

# The influence of relationship intention and population group on South African cell phone users' positive attitude towards complaining

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## ABSTRACT

As most customers do not voice their dissatisfaction to service providers following service failures, it is important to identify those customers most likely to do so. Since customers with positive attitudes toward complaining are the most likely to voice their dissatisfaction, identifiable customer characteristics – such as customers' relationship intentions and population group – influencing such attitudes can be an efficient way to acquire feedback from customers. This study accordingly investigated the influence of relationship intention and population group on cell phone users' positive attitude towards complaining to their cell phone network providers. By means of non-probability convenience sampling, 605 respondents from South Africa's Johannesburg metropolitan area participated in this study. The results indicate that population group as well as relationship intention practically significantly influence respondents' positive attitude towards complaining. Despite this finding, no interaction effect was found between respondents' population group and relationship intention on positive attitude towards complaining.

**Keywords:** Customer complaint behaviour, attitude towards complaining, relationship intention, population group

It has been established that due to the nature of services, customers are likely at some time during service delivery to experience a service failure when service providers fail to meet their expectations regarding service delivery (Harrison-Walker, 2012:115; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:387). Since unattended service failures can result in customers spreading negative word-of-mouth or switching to competitors (Palmer, 2011:75), it is important for service providers to offer satisfactory resolutions to service failures by means of service recovery (Huang, 2011:513;

Robinson, Neeley & Williamson, 2011:96). As customers are more likely not to provide feedback in the form of complaints when service failures occur (Wirtz, Chew & Lovelock, 2012: 396), it is imperative to identify those customers who will provide feedback – and specifically do so to the service provider and not in the form of negative word-of-mouth to others (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:382).

By offering satisfactory service recovery, service providers stand a greater chance of retaining their existing customers (Lovelock &

Wirtz, 2011:372-373; Palmer, 2011:73), thereby ensuring greater profitability as it costs less to service existing customers than to continuously attempt to attract new customers (Berry, 1995:237).

However, to implement service recovery efforts following a service failure, service providers have to be aware when such service failures occur (Huang, 2011:513; Robinson et al., 2011:96). Research has shown that customers with positive attitudes toward complaining would, in all probability, voice their feedback to service providers directly; whereas those with negative attitudes towards complaining would not do so (Beardon & Mason, 1984:495; Kim & Chen, 2010:107, 108; Richins, 1982:505; Yuksel, Kilinc & Yuksel, 2006:15; Wittman, 2014:64).

As a positive attitude towards complaining is considered the most important predictor of customers' voicing their complaints to service providers, this study aims to identify possible antecedents to a positive attitude towards complaining. The influence of two factors in particular, namely customers' relationship intentions and population groups, on a positive attitude towards complaining will be considered. These factors were selected for a number of reasons. Since previous research findings indicate that customers with relationship intentions are more likely to voice their dissatisfaction to service providers (Lacey, 2012:141; Proença & Rodrigues, 2011:205; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:386), it may be argued that customers' relationship intentions would influence their positive attitudes towards complaining.

The possible influence of customers' population group on a positive attitude towards complaining will be considered as, although population group has been found to influence customers' attitudes toward complaining (Ekiz & Au, 2011:340), and differences between population groups relating to positive attitude towards complaining exist (Kim & Boo, 2011:231), the influence thereof within a South African context has not yet been explored.

The purpose of this study is thus to determine the influence of relationship intention and population group on cell phone users' positive attitude towards complaining. The cell phone

industry was selected since South African cell phone network providers, in particular, must retain their existing customers, following service failures, as the market is becoming saturated in terms of obtaining new customers (Van Niekerk, 2012:101) and new cell phone network providers are expected to enter the market (ICASA, 2012:3). By identifying which customers are most likely to provide feedback to them, cell phone network providers may be better equipped to draft strategies aimed at retaining their existing customers following service failures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Customer complaint behaviour*

When actual service delivery fails to meet the customers' expectations, customers usually experience dissatisfaction (Tronvoll, 2007:26). Customer complaint behaviour refers to customers' response in reaction to the dissatisfaction they experience (Crie, 2003:60). Singh (1988:104), one of the pioneers on customer complaint behaviour, found that customer responses to their dissatisfaction would usually manifest in one of three ways, namely customers doing nothing, customers taking private action, or customers taking public action. It has been established that most customers do not complain (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2012:343), especially when they believe that complaining would be futile (Wirtz et al., 2012:396).

