

RELATIONSHIP OF CATEGORY ATTITUDE WITH EXTENT OF INFORMATION  
SEARCH: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

Marketing of Services is fundamentally different from that of products that requires a thorough understanding of consumer behavior pertaining to services. By virtue of the characteristics of services, consumers' attitude towards services is very different from that of any tangible goods marketing. With the breakthrough paper of Vargo and Lusch (2004), the whole gamut of services marketing entered a new horizon and the academic leaders of service marketing areas are in a mission to redefine services marketing practices (Otago forums)<sup>1</sup>.

In the field of Consumer Behavior, Information Search is pivotal since that provides the marketers with the first-hand view to understand the scope of acquisition or selling. It's therefore important to understand the various aspects of search behavior as that could directly impact the firms' decision making. In past decade most studies in consumer behavior in services marketing area focused primarily on how the consumer attitude had been towards services sector for example attitude towards airlines, banking, life insurance, healthcare, online shopping science education etc (Corbin et al., 2001, Howcroft, et al., 2002, Osborne et al., 2003, Li and Zhang, 2002, Dahl, M. 2004, Yusuf et al., 2009, Harcar and Yucelt, 2012). It was observed from the papers studied that service marketers and researchers have realized that brand level marketing is seldom convincing as that is predominantly dependent on consumer intention to use a service at the first place (Dorsch et al., 2000). In order to contribute to the redefinition of this concept of marketing, our research was to extend the category attitude towards a service sector to the next level of consumer decision making. Though consumer information search is an enriched area with several research work done over past few decades there was apparently no established relationship found

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.business.otago.ac.nz/marketing/events/events.html>

from the literature to describe how consumers' attitude towards category influences their information search. It was also noted that relatively a very few studies are conducted in services in the information search area.

In order to address this gap, we aimed our research to study how attitude towards category influences the extent of information search in services. We proposed that the relationship between category attitude and extent of information search is mediated by ability to search. Deriving support from existing literature we proposed that category attitude influences consumer's ability to search through its influence on the motivation to search and his/her category knowledge. We also modelled to test the moderating impact of perceived search cost and perceived risk between ability to search and extent of information search. This research comprised of studies in three categories of services selected based on the continuum of inseparability dimension designed by Lovelock & Gummesson (2004) and Keh & Pang (2010). Study I was in Health care, study II was in education and study III was in insurance sectors. The conceptual model was tested in all the three studies to test the relationship of category attitude and extent of information search. In total of 11 hypotheses were tested in each of the three categories. The relationships tested were relationship between category attitude and extent of search is mediated by ability to search; relationship between category attitude and ability to search is mediated by motivation to search and category knowledge; relationship between ability to search and extent of search is moderated by perceived search cost and perceived risk and that the relationship between category attitude and motivation, category attitude and ability and ability to search and extent of search are positive.

Services are in general predominantly experience and credence based than products and since all the three sectors have high credence values, the objective was to generate cues on how the relationships among various constructs work in the three categories and therefore in service sector

in general. We live in in an era of services economy with over 60% of GDP contributed by services across world<sup>2</sup> and in India<sup>3</sup> . Services being highly experience and credence based than products, category level marketing plays pivotal role. That's where the rationale of undertaking this study is base-lined.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2012-13/echap-10.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ibef.org/industry/services.aspx>

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