CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The present chapter discusses the objectives and hypotheses of the study leading to the conceptual model. The chapter comprises of two sections. The objectives of the study are discussed in the first section followed by the second section which deals with the hypotheses development and conceptual research model.

4.1 Objectives of the Study

The present study is designed to address the research gaps as surfaced from the literature review in the previous chapter. Based on the identified research gaps, the following objectives have been framed:

1. To examine the impact of focused search strategy, exploratory search strategy, and haphazard search strategy on the job search outcomes (i.e. number of job offers; percentage of job search success; and pre-entry fit perceptions) amongst entry-level job seekers in India.

2. To examine career planning attitudes (career adaptability, career optimism, and perceived knowledge of job market) as individual level antecedents of job search strategies (i.e. focused search strategy, exploratory search strategy, and haphazard search strategy) amongst entry-level job seekers in India.

3. To examine social support (i.e. emotional, financial, and informational) as situational antecedents of job search strategies (i.e. focused search strategy, exploratory search strategy, and haphazard search strategy) amongst entry-level job seekers in India.
4. To construct the scale for social support dimensions in order to measure their differential impact on focused search strategy, exploratory search strategy, and haphazard search strategy.

4.2 Development of Hypotheses

4.2.1 Relationship between Career Planning Attitudes and Job Search Strategies

Career planning reflects planfulness and a future career orientation i.e. a realization that preparing for a career is important. As noted by past researchers (Ganster & Lovell, 1978; Reese & Miller, 2006; Koen et al., 2012; Van Hooft et al., 2013; Arnold & Barrett, 2017; Sarchielli et al., 2017), planning inclines people to specify their future career goals and engage in relevant activities to accomplish the goals. Past studies have also found career planning to foster more successful and satisfying careers (Super & Hall, 1978; Swain, 1984; Morrison & Hall, 2002; Folsom & Reardon, 2003; Dik et al., 2008; Spurk et al., 2015; Stoeber et al., 2016; Corr & Mutinelli, 2017).

In this regard, Gunkel et al. (2010) noted that the three components of career planning attitudes namely, career adaptability, career optimism and perceived knowledge of job market positively predicts career decisiveness amongst graduating students across US, Germany and China. Similarly, Koen et al. (2012) found career adaptability to have a positive relationship with successful school-to-work transition among graduating students. Further, Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, & Detwiler (2014) noted that career planning positively impacts purposeful job search behavior and negatively impacts futile job search behavior that leads to dissatisfying career or failure to find employment. A purposeful job search is depicted by clarity of employment goals,
intensive job search plan, and use of focused or exploratory job search strategies (Van Hoye et al., 2013; Kuron & Taggar, 2016). On the contrary, a futile job search is depicted by lack of goal clarity, superficial and unplanned attempts, absence of persistence, and use of haphazard search strategy (Stevens & Beach, 1996; Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Van Hoye et al., 2013; Kuron & Taggar, 2016).

Since the use of focused search strategy implies clear employment goals and career decisiveness (Gunkel et al., 2010; Konstam et al., 2015), job seekers are likely to search along meticulously determined screening criteria in sync with their needs, qualification, motivation, and interests. At the same time, planning is likely to reduce the use of haphazard search strategy as it implies lack of goal clarity pertaining to employment. Therefore, we expect the components of career planning attitudes to positively predict the use of focused search strategy and negatively predict the use of haphazard search strategy. Additionally, since the individuals high on career adaptability are found to adapt quickly to the changes in their career plans and shifting nature of work demands and are also inclined towards career exploration (Werbel, 2000; Savickas 2005; McArdle et al., 2007; Koen et al., 2012; Guan et al., 2013; Guan et al., 2014; Guan et al., 2015), they are also likely to use the exploratory search strategy.

Similarly, as a component of career planning attitudes, perceived knowledge of job market includes exploration of career alternatives by proactively gathering information on occupations, jobs, organizations, and industries (Dzibun et al. 1994; Nota et al., 2014), which indicates the use of exploratory search strategy during job search. However, the findings by Gunkel et al. (2010) and Chatterjee (2014) suggest that perceived knowledge of job market fosters career decision-making and clarity of employment goals; suggesting use of focused search strategy. Such relationship is also likely because a good comprehension and
understanding of the job market and employment trends provide the job seekers with an opportunity to self-select or opt-out themselves from jobs or occupations they perceive to be over-qualified or under-qualified for.