When complaining by taking public action, customers either switch to competitors, or spread negative word-of-mouth (Wirtz et al., 2012:396). In contrast to public action, customers take private action when they complain directly to the service provider at fault, complain to a third party, or take legal action. When customers do complain to service providers directly, they usually do so in order to be compensated for some form of economic loss incurred, to release anger and frustration with the situation, to help improve the service, or out of concern for others (Wirtz et al., 2012:397).

From the aforementioned discussion on complaint behaviour options customers deploy, it

becomes clear that it is in service providers' best interest that customers directly complain to them in an effort to not only rectify the unsatisfactory situation, but also to ensure that a similar situation does not recur in the future during service delivery (Lin, Wang & Chang, 2011:529). One way of identifying customers who are more likely to complain, is by considering their attitudes toward complaining (Yuksel et al., 2006:17), since one's attitude towards complaining is generally considered to be a significant predictor of actual complaint behaviour (Kim & Chen, 2010:107-108; Wittman, 2014:64).

### ***Attitude towards complaining***

According to Singh and Wilkes (1996:353), a customer's attitude towards complaining refers to the perception of the 'goodness' or 'badness' of the act of complaining, irrespective of a particular unsatisfactory service encounter. This study accordingly defines attitude towards complaining as customers' perceptions of the appropriateness of complaining to service providers even before a service failure occurs. As with all attitudes, customers decide on the strength and direction of their attitudes towards complaining to service providers (Petruzzellis, 2010:615). Attitudes towards complaining can, therefore, either be considered as positive or negative (Phau & Sari, 2004:422; Yuksel et al., 2006:17).

In terms of the factors influencing whether customers will display positive or negative attitudes toward complaining, research found a number of influencing factors, including customers' previous complaint experiences (Kim & Boo, 2011:231-232), price consciousness and locus of control (Gursoy, McCleary & Lepsito, 2007:376), perceptions of the societal benefits resulting from complaining (Richins, 1982:505), as well as whether customers believe voicing to service providers would be worth the effort (Day, 1984:497; Richins, 1982:505).

From the discussion on customer complaint behaviour and attitude towards complaining, it could be deduced that service providers mostly benefit from customers voicing their complaints directly to them, as opposed to other complaint behaviour options. Since previous research has

shown that customers with positive attitudes towards complaining are more likely to complain (Phau & Sari, 2004:411), and particularly by means of voicing their dissatisfaction to service providers (Bearden & Mason, 1984:495; Bodey & Grace, 2007:581, 590; Kim & Boo, 2011:232; Richins, 1982:505; Yuksel et al., 2006:15, 22), this study will specifically consider the influence of positive rather than negative attitude towards complaining.

### ***Relationship intention***

It is believed that customers who want to keep on supporting an organisation (i.e. customers with relationship intentions) are the most likely to voice their dissatisfaction, in order to give service providers the opportunity to salvage the relationship (Chang & Chin, 2011:128). It could, therefore, be beneficial for service providers to determine whether customers' relationship intentions influence their attitude towards complaining.

Relationship intention refers to a customer's intention to build a relationship with a service provider, while obtaining products or services from the service provider (Kumar, Bohling & Ladda, 2003:669). Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2012:391) and Kumar et al. (2003:667, 669) argue that customers with emotional attachments to a particular service provider trusts in, and have a high affinity towards the service provider, thereby fostering long-term relationships between these two parties. Kumar et al. (2003:670) advocate that when determining customers' relationship intentions, five sub-constructs need to be considered, namely involvement, expectations, fear of relationship loss, forgiveness and feedback.

