate cause of intentions in consumer behavior models, but the typical antecedent refers to a global evaluation such as satisfaction and attitude. One reason why we expect evaluation–intention links with different strength when different intention constructs are employed is that (a) evaluation constructs and (b) the three intentions constructs occupy different positions on a sense-of-ownership dimension (cf. Söderlund and Öhman 2003). It is assumed that an evaluative judgment is not only own (i.e., subjective) but also owned (i.e., perceived to be possessed). In other words, *my* attitude or *my* satisfaction can be mine in the same sense that my car or my clothes are mine. In fact, we expect that an evaluative judgment is almost invariable perceived to be mine to a larger extent than intentions (because intentions reference acts that are yet to take place, while an evaluative judgment is taking place when it does materialize). However, intentions can still be viewed in terms of sense of ownership, but we expect that the three types are subject to variation in this dimension. More specifically, given the three proposed intention constructs, we assume that intentions-as-wants are subject to the highest level of perceived ownership, because to want something is subject to few external restrictions. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi and Graef (1980) indicate that wanting to do something is an expression of being free. To estimate probabilities and to assess action preparedness, however, are activities that require considerably more attention to external factors (cf. Warshaw and Davis 1985). Our assumption is also based on a view of sense-of-ownership of an object as determined by (1) perceived control of an object, (2) intimate knowledge of an object, and (3) self-investment in the object (Pierce, Rubenfeld, and Morgan 2001), and we assume that intentions-as-wants are characterized by higher levels of each of these three determinants compared to the two other intention constructs. The following, then, is hypothesized:

H3: Global evaluative judgments explain more variance in intentions-as-wants compared to the explained variance in intentions-as-expectations and intentions-as-plans

METHOD

Research design and sample

We selected one specific service consumption act, having dinner at one particular restaurant, as the source of global evaluative judgments and intentions responses. The data were collected with a questionnaire. Each respondent was instructed to select one particular restaurant that he or she had been visiting for dinner during the past six months, and s/he was asked to answer the subsequent questions with this particular restaurant in mind. We included an open-ended item in the beginning of the questionnaire to capture the name of the selected restaurant, and our examination of the names revealed that few respondents selected the same restaurant as any other respondent. Our approach, then, encouraged stimulus heterogeneity. The respondents (N=103) were participants in seminars on customer satisfaction. Thus, we used a convenience sampling procedure. We distributed the questionnaires to the participants at the beginning of the seminar, we supervised the completion task, and we controlled the environment in the sense that no talking amongst participants was permitted.

Measures

We included measures of the following evaluative constructs in this study: customer satisfaction with the restaurant, attitude to revisiting the restaurant, and delight. The following question was asked to measure *customer satisfaction*: "Think about your accumulated experience during the past six months of the selected restaurant. How would you summarize your impressions of the restaurant?" It was followed by three satisfaction items used in several national satisfaction barometers (cf. Johnson et al, 2001). These were the items: "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the restaurant?" (1=very dissatisfied, 10=very satisfied), "To what extent does it meet your expectations?" (1=not at all, 10=totally), and "Imagine a restaurant that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find the selected restaurant?" (1=very far from, 10=can not get any closer). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .81.

Attitude, our second evaluative construct, was operationalized in terms of the attitude to revisiting the restaurant, and it was captured with a five-item scale with 10 points and with adjective pairs common in marketing research. The question was worded as follows: "What is your view of visiting the restaurant again during the coming six months?" These adjective pairs were used to capture the responses: bad–good, dislike it–like it, unpleasant–pleasant, uninteresting–interesting, and negative impression–positive impression. Alpha for this scale was .91.

Furthermore, some authors have suggested that "satisfaction is not enough" (cf. Oliver, Rust, and Varki 1997) and thus that the firm needs to make a stronger impact on the customer than merely satisfying him/her. After all, the Latin root of the word satisfaction (satis) means enough—and a perception that a supplier has produced enough is presumably connected to a state of mind with a relatively low level of arousal and excitement. Therefore, *delight* has been launched as an alternative construct that is (a) subject to a relatively less skewed distribution than satisfaction and (b) able to enhance consequences such as repatronage behavior to a larger extent than satisfaction. We included the following three-item measure of delight in our study: "The restaurant makes me delighted," "The restaurant makes me thrilled," and "The restaurant makes me excited." Each item was scored on a 10-point scale (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely). Alpha was .84.