With regard to career optimism, Rottinghaus et al. (2005) noted that the job market conditions have a vital role to play in determining the levels of career optimism amongst graduating students. In this regard, Gunkel et al. (2010) and McIlveen et al. (2013) reported that career optimism positively impacts career decisiveness in graduating students, whereas, Rottinghaus et al. (2012) suggested that career optimism leads to an intensive exploration of career choice. The dissertation work by Chatterjee (2014) amongst the sample of management students in India (N=474) revealed that career optimism did not predict career decisiveness in the Indian context. The author attributed this finding to the turbulent job market conditions and argued that a better market conditions like the ones in Gunkel et al. (2010) study would have yielded a different result. This implies that career optimism, as suggested by Rottinghaus et al. (2005), is shaped to a large extent by the economic and job market conditions and thus may not always lead to a specific career choice and use of focused search strategy. Accordingly, the contrasting results on career optimism indicate the use of exploratory search strategy in the Indian context due to limited opportunities being available for the entry-level job seekers (Mitra & Verick, 2013; Mamgain & Tiwari, 2016). Based on the literature review and discussions above, the following set of hypotheses was formulated:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Career adaptability positively impacts focused search strategy.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Career optimism positively impacts focused search strategy.

**Hypothesis 1c:** Perceived knowledge of job market positively impacts focused search strategy.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Career adaptability positively impacts exploratory search strategy.
Hypothesis 2b: Career optimism positively impacts exploratory search strategy.

Hypothesis 2c: Perceived knowledge of the job market positively impacts exploratory search strategy.

Hypothesis 3a: Career adaptability negatively impacts haphazard search strategy.

Hypothesis 3b: Career optimism negatively impacts haphazard search strategy.

Hypothesis 3c: Perceived knowledge of the job market negatively impacts haphazard search strategy.

4.2.2 Relationship between Social Support and Job Search Strategies

As suggested by Zikic and Klehe (2006), emotional support influences the employment quality of the job seekers. This implies that in the presence of emotional support, job seekers are motivated to pursue their career aspirations by searching for the type of job they are qualified for and interested in (Van Hoye et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2015). Emotional support serves as a coping mechanism to overcome the distress related to failures and sustain the job search efforts to reach the specific goals. On the other hand, lack of emotional support is likely to lead the job seeker to haphazardly search for a job in order to end the state of unemployment at the earliest (Blau, 1994; Wanberg et al., 1996; Saks, 2005; Koen, 2007). Further, Bonaccio et al. (2014) in their qualitative study found that when job seeker’s recollection of the job search process suggested lack of emotional support, they were more likely to display haphazard search strategy and vice versa. However, past studies are inconclusive about the relationship between emotional support and exploratory search strategy. The attachment theory by Bowlby (1969) suggests that the individuals who are more attached to their family and friends and receive emotional support tends to feel secure and indulge in career exploration activities. On the other hand the “model of vocational exploration and commitment” by Blustein, Ellis, & Devenis (1989) suggests that
emotional support may lead to high perceived pressure and social anxiety which fosters tendency to foreclose i.e. the desire to commit to premature career decision as soon as possible by restricting career exploration. Additionally, the study by Bonaccio et al. (2014) revealed that out of the total job seekers using exploratory search strategy, 56% reported to have emotional support while 44% reported lack of it. Thereby, more empirical studies are required in this direction to examine the impact of emotional support on exploratory search strategy. Hence, the present study intends to test this competing hypothesis by keeping it open-ended. Based on this rationale, the following set of hypotheses was formulated:

**Hypothesis 4a:** Emotional support positively impacts focused search strategy.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Emotional support impacts exploratory search strategy.