### ***Involvement***

Involvement can be defined, from a relationship intention perspective, as customers' willingness to engage in relationship activities in the absence of obligation or coercion (Kumar et al., 2003:670). Furthermore, the relevance of the object to customers (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983:143), as well as customers' interest in, and attachment to, an object influence

their involvement with a service (Ruiz, Castro & Armario, 2007:1094). Involved customers want to help shape and personalise what they regard as important (Mukherjee, 2007:11) and become co-creators of value through this involvement (Cheng, Chen & Tsou, 2012:450). More involved customers are, furthermore, keen to provide comments on service delivery and performance to their service providers (Kinard & Capella, 2006:365; Scott & Vitartas, 2008:54) and they are also prone to voicing their dissatisfaction to service providers when their expectations are not met (Kim & Chen, 2010:107).

### *Expectations*

The literature indicates that customers' expectations are used to evaluate service providers' performance, and to ultimately determine their satisfaction with the service delivery (Wirtz et al., 2012: 47), thereby resulting in specific behavioural intentions (Choy, Lam & Lee, 2012:14). For this reason, expectations can be defined as how customers anticipate service delivery should be (Kim, Ok & Canter, 2012:60-61). Customers have a zone of tolerance for service delivery. The zone of tolerance is the gap between the level of service customers desire to receive from service providers, and the level of service that customers are willing to accept – albeit not the desired service (Wilson et al., 2012:54).

Expectations thus automatically develop when purchasing products and services (Kumar et al., 2003:670). Kumar et al. (2003:670) accordingly advocate that customers showing relationship intentions are concerned with the quality of the service received from service providers and they would, therefore, have higher expectations of service providers with whom they have good relationships.

### *Fear of relationship loss*

A concern with losing the relationship with a service provider is evoked through the benefits associated with a long-term relationship between a customer and a service provider, with the bonds formed between customers and service providers, and the costs associated with switching to another service provider (Liang & Wang, 2006:123; Spake

& Megehee, 2010:316). The benefits associated with a customer-service provider relationship include relational benefits (such as confidence, social and special treatment benefits) (Wirtz et al., 2012:364) and risk-reducing benefits (in terms of security, a feeling of control and trust in the service provider) (Berry, 1995:238), whereas bonds refer to those psychological, emotional, economic or physical attachments between customers and service providers (Liang & Wang, 2006:123; Spake & Megehee, 2010:316).

The fear of losing a relationship with a service provider is heightened by switching costs, referring to those sacrifices or penalties incurred when moving from one service provider to another (Jones, Reynolds, Motherbaugh & Beatty, 2007:337). Moore, Ratneshwar and Moore (2012:260), therefore, advocate that when the benefits, bonds and switching costs of a long-term relationship outweigh the costs of maintaining the relationship, relationships between customers and service providers are strengthened.

From the discussion it can be construed that strong relationships with a service provider increase the concern with, and the emotional attachment to, that service provider. Kumar et al. (2003:670) thus propose that customers who are concerned with losing their relationships with a particular service provider are, consequently, portraying relationship intentions.

### *Forgiveness*

Forgiveness refers to the cognitive, affective and motivational response from customers towards service providers following a service failure (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:387; Zourrig, Chebat & Toffoli, 2009:406). Customers can use forgiveness to handle their dissatisfaction (Worthington & Scherer, 2004:402), therefore, acting constructively within the relationship to repair it after a service failure (Hedrick, Beverland & Minahan, 2007:70). This constructive behaviour releases the negative emotions associated with the service failure (McCullough, Fincham & Tsang, 2003:540; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:382). Karremans and Aarts (2007:910, 913) and Kumar et al. (2003:670) accordingly argue that customers who have relationships with service providers may

be more likely to forgive these service providers for their service failures.