The intentions items in the questionnaire were introduced to the respondent with the following question: "Below are some statements about your future relationship with the restaurant during the coming six months. Please indicate for each statement how it describes your relationship with the restaurant." All responses were scored on a 10-point scale. The following items were designed to measure *intentions-as-expectations*: "I will have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=very unlikely, 10=very likely), "The probability that I will have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months is…" (1=low, 10=high), "I am sure I will have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely), and "It is likely that I am going to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely). The internal consistency of this scale, in terms of Cronbach's alpha, was .94. Similar items, with an emphasis on probability/likelihood, have been used by Boulding et al (1993) and Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996). For *intentions-as-plans*, we used "I plan to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely), "I have decided to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely), and "My purpose is to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely). Alpha was .94. *Intentions-as-wants* were measured with "I want to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely), "My will to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months is…" (1=weak, 10=strong), and "I wish to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely). For this scale, alpha was .93. Intention items with a specific want-content have been used by Fishbein and Stasson (1990) and Norman and Smith (1995). We also included a single-item measure of intent phrased explicitly in terms of intent, namely "I intend to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months" (1=do not agree at all, 10=agree completely). This variable, intentions-as-intent, will be used as a point of reference to obtain evidence of what it means to have an intention for a consumer (cf. hypothesis 2).

In addition, we included a pairwise comparison task in the final part of the questionnaire. In this part, one intentions statement from each of the multi-item scales was used again ("It is likely that I am going to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months," "I plan to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months," and "I want to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months"), they were presented in a pairwise way, and we asked the respondent to underline the intentions statement in each pair that best captured his/her view of the future relationship with the restaurant. We used this pairwise comparison task to generate scores in the 0-2 range (thus reflecting the number of "wins") for each of the three types of intentions. These scores, we argue, provide a complement to the scores derived from the rating scales (i.e., the multiple-item measures of intentions described above), and we used these scores as alternative intentions indicators in our assessments of the evaluation-intentions links.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to address hypothesis 1, that is, if the three intentions types represent three different constructs, confirmatory factor analysis was performed with AMOS V. The proposed model (i.e., a three-factor model) resulted in a good fit with the data (χ^2=93.12, *df*=32, $p < .01$, CFI=.946, NFI=.921). An alternative one-factor model was also examined (i.e., the eleven indicators for the three proposed constructs were modeled as indicators of one single construct), but this model produced a considerably lower level of fit (χ^2=437.92, *df*=35, $p < .01$, CFI=.643, NFI=.63). Moreover, the proposed three-factor model was significantly better than the one-factor model (delta χ^2=344.8, delta *df*=3, $p < .01$). This way of assessing the dimensionality of a construct has been used by, for example, Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004). Our results, then, provide support for hypothesis 1; the three intentions types appear to represent three different theoretical constructs.

Hypothesis 2 was examined with a regression analysis in which intentions-as-intent (measured with the item "I intend to have dinner at the restaurant during the coming six months") was the dependent variable and IE, IP, and IW served as the independent variables. The result indicated that intentions-as-expectations did not contribute to the variation in intentions-as-intent (b=-.003, p=.96). However, intentions-as-plans (b=0.65, $p < .01$) and intentions-as-wants (b=0.35, $p < .01$) had a significant impact on intentions-as-intent. Overall, the explained variance was quite high: R^2=.81, F (3, 97)=146.25, $p < .01$. The outcome thus suggests that the employment of intention-as-plans items seems to best capture intentions phrased explicitly in terms of intent. Hypothesis 2, then, was supported. The outcome also indicates that intention-as-intent items may be included in an intentions-as-plans scale.

Turning to hypotheses 3, we first computed the zero-order correlation between each evaluative judgment variable and the three intentions variables derived from the multi-item rating scales. In total, then, nine correlation coefficients were computed. The outcome is presented in table 1.