**Hypothesis 4c:** Emotional support negatively impacts haphazard search strategy.

Past studies on job search have widely focused on financial hardship (i.e. financial need) as a situational predictor of job search behavior and reported the positive impact of financial need on job search intensity (Blau, 1994; Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994; Saks, 2005; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Van Hooft & Crossley, 2008; Vleugels, Rothmann, De Witte, & Griep, 2013; Van Hoye et al., 2015; Varekamp, Knijn, Van der Gaag, & Bos, 2015). In this regard, extant literature also suggests that financial need leads to poor quality of job search outcomes due to job search efforts being solely directed towards job search quantity (Van Hooft et al., 2013; Manroop & Richardson, 2015; Gerards & Welters, 2016). Koen (2007) in her study found that financial hardship was positively related to the use of haphazard search strategy by the job seekers. This is because when an individual is in immediate need of money, he/she will not be motivated to explore all the job alternatives or wait for the most suitable job matching one’s need. Instead he/she is likely to haphazardly search for a job and grab any initial job being
offered so as to financially support oneself. On the other hand, receipt of financial support is likely to terminate the use of haphazard search strategy. Gerards and Welters (2016) in their study found that job seekers who searched for a job under financial pressure reported lower perceived quality of employment obtained as against the job seekers who received financial support and reported higher perceived quality of employment. Therefore, it is likely that job seekers in receipt of financial support will search for the specific jobs with higher perceived fit depicting the use of focused search strategy. Zikic and Klehe (2006) in their study found instrumental support to positively impact career exploration so as to generate multiple career alternatives to choose from (Blustein et al., 1989; Li et al., 2015). Thus, it is likely that availability of financial support will induce job seekers to gather job related information from variety of sources and fully explore the available occupational or job alternatives i.e. use exploratory search strategy, without having the pressure to find a job hurriedly to financially support oneself (Koen et al., 2010; Bonaccio et al., 2014; Kuron & Taggar, 2016). Based on the above discussion, it was postulated that:

**Hypothesis 5a:** Financial support positively impacts focused search strategy.

**Hypothesis 5b:** Financial support positively impacts exploratory search strategy.

**Hypothesis 5c:** Financial support negatively impacts haphazard search strategy.

Though Malecki and Demaray (2003) have argued the relevance of studying each social support dimensions individually due to their differential impact on the outcomes across different research contexts, extant literature on job search that examines different social support types are relatively scarce. In this regard, Zikic and Klehe (2006) demonstrated the differential impact of emotional and instrumental support on job search behavior and job search outcomes but other dimensions of social support such as informational and appraisal support were not considered.
Since job search behavior is widely defined as a process of gathering and pursuing job related information, availability of informational support is likely to play a critical role in the job search process, and hence needs scholarly attention. Russell et al. (2015), in their recent study, also found support for the positive impact of informational support on job search intensity and highlighted the relevance of informational support in the job search context. Similarly, appraisal support i.e. feedback and communication of information pertinent to self-evaluation may also influence the job search behavior and is often included in the informational support category (Dennis, 2003; Thoits, 2011). Thus, it is expected that with readily available information about the employment opportunities, job leads, and self-evaluation, job seekers will pursue all the information available to them and will explore the alternatives fully to ensure that they do not miss a better job profile or compensation. Nevertheless, as noted by Pitz and Harren (1980), sufficient information about one’s abilities and the possible career alternatives increases career decision making; which fosters the use of focused search strategy. On the other hand, availability of job related information and job leads is likely to terminate the use of haphazard search strategy as information available will foster informed job leads by the job seeker rather than a haphazard approach to job search due to awareness through job related information. Based on evidence from existing literature and the discussions above, the following set of hypotheses was formulated:

**Hypothesis 6a:** Informational support positively impacts focused search strategy.

**Hypothesis 6b:** Informational support positively impacts exploratory search strategy.

**Hypothesis 6c:** Informational support negatively impacts haphazard search strategy.
4.2.3 Relationship between Job Search Strategies and Job search Outcomes

Extant research on job search have considered a number of job search outcomes such as employment status (Saks & Ashforth, 1999), number of job offers (Blau & Robins, 1990; Saks & Ashforth, 1997), number of interview calls (Burger & Caldwell, 2000; Tay, Ang, & Van Dyne, 2006), speed of employment (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Saks, 2005), employment quality (Saks & Ashforth, 2002), initial compensation (Werbel, 2000), job satisfaction (Allen & Van der Velden, 2001) etc. However, these outcomes have been mainly studied with respect to job search intensity, which is a form of job search behavior restricted to the frequency of indulgence in job search activities (Kanfer et al., 20001; Van Hoye et al., 2013). With regard to job search strategy, employment quality and number of job offers have remained the main pursuit of investigation concerning job search outcomes (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010; De Battistiet al., 2016). Crossley and Highhouse (2005) in their study suggested that focused search strategy was negatively, and exploratory search strategy was positively related to the number of job offers. Similarly, exploratory search strategy was negatively related to the employment quality whereas focused search strategy showed a positive linkage with the same. Lastly, haphazard search strategy was negatively related to the number of job offers and employment quality, measured in terms of job satisfaction. Given the fact that job seekers using focused search strategy would apply for a less number of jobs, their job search success can be attributed to the person-job fit and person-organization fit ensured during job search process.