### **Feedback**

Kumar et al. (2003:670) explain that, unlike customers who do not have relationship intentions, customers with relationship intentions communicate their expectations to service providers by providing both positive and negative feedback without expecting any return or reward. The value of positive feedback lies therein that it can be used to draft strategies based on customers' perceptions of service providers' strengths (Wirtz, Tambyah & Mattila, 2010:380). Conversely, negative feedback in the form of complaints is necessary to identify weaknesses and to improve service provision (Wirtz et al., 2010:380). Negative feedback is, therefore, necessary to help service providers identify and rectify service failures, and to adopt service delivery processes to ensure that similar service failures do not recur, and to restore relationships with customers that have been negatively affected by service failures (Lin et al., 2011:529-530). Considering the context of this study, it should be highlighted that research findings suggest that customers' population group could influence their perception of the appropriateness of providing feedback to service providers (Ekiz & Au, 2011:340).

### **South African population groups**

South Africa is often referred to as the 'rainbow nation' due to the country's diverse population groups (Van Niekerk, 2013), namely Asians/Indians, Blacks, Coloureds and Whites (Statistics South Africa, 2011:6). Because of its historical past, characterised by apartheid, a number of differences can be observed between South African population groups, including the economic and social confidence that constructs the identity of the population groups (Van der Merwe, 2005:26), household expenditure on products and services (Martins, 2012:69), as well as the expenditure on communication, such as cell phones (Statistics South Africa, 2012:19).

It has been found that intercultural service encounters result in differences pertaining to

customers' expectations and perceptions (Sharma, Tam & Kim, 2012:531), and that population groups as subcultures impact customers' complaint behaviour (Chan & Wan, 2008:87), specifically through the influence on attitude towards complaining (Ekiz & Au, 2011:340). It could, therefore, be argued that South Africa's population groups could impact their positive attitudes towards complaining. This view is supported by a number of researchers, who found differences between the various population groups regarding service provision (Morrisson & Huppertz, 2010:250; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:388; Wang & Matilla, 2011:429). Research into the behaviour of customers from different population groups within the same country is needed (Hakala, Svensson & Vincze, 2012:448) since most of the previous studies pertaining to culture and service failure considered population groups from different countries (Wang & Mattila, 2011:429; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:388; Morrisson & Huppertz, 2010:250).

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES**

Service providers face the challenge of managing customer dissatisfaction when service failures occur during service delivery (Palmer, 2011:80). When service failures do occur, service providers expect customers to voice their dissatisfaction directly to them about service delivery failing to meet their expectations (Kim & Boo, 2011:217). Although having customers voice their complaints directly to service providers is important, as it prevents negative word-of-mouth and customers switching to their competitors (Palmer, 2011:75), most customers do not voice their dissatisfaction to service providers (McCullough, Berry & Yadav, 2000:133). Service providers, therefore, have to identify those customers most likely to voice their complaints directly to them (Lin et al., 2011:529).

It has been established that customers' positive attitude towards complaining should be regarded as a significant predictor of customers voicing their dissatisfaction to service providers (Beardon & Mason, 1984:495; Kim & Chen,

2010:107; Richins, 1982:505; Yuksel et al., 2006:15, 22). Since it is believed that those customers with relationship intentions are the most likely to voice their dissatisfaction – in order to give service providers a chance to restore the relationship (Tax, Brown & Chandrashekar, 1998:72) – and that customers from different population groups differ on their attitudes towards complaining (Ekiz & Au, 2011:340; Kim & Boo, 2011:231), the purpose of this study is to determine the influence of cell phone users' relationship intentions and population groups on their positive attitude towards complaining.

The following objectives were accordingly set for the study, namely:

- To determine the relationship between population group and positive attitude towards complaining;
- To determine the relationship between relationship intention and positive attitude towards complaining;
- To establish the interaction effect between population group and relationship intention on positive attitudes towards complaining.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Research design, target population and sampling*

A descriptive research design in the form of quantitative research was used for this study. The target population included adult cell phone users, from all population groups, residing in the Johannesburg metropolitan area, in South Africa's Gauteng Province. Since the study considered cell phone users' attitude towards complaining to a cell phone network provider, respondents had to have been using a cell phone network provider for at least three years. A screening question was thus posed to potential respondents to ensure they met this criterion before participating in the study. As no sampling frame could be obtained from any of the cell phone network providers, the researchers had to make use of non-probability, convenience sampling.