It can be contended from table 1, and for each evaluation variable, that the evaluation–intention correlation was strongest when the intentions-as-wants variable was employed. Moreover, a set of tests of the strength of correlations (cf. Kleinbaum et al 1998) revealed that the three correlations between intentions-as-wants and the three evaluation variables (i.e., .651, .648, and .541) were significantly stronger than were the correlations between (a) intentions-as-expectations and the three evaluation variables and (b) intentions-as-plans and the three evaluation variables ($p < .01$ for each comparison). The evaluation-intentions associations involving intentions-as-expectations and intentions-as-plans, however, were not significantly different from each other (i.e., .297 vs. .237, .451 vs. .414, and .179 vs. .263; $p > .01$ in each case). In a second step, the same correlation analyses were performed, but this time with the intentions data derived from the pairwise comparison task. The outcome is presented in table 2.

Table 2 shows that the same pattern was reproduced with this alternative assessment of intentions: intentions-as-wants were subject to stronger positive associations with the evaluative variables than were the other intention variables. This, then, means that hypothesis 3 cannot be rejected.

DISCUSSION

This study suggests that intentions are plural, given that a three-factor conceptualization captured the proposed tripartite view of intentions better than did a one-factor model. In addition, and as a further argument to support the distinctiveness of the three intentions constructs, we found that they were not associated to the same extent with theoretical antecedents in terms of global evaluation variables. In this study, intentions-as-wants stand out as a particularly distinct construct, and we believe that one main reason is that such intentions correspond better with evaluation variables in terms of an perceived ownership dimension.

One main implication is that the investigator who is examining the link between evaluative constructs and intentions should select intentions measures with care, because the link's strength appears to be dependent on how intentions are measured. And the link's strength, in turn, has important implications for decision making. For example, a weak correlation between a satisfaction measure and an intention indicator may be interpreted as a weak causal link. The logical decision in this case, given that customer loyalty is an important objective (and given that intention is equated with loyalty), would be to abandon activities designed to enhance customer satisfaction. This decision, however, may be premature given that other intentions measures produce a stronger association.

In fact, in order to avoid dependency on measures of one single intentions construct given the present state of knowledge about intentions, we believe that a multi-intention construct approach is viable. The main advantage, particularly for marketers who are interested in customer loyalty, is that it offers a more detailed picture of the customer's view of his/her future. That is to say, differences in levels between different intentions in the mind of a customer (or in customer segments) may provide important information. Some customers, for example, may have strong wants but weak behavioral expectations, whereas other customers have strong expectations but weak wants. And segments defined in those terms are likely to call for different activities in order to create stronger intentions. In addition, given our assumption that different intentions constructs may co-exist in every individual, it may fruitful to allow for several intentions constructs in attempts to predict behavior.

Some limitations in our study, however, should be observed. First, we examined intentions only in one particular context: a dinner-at-a-restaurant context. This context is likely to be highly involving for many customers. Yet many decisions made by customers are characterized by a low level of involvement, and future research needs to address if the patterns obtained in this study would repeat themselves in such settings. Second, our focus was on one particular future act: repatronage behavior. Many other acts exist in the marketplace, and they are likely to be subject to intentions, too. For example, customers are in the position of forming intentions about such acts as collecting information about a product, trying a product for the first time, word-of-mouth, and complaining. Intentions vis-à-vis such acts need to be assessed before the final word is said about the existence of several distinct intentions constructs. Third, and perhaps more important, other types of intentions than those proposed in this study may exist. Given that an intention is a proposition that an individual makes about his/her own future acts, it is possible, for example, to regard such constructs as desires and needs in terms of intentions. Finally, future research is also needed to assess how various intentions constructs are associated with overt behavior in the marketplace. The issue was not addressed in our paper (but it is dealt with in Söderlund and Öhman 2005).

TABLE 1

Zero-order correlations between the evaluative judgments and the intentions variables (rating scale scores)

	IE	IP	IW
Customer satisfaction	.297***	.234**	.651***
Attitude to revisiting	.451***	.414***	.648***
Delight	.179*	.263***	.541***

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$

TABLE 2

Zero-order correlations between the evaluative judgments and the intentions variables (pairwise comparison scores)

	IE	IP	IW
Customer satisfaction	-.269***	-.022	.236**
Attitude to revisiting	-.210**	-.039	.174*
Delight	-.341***	.002	.248**

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$

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The Art of Breaking Up

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

When contemplating departure from your loved one, you are faced with a myriad of considerations. What strategies will you use? Will you dump them with etiquette or take the easy option of never returning their call? Will it be short and sweet, or long and excruciating? In light of this diversity, it can be appreciated that the break up process is easy for some yet difficult for others. During our life, we begin many types of relationships which at some point in time may end. The dissolution of a relationship with a service provider forms the focus of this study.