In sync with the extant literature on job search strategy, this study measures the quantity and quality of job search outcomes. The quantity of job search outcome in the current study was captured by the number of job offers obtained by the job seekers (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005;
Koen et al., 2010) whereas, the quality of job search outcome was captured by the job seeker’s pre-entry fit perceptions (Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Pre-entry fit perceptions are the early perception of person-job fit and person-organization fit which is formed on the basis of congruence between individuals’ knowledge, skills, abilities, and interest and requirements of the job and the compatibility between individuals’ value system and the shared values of the organization. Person-job fit perception also results from the match between individuals’ needs and desires and what is supplied or fulfilled by the job. Thus, when needs of the job seekers are fulfilled by the job and their abilities are in sync with the occupational requirements, they are likely to be more satisfied with the job and have less or no turnover intention. Similarly, when the beliefs of the job seekers are aligned with the organizational beliefs and value system, they are likely to have more organizational identification and commitment towards the employer.

Saks and Ashforth (2002) in their study found pre-entry fit perceptions to positively impact employment quality that was measured in terms of less turnover intention, job satisfaction, organizational identification, and organizational commitment. Zikic and Klehe (2006) and Koen et al. (2010) have also measured perceived fit, turnover intention, job satisfaction, and organizational identification as indicators of employment quality.

The current study measures job search success (i.e. percentage of job search success) as a percentage of the number of applications submitted and number of job offers received by the job seekers in a given period of time. It is because measuring number of job offers without considering the number of job applications submitted depicts quantity of job search outcomes without any criterion. In this regard, it is assumed that since the job applicants using a focused search strategy carefully screen the employment options and submit only a few applications, the number of job offers will be less. However, the percentage of success obtained will be higher for
the job seekers using focused search strategy, based on the number of applications sent and the number of offers obtained due to person-job fit and person-organization fit ensured during job search. Similarly, pre-entry fit perceptions will also be high for job applicants with focused search strategy (Koen et al., 2010; Konstam et al., 2015).

On the other side, use of haphazard search strategy suggests that the job seekers have unclear employment goals and therefore they are likely to accept any initial offer that comes their way. As a result, use of haphazard search strategy reduces the number of job offers received by the job seekers resulting in low percentage of job search success. Similarly, haphazard search strategy also leads to lower levels of pre-entry fit perceptions (Kuron & Taggar, 2016).

Use of exploratory search strategy depicts that the job seekers explore several job alternatives to create a pool of potential employers to choose from; thereby the number of applications submitted will be high. Further, as noted by Taggar and Kuron (2016), the exploratory job seekers send large number of under-qualified job applications with the intent to generate many job alternatives. Thus, we can expect that exploratory search strategy will lead to higher number of job offers. However, since the person-job fit and person-organization fit are not fully taken care of during the job search, it is likely that not all the applications sent out will be converted into job offers; lowering the percentage of success and pre-entry fit perceptions (De Battisti et al., 2016; Koen et al., 2016). Accordingly, the following set of hypotheses was formulated:
**Hypothesis 7:** Focused search strategy (a) negatively impacts the number of job offers (b) positively impacts the percentage of job search success (c) positively impacts pre-entry P-J fit perception (d) positively impacts pre-entry P-O fit perception.

**Hypothesis 8:** Exploratory search strategy (a) positively impacts the number of job offers (b) negatively impacts the percentage of job search success (c) negatively impacts pre-entry P-J fit perception (d) negatively impacts pre-entry P-O fit perception.

**Hypothesis 9:** Haphazard search strategy (a) negatively impacts the number of job offers (b) negatively impacts percentage of job search success (c) negatively impacts pre-entry P-J fit perception (d) negatively impacts pre-entry P-O fit perception.
This chapter presents the research objectives that are formulated based on the research gaps identified in the previous chapter (i.e. chapter 3). This chapter further discussed the research hypotheses and the rationale behind the proposed relationships. Lastly, the conceptual research model is presented in Figure 4.1. The next chapter gives detailed description of the research methodology used in the present study.