### *Questionnaire design and data collection*

The questionnaire used in the study started with a preamble explaining the respondents' rights and the purpose of the study, followed by screening questions to ensure that the respondents participating in the study were part of the target population. This was followed by four sections, where all the scale items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Section A captured classification and patronage information concerning the cell phone network providers respondents used. Section B measured the respondents' relationship intention by means of the scale proposed by Kruger and Mostert (2012:45) with 26 items, where the Likert-type scale ranged from 1 = No, definitely not to 5 = Yes, definitely.

Section C dealt with the respondents' attitudes toward complaining, using a scale developed with items adapted from Day (1984:498) and Yuksel et al. (2006:16), with 6 items. The Likert-type scale ranged from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Lastly, Section D obtained the respondents' demographic details, such as their gender and population group. The questionnaire was pretested on 27 respondents resembling the target population. No problems were identified from the pretest and therefore no changes were made to the questionnaire. Trained fieldworkers collected the data through personal in-home interviews, using interviewer-administered questionnaires. Respondents answered the entire questionnaire based on their current cell phone network provider which they regarded as their main cell phone network provider. A total of 900 questionnaires were distributed. However, after cleaning the data, only 605 questionnaires were deemed appropriate for analyses, resulting in a response rate of 67.2%.

### *Data analysis*

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 22) and the SAS statistical program (Version 9.3) were used for statistical analyses. For this study, a confidence level of 95% and subsequent significance level of 0.05 was used

**TABLE 1:**  
Sample profile and patronage habits

Variable	Response categories	Population group								Total sample	
		Asian/ Indian		Black		Coloured		White			
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	Male	64	50.0	88	43.3	44	42.7	84	49.1	280	46.3
	Female	64	50.0	115	56.7	59	57.3	87	50.9	325	53.7
Period using cell phone network provider	3 years to less than 5 years	74	57.8	62	30.5	46	44.7	74	43.3	256	42.3
	5 years to less than 10 years	40	31.3	85	41.9	32	31.1	56	32.7	213	35.2
	10 years and longer	14	10.9	56	27.6	25	24.3	41	24.0	136	22.5
Cell phone network provider used	Cell C	31	24.2	25	12.3	17	16.5	27	15.8	100	16.5
	8-ta	7	5.5	3	1.5	5	4.9	5	2.9	20	3.3
	MTN	44	34.4	87	42.9	30	29.1	47	27.5	208	34.4
	Virgin Mobile	5	3.9	4	2.0	3	2.9	5	2.9	17	2.8
	Vodacom	41	32.0	84	41.4	48	46.6	87	50.9	260	43.0
Monthly cell phone expenses	Less than R100	20	15.6	43	21.2	17	16.5	16	9.4	96	15.9
	R101 to R250	52	40.6	77	37.9	46	44.7	44	25.7	219	36.2
	R251 to R400	32	25.0	51	25.1	25	24.3	53	31.0	161	26.6
	R401 to R600	12	9.4	20	9.9	10	9.7	26	15.2	68	11.2
	More than R600	12	9.4	12	5.9	5	4.9	32	18.7	61	10.1
Contract or prepaid	Contract	75	58.6	69	34.0	52	50.5	120	70.2	316	52.2
	Prepaid	53	41.4	134	66.0	51	49.5	51	29.8	289	47.8

to determine statistical significance. However, because statistical significance does not indicate the strength of the significance, r-values of Cohen for Spearman correlation coefficients, Eta<sup>2</sup> ( $\eta^2$ ) and d-values in terms of Hedges g for all analyses of variance (Anova), were also calculated to determine practical significance by means of effect size (Steyn, 1999:3). The decision to use Hedges g was based on the fact that the sizes of the population groups were not the same, implying that the standard deviations were weighted and pooled (Ellis, 2010:27). Practical significance in terms of r-values is considered to be small at 0.1, medium at 0.3 and large at 0.5 (Cohen, 1988:79-81). Practical significance in terms of  $\eta^2$  is considered as being small at 0.01, medium at 0.06 and large at 0.14 (Cohen, 1988:284-287). Practical significance in terms of d-values of Cohen is considered to be small at 0.2, medium at 0.5 and large at 0.8 (Cohen, 1988:25-26). These values were used

as a guideline to interpret this study's d-values (Hedges g).

