11. **Managerial Implications**

- **Generic Recommendations across Spectrum of Services**

Since all the three categories studied are credence services, consumers generally have low interest in purchase, they rely more on opinion based information relating to their specific requirements. A positive disposition towards the category would enable consumers have higher motivation and category knowledge, which in turn make the consumers capable of searching right information. Therefore, by providing options of customized solutions consumers would be motivated as well as educated, which in turn would influence ability to search for the right information enabling them for making the right informed choice.

- **Fundamentals of Marketing – designing the 4Ps**

An integrated customized approach to overall marketing should be deemed appropriate in designing the 4Ps – products/solutions; pricing (yield based); customized place or distribution (online/offline) and targeted promotions. Services have the advantages that they could be customized more easily than tangible goods. This is an actionable input that could be used across the three categories undertaken for this study. Since these are unsought goods and consumers need to be sensitized about the requirement of the purchase, higher degree of importance is attached with communicating with consumers and this is the era of co-creation of value, therefore, it becomes crucial to connect with the consumer at an early stage of purchase decision making.

- **Learning from Consumers**

Marketers should understand the state of being, state of mind and behavior of the consumers by virtue of online/offline data; by gathering information while discussing, or by utilizing social-media data – ‘people-like-me’ concept, and accordingly proposed offerings, pricing etc. All mode
of communications and touch-points could use customized approach by collecting relevant information and triggering more search curiosity among consumers. More integrated marketing initiatives should be designed to enable consumers themselves to get the right information. Given the characteristics of credence, hearing from other people’s experiences reduces the degree of uncertainty involved with these services. Another important aspect to remember is, all these three services are unsought services. From the findings of our study, consumer attitude influences the motivation, knowledge, which in turn influences the ability to search information and that influences the extent of information search. Therefore understanding what consumers want would enable Marketers with a long-term sustainability. With respect to the shift of new perspectives of service dominant logic, focus is on intangible resources, the co-creation of value, and relationships, our findings are in line too and could be leveraged to redefine marketing strategies with respect to the new dominant logic.

- **Engaging throughout the life-cycle of consumers**

In general consumers pass through 4 life cycles stage when they enter and till they exit from a service. Our findings could be leveraged across the stages. By understanding consumer’s intention to purchase, and various psychological dimensions from available data/information from social media one could gather inputs for attitude towards the services, factors motivating them, their knowledge level about the product, ability to search information and anticipated risk and frame the strategies across the life cycle stages by performing required further analyses, such as:

- Acquisition: Segmentation, Purchase propensity & purchase driver analysis
- Development: Opportunities for Cross/Up Sell

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Following sections describe the specific implications for the three services sectors studied.

11.1 Healthcare

In general, though ability to search information has a mediating role between category attitude and extent of search, the impact was low in case of healthcare. Mainly since healthcare is a high-credence service (Shaffer and Sherrell, 1997, Krishnan and Hartline, 2001) as this can’t be evaluated prior to purchase and service performance can’t be evaluated even after the consumption, innovative marketing ideas may be devised such as providers connecting with the patients post the service. Additionally healthcare is an inseparable service that requires consumers to be present during the service execution, therefore one-to-one contact perhaps would enhance consumer’s ability to search. Providers may make themselves available for consumers at their fingertips, maybe innovation like mobile app be leveraged for improving consumer ability to search.

From a communication point of view, since word-of-mouth is a preferred communication in healthcare services (Buttle, 1998) practitioners may add innovative approaches such as identifying designated patients as ‘ambassadors’ in specific locations or at their respective work places. This is from the perceived risk point of view, and also to improve their motivation level. Additionally, eWOM be practiced more as people are dependent on online media primarily. Disease, hospital or specialist specific groups’ maybe created in social media cites with specific content discussions. Healthcare providers need to invest more on web portals with consumer interactivity and dynamic features that can enable consumers to search for relevant information in the required proximity.
As people are becoming more internet savvy, maybe the providers should make themselves easily accessible online.