The literature on service exits has examined causal determinants (Keaveney 1995, Coulter and Ligas 2000), switching costs (Jones, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty 2000; Burnham, Frels, and Mahajan 2003) and interpersonal relationship theories of dissolution (Fajer and Schouten 1995, Hocutt 1998). There has been a tendency to focus on *why* consumers break up with their service provider, but not on *how* they break up. More specifically, research has not investigated the strategies that consumers have used and considered using to action their break up.

Given this gap, this paper sets out to explore the way in which consumers contemplate and/or action their exit with a service provider. We develop a model of emotional conflict the extent to which, influences whether the strategies used in the break up process are simple or complex in nature. This paper builds on the work of Keaveney (1995) who defines simple switching as "involving *one* category or factor" and complex switching as "involving *more than one* category or factor". Keaveney's list of factors are causal determinants of why people switch service providers. In our study however, we find that it is the emotion attributed to the cause/situation and to the service provider which are more influential in determining switching behaviour. In consideration of this finding, Keaveney's simple and complex labels are redefined in terms of the level of emotional conflict felt by the consumer.

In order to investigate the exit process, a phenomenological inquiry was conducted as it would allow for the subjective meaning of the consumers' experiences to emerge uninhibited (Goulding 1998) and "unadulterated by preconceptions." (Heron 1992, p.164). The data was collected by means of unstructured interviews (Crotty 1998). Three informants were selected as cases for this study (Fournier 1998). The nature of the relationship and the nature of the dissolution were investigated. For those who had not executed the break up, the contemplation of the break up was explored. The range of service providers examined here included an accountant, an architect and a solicitor. The interviews were taped, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) recommended approach. In order to assess trustworthiness and establish conformability, triangulation across researchers was conducted (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

Based on the findings, a preliminary model was inducted. This model was founded on the concept of emotional conflict, a strong theme which was evident across all of the informants. It is proposed that emotional conflict is a measure of the *discrepancy* between the emotions a consumer attributes toward the service situation (e.g. angry at service failure) and the emotions a consumer attributes toward their service provider (e.g. liking and sympathy for accountant). More specifically, it is proposed that a low (high) degree of emotional conflict occurs when the emotions attributed to the situation and the emotions attributed towards the service provider are similar (dissimilar) in valence.

The findings presented the concept of emotional conflict and its relationship with the type of exit process in relation to the three case studies. The story of Thomas and his accountant Colin provided an example of a complex goodbye, defined by a high degree of emotional conflict. This was reflected by the moral struggle between Thomas' dissatisfaction with the service situation and the empathy and sympathy he felt towards Colin "the old man". Examples of the complexity were evidenced in Thomas' goodbye strategies; his use of "time" as a strategic method of delay; his fling with another accountant; his consideration of the use of lying to alleviate the emotional burden, his prediction of what his accountant's counter response would be to the lie, and his contemplation of using a future accountant to do his 'dirty work'.

This story can be juxtaposed to the story of Stavros and David his solicitor. In this case, the emotions experienced were purely of a negative nature. The feelings Stavros felt about the situation, anger and frustration, were the same as those he felt towards the service provider. Hence, his emotions were not conflicting with each other. Based on this, his exit strategy was found to be relatively straightforward as he simply went into the office unannounced and demanded his papers back "and that was it". This finding illustrated a simple exit process.

Finally, the story of Kate and Fabian provided further evidence of a complex break up. In this case, Kate was torn between salvaging a friendship and ending a professional relationship which had gone sour. Kate enjoyed Fabian's company and their friendship was emotionally gratifying. On the other hand, Kate felt betrayed and disappointed in the professional relationship that they shared. Kate experienced a high degree of emotional conflict. Examples of the complexity were evidenced in Kate's goodbye strategies; a long elaboration time, collecting and using the evidence as an 'emotional shield', strategizing a confrontation where Fabian could not refute her, suppressing her emotions during the planned confrontation and most importantly focusing on not jeopardizing the friendship.

The question is, *how* do you end a relationship with someone you feel sorry for or like? Someone who provides you with a service and who you are also close friends with? How do you deal with the emotions experienced? *How* do you say goodbye?

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