According to Cohen (1988:20), medium effect sizes have ample practical significance, as the differences between the respondent groups can be observed with the naked eye. Medium and large effect sizes were thus regarded as being practically significant when interpreting results.

## RESULTS

### *Sample profile and patronage habits*

The sample profile, together with respondents' cell phone patronage habits (per population group and for the total sample) are presented in Table 1.

It is evident from Table 1 that a total of 605 respondents participated in this study, with 33.5% being Blacks (203 respondents), 28.3% Whites (171 respondents), 21.2% Asians/Indians

(128 respondents) and 17% Coloureds (103 respondents). Slightly more than half of the respondents were females (53.7%). The majority of the respondents had used their current cell phone network provider for more than three years, but less than five years (42.3%) or from five years to less than 10 years (35.2%).

It may, furthermore, be deduced that the majority of the respondents used Vodacom (43%), MTN (34.4%), or Cell C (16.5%) as their cell phone network provider. The majority of the Coloured and White respondents used Vodacom (46.6% and 50.9%, respectively) and MTN (29.1% and 27.5%, respectively) as their cell phone network provider, whereas the majority Black and Asian/Indian respondents used MTN (42.9% and 34.4%, respectively) and Vodacom (41.4% and 32.0% respectively). With regard to monthly cell phone expenses, the majority of the respondents, as well as the majority of the respondents from the four population groups, spend between R101 to R250, or between R251 to R400, on their monthly cell phone expenses.

The majority of Asian/Indian (58.6%) and White (70.2%) respondents had contractual agreements with their cell phone network providers, while an almost equal divide for Coloured respondents (50.5% contract and 49.5% prepaid) was observed. On the other hand, the majority of the Black respondents (66.0%) were prepaid customers of their cell phone network providers.

**Validity, reliability and mean scores**

To demonstrate construct validity in terms of divergent and discriminant validity, and to uncover the underlying dimensions of constructs, exploratory factor analyses with Maximum

Likelihood extraction and Varimax rotation were performed. The relationship intention scale was suitable for factor analyses since Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.9. The Measure of Sampling Adequacy for all the items varied between 0.767 and 0.938. Furthermore, the eigenvalues indicated that five factors, as proposed by Kumar et al. (2003:669), explaining 58% of the variance, should be retained.

Concerning the positive attitude towards complaining scale, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.82. The Measure of Sampling Adequacy for all the items varied between 0.797 and 0.867, and the eigenvalue indicated that one factor explaining 50% of the variance should be retained. Therefore, it may be concluded that the scales were valid to measure the respondents’ relationship intentions and positive attitudes towards complaining.

**TABLE 2: Cronbach’s alpha values for constructs of the study**

Constructs	Cronbach’s alpha value
Relationship intention (26 items)	0.90
Involvement (5 items)	0.83
Underlying dimensions of relationship intention	0.73
Expectations (6 items)	0.86
Fear of relationship loss (5 items)	0.80
Feedback (5 items)	0.82
Forgiveness (5 items)	0.82
Positive attitude towards complaining (6 items)	0.79

The internal consistency reliability of the relationship intention and the positive attitude towards complaining scales were both

**TABLE 3: Means scores for constructs of this study**

Construct	Population group				Total sample
	Asian/Indian	Black	Coloured	White	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Relationship intention	3.54	3.78	3.77	3.33	3.60
Positive attitude towards complaining	4.06	4.41	4.26	3.96	4.18