**In Summary the specific managerial implications from Marketing aspects for Healthcare are as following:**

In case of healthcare, for example, considering a case of a patient coming to a hospital for a checkup, and gets diagnosed with some critical disease, many times, patients do not really know what to do next. Also, from medico-legal perspective, any improper advice or treatment could lead to legal implications. Our findings would enable the medical administration to understand the patients better and make them take the right and informed decision. Besides such scenarios, Preventive Healthcare, Special procedures, Critical Disease Treatment could be extremely beneficial with our findings leading to a win-win relationship.

- **Product/Offering**
  A counselor should spend time with the patient/relatives and understand their acceptance level, educate them with all the pros/cons of treatment, in that hospital and/or any other hospitals/specialized centers. Encourage them to gather all relevant information, by asking right questions. Help them with the questions need to be addressed such as duration & cost of treatment, benefits to the patients by acquainting them with various treatment options.

- **Pricing**
  A customized approach to pricing be adapted, for the diagnostics –not required should not be charged. This would create some degree of motivation among consumers to seek for right
information. Consumers would also gather required knowledge to be able to assess the exact requirement of treatment.

- **Place**

Every hospital must develop tie-ups with a series of specialized hospitals and design their solutions accordingly. Preventative care, special procedures (e.g. infertility treatment) and critical disease treatments could certainly be benefitted by these findings by implementing the above recommendations. Additionally, telemedicine could also be practiced, that would enable consumers to overcome the unpleasantness of going to the hospitals, and they would open up in gathering the required information. Motivation level, Knowledge and Ability would certainly be higher, and degree of uncertainty would reduce as they would be comfortable in discussing the cases.

- **Promotion**

Given that healthcare is the first level of services as per the continuum, requiring presence of consumers/patients while the service is produced, In-hospital communications are the most effective. As this is a category of service that requires consumers (patients) to be present during the production & consumption of services, in-hospital communications could be made effective. Many times, patients spend hours waiting for their turn. Hospital administration could make use of their time in a coordinated way. Additionally, a service portal could be developed with tie-up hospitals and doctors, enabling patients to search and compare options and take an informed decision, by taking cues from their life events, psychographics and situational factors. Additionally, given the digitized age, Hospital web-page should have the dynamic information –based on the information collected from the patients –
suggestions/options might be designed, such as approximate treatment cost, affordable limit for the patients, and probable offers. Hospitals could tie-up with organizations in the locality to create awareness programs. Blogs, and social-media communications must be practiced for quicker spread.

11.2 Education

When information seeking follows the pattern of psychological approach involving one’s motivation and ability to search, marketers should focus on sources of information in order to cater to consumer’s psychology (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996).

Past studies have shown higher awareness or knowledge in education doesn’t directly convert to purchase intention interest, service providers should focus on existing consumers’ experience sharing, or more word of mouth communications. Greenbank (2011) study, cross-referenced in Diamond’s paper shared that, potential participants perception was, though the careers advisors might be knowledgeable, but they won’t know the participants situation in detail, and therefore, the preference source would be someone known to the potential participant (Diamond et al., 2010).

It was studied that though motivation enables search ability, it’s difficult to identify what motivates people for particular education (Weiler, 2005). Maybe a survey of existing participants of their reasons to select the particular program to be administered by the practitioners to identify the motivating factors and use those as cues in designing their communication strategies.

Reduction of risk, or in other words lower the high credence properties be considered as an opportunity for education service providers (Chen, 2006). Reducing risk should be capitalized in credence based services, since the very nature of education service makes it difficult for consumers to completely assess the outcome before purchasing and even during and after consumption, raising a high risk. Educational institutes, service providers therefore must focus on a formalize
word-of-mouth communications considering their existing students. As the access to information is high on internet, internet, and eWOM should be practiced leveraging online communities and the target participants’ social media activities.

Additionally, as indicated that potential participants of higher education and professional program consider various risk factors such as taking break from work, relocation etc. Many institutes are providing weekend, online and distance programs already, however, more innovative techniques should be included, for example, video recording of the instructors delivery of the program on the institute’s online portal or online library with restricted and specific access to the participants. For professional certification programs, maybe institute should tie-up with organizations L&D departments and deliver the required class-room training within organization premises itself.