**TABLE 4:**  
Respondents' population groups and their positive attitude towards complaining

Factor	Mean	SD	n	p-value	Population group	d-value (Hedges g)			
						1) Asian / Indian	2) Black	3) Coloured	4) White
Positive attitude towards complaining	4.06	0.74	128	1-2	1) Asian / Indian	-	0.5	0.3	0.1
	4.41	0.61	203	2-4	2) Black	0.5	-	0.3	0.6
	4.26	0.60	103	3-4	3) Coloured	0.3	0.2	-	0.4
	3.96	0.74	171		4) White	0.1	0.6	0.4	-

assessed through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient values. Cronbach's alpha coefficient values, indicated in Table 2, for the relationship intention scale (and the underlying dimensions as uncovered during the exploratory factor analysis), and positive attitude towards complaining scale were both above 0.7, the suggested minimum Cronbach's alpha coefficient value (Pallant, 2010:6). For this reason, it may be concluded that the scales were reliable to measure the respondents' relationship intentions and positive attitudes towards complaining to their cell phone network providers. It is thus concluded that the scales were reliable and valid to measure the respondents' relationship intentions and positive attitudes to complaining to their cell phone network providers. Subsequently, the overall mean scores were calculated for the constructs of this study. As proposed by Kumar et al. (2003:675), an overall score was calculated for respondents' relationship intention (encompassing the five underlying dimensions), which was used for further data analysis. Table 3 presents the mean scores for the constructs of this study per population group and for the total sample.

Considering that the midpoint of the scales used was 3, the mean score of the respondents' relationship intentions (mean=3.60) and the positive attitude towards complaining (mean=4.18) demonstrates that the respondents had a tendency towards higher relationship intentions and higher positive attitudes towards complaining. By examining the mean scores per population group, as indicated in Table 3, differences were observed. It was subsequently decided to perform Anovas to determine whether the mean scores for different

population groups differed significantly in terms of their positive attitude towards complaining.

**Population group differences with regard to positive attitude towards complaining**

An Anova was performed to determine whether respondents from the different population groups differed with regard to their positive attitude towards complaining. Table 4 presents the mean, standard deviation (SD), p-value and d-value in terms of Hedges g when comparing the means of positive attitude towards complaining for the different population groups.

From Table 4 it may be deduced that statistical significant differences exist between Asian/Indian and Black respondents, between Black and White respondents, and between Coloured and White respondents, for positive attitude towards complaining. The effect size of the omnibus Anova was medium ( $F = 15.690, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.07$ ).

Table 4 furthermore indicates that although statistically significant, the effect size between Coloured and White respondents ( $d = 0.4$ ) was small and therefore not of practical significance. However, medium effect sizes were found between Black and White respondents ( $d = 0.6$ ), and between Black and Asian/Indian respondents ( $d = 0.5$ ) for a positive attitude towards complaining. Since the mean scores indicate that Black respondents (mean = 4.41) have a higher positive attitude towards complaining than White respondents (mean = 3.96) and Asian/Indian (mean = 4.06) respondents, it may be concluded

that Black respondents have a higher positive attitude towards complaining than White and Asian/Indian respondents, respectively.

### ***Relationship intention and positive attitude towards complaining***

The correlation between respondents' relationship intentions and their positive attitudes towards complaining was investigated through a  $r$ -value of Spearman Rho since the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity were violated. The association between the respondents' relationship intentions and their positive attitudes towards complaining was significant, and realised a medium effect size ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.433$ ). This finding implies that, as the respondents' relationship intentions increase, their positive attitude towards complaining also increases. It may, therefore, be concluded that there is a practically significant correlation between the respondents' relationship intentions and their positive attitude towards complaining.

### ***Interaction effect of population group and relationship intention on positive attitude towards complaining***

To investigate the direct and interaction effects of population group and relationship intention on positive attitude towards complaining, a factorial between groups Anova was performed. To perform the analysis, the respondents had to be categorised into three groups based on the overall mean score for relationship intention, by using the 33.3 and 66.6 percentiles. From the analysis, a significant main effect of population group on positive attitude towards complaining was found ( $F = 6.105$  at  $p < 0.001$ ). However, the partial eta squared, containing only the variance attributable to the effect of interest (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013:54), was small (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ) and therefore not of practical significance.

Furthermore, the main effect of relationship intention on positive attitude towards complaining was statistically significant,  $F = 41.610$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). The partial eta squared for this effect was medium (partial  $\eta^2 = 0.12$ ). However, despite the statistically significant findings, no interaction

effect was found between population group and relationship intention on positive attitude towards complaining ( $F = 0.664$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.007$ ).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Service providers rely on customers to voice their dissatisfaction when service failures occur, in order to be able to restore the relationships (Huang, 2011:513; Robinson et al., 2011:96). As customers with positive attitudes towards complaining are more likely to voice their dissatisfaction (Beardon & Mason, 1984:495; Kim & Chen, 2010:107, 108), cell phone network providers can benefit from knowing what contributes to customers holding positive attitudes toward complaining.

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of relationship intention and population group on cell phone users' positive attitude towards complaining. The influence of these two factors on customers' positive attitude towards complaining were selected since it is believed that customers with relationship intentions are the most likely to voice their dissatisfaction (Tax et al., 1998:72), and because it has been established that customers from different population groups differ with regard to their attitude towards complaining (Ekiz & Au, 2011:340; Kim & Boo, 2011:231).

It was found in this study that the population group to which the respondents belong practically significantly influenced their positive attitudes towards complaining, thereby providing support for the existing literature hypothesising this effect (Ekiz & Au, 2011:340; Kim & Boo, 2011:231). In particular, it was found that Black respondents had higher positive attitudes towards complaining than White and Asian/Indian respondents. Cell phone network providers should thus realise that differences exist between the respondents from different population groups, in so far as their attitudes toward complaining are concerned. Cell phone network providers' marketing strategies, and specifically their communication with customers concerning complaining and complaint handling, should recognise possible differences between customer groups and should accordingly reflect such differences as a single approach to an entire customer base might not prove appropriate

or effective.

The results from this study, furthermore, found a practically significant correlation between respondents' relationship intentions and their positive attitudes towards complaining, thereby supporting the view of Tax et al. (1998:72) that customers with relationship intentions are the most likely to voice their dissatisfaction. This finding, furthermore, supports the notion that cell phone network providers can be assured to obtain feedback from customers with relationship intentions as these customers are believed to want to continue their relationships with their service providers (Kumar et al., 2003:670; Lacey, 2012:141; Tax et al., 1998:72; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011:386). This finding also confirms the hypothesis of Kumar et al. (2003:670) that customers with relationship intentions would be more likely to engage in two-way communication through feedback with their service providers. It can thus be recommended that cell phone network providers should identify those customers with relationship intentions, and specifically target them with their relationship marketing efforts. By doing so, cell phone network providers stand a greater chance of obtaining feedback when service failures occur, enabling them to not only rectify the failures, but also to prevent failures from recurring.

It is important to note that no interaction effect was found between population group and relationship intention on positive attitude towards complaining. Cell phone network providers should, therefore, not adopt an approach where they focus exclusively on one population group (for example Black customers in this study) with relationship intentions. Although one population group could have more positive attitudes towards complaining than other population groups, customers from other population groups could also show relationship intentions. Concerning the findings from this study, however, South African cell phone network providers have to be aware of the possibility that their Black customers may hold more positive attitudes towards complaining and they could, therefore, possibly voice their complaints directly to them when service failures occur, should they be afforded the opportunity to do so. Cell phone network providers could,

therefore, display greater approachability by, for example, employing more employees in call centres who are fluent in the official South African languages, other than English and Afrikaans (e.g. Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, Tswana, Venda or Tsonga).

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Duplicating this study across multiple industries and provinces of South Africa, using probability sampling would address the methodological limitations of this study, which, currently, prohibits any generalisation of the findings. This study is based on the assumption that a positive attitude towards complaining results in customers voicing their dissatisfaction to service providers (Beardon & Mason, 1984:495; Kim & Chen, 2010:107, 108; Richins, 1982:505; Yuksel et al., 2006:15, 22). Consequently, future research should specifically include customer voicing in the analyses. Furthermore, although customers may choose not to complain, as they do not think it would help (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012:95; Lacey, 2012:141), specific reasons for each South African population group's attitude towards complaining should be investigated.

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