In Summary the specific managerial implications from Marketing aspects for Educational Services are as following:

Educational institutes could be extremely benefitted from the findings of our study. Considering our base sample, the working professionals need to keep them abreast of various professional programs such as PMP (Project Management Professional), Certifications (6 Sigma, Lean), other technical certifications (Java etc.) and various short-term programs (MDPs, LDPs etc.). As the technology trend keeps changing people also try to get them up to date with respect to the new/emerging technologies. Currently, most IT/ITES professionals are into the flow of learning big data, Hadoop & Analytics. It’s a frequently asked question, what to study, how to study and where to study etc. As per our findings, if educational/training institutes could assess the person’s
disposition and accordingly enable him/her to find the right course/program that would lead to success. A solid collaboration between industry and academia is the need of the time.

- **Product/Programs**

  Customized need-based short-term programs maybe designed with respect to changing times –for example –Hadoop/Bigdata Analytics as part of Marketing Research curriculum. Similarly, on-demand professional programs trainings be designed to cater to the need of the industry/professional aspirants. A customized solution would definitely trigger positive disposition in any potential participants, they would be motivated to gather right information, enabling their knowledge and ability to search for their desired programs.

- **Pricing**

  Customized pricing based on the duration and delivery of the program should be adopted. For example, a crash course of Analytics vs a full module with all techniques and tools, should offer different pricing.

- **Place**

  Education or training services are kind of services that are non-physical acts to consumer mind, therefore, the content delivery is not place-bound. However, depending on the infrastructure requirements, the institutes could leverage the location, either own campus/inside other organizations or even on-line sessions. Given the risk and stake the working professionals put while undergoing any training, they would certainly be interested to look for time and place independent solutions. An industry interface should be developed at training/professional educational institutes and an academic interface be designed at organizations, maybe from IT/ITeS to begin with.
**Promotion**

The program coordinator must enable the potential participants to search for information by educating him/her to ask the right questions. These institutes could leverage IT/ITES firms in the locality and conduct special awareness programs for the employees. Additionally, this could be a strong e-commerce opportunity. One could design a web portal by virtue of connecting with good training centres/institutes in referring appropriate programs on a case-by-case basis. The portal would perform a real-time analysis of consumer’s mind set and also the situational factors and trigger right questions in his/her mind. The participants would be able to take an informed decision. Social media is one of the most cost-effective media that has maximum customer reach.

**11.3 Insurance**

The mediation effect of ability to search was the highest in insurance, or in other words, when consumers have higher ability to search, the extent of search is high. The tips for practitioners would be to make consumers able to search information pertaining to insurance offerings. In digital age, insurers could be extremely beneficial by leveraging the new media. Innovative ideas like telematics for motor insurance⁶², maybe a mobile app for specific life and other insurances could be devised.

Though the motivation to search information had significant mediating influence between category attitude and ability to search, the influence was in a medium range. As past researchers had indicated that motivation influences ability to search in insurance (Ulbinaité et al., 2013),

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marketing efforts should be made towards developing the motivation level among consumers. Innovative and digital solutions like listening platforms\textsuperscript{63} should be used more and more to understand the consumers and customized the marketing programs so as to increase consumer’s search ability.

The mediating impact of category knowledge between category attitude and ability to search had higher influence in insurance. As financial literacy makes a consumer self-sufficient, a lot of efforts is needed to make the consumers knowledgeable about insurance offerings. Insurance underwriters should spend time creating case studies and make those available online. Online content delivery should be made available customized to consumers need.

Moderating effect of perceived search cost was insignificant in insurance. The possible explanation could be perceived cost of search is lesser with the access to internet (Wimble et al., 2009). Insurance companies must take advantage of this by ensuring availability of end-to-end detail information.

Perceived risk was observed to have significant moderating influence between ability and extent to search. By nature, all financial industries and insurance in particular are high-credence services (Crosby and Stephens, 1987, Krishnan and Hartline, 2001) and have high degree of perceived risk associated (Beckett et al., 2000). Given that the risk factor is higher in insurance purchase, people search around in order to minimize the perceived risk (Chater et al., 2010).

The specific managerial inputs from marketing aspects are as following:

\textsuperscript{63}http://www.forrester.com/The+Listening+Platform+Landscape/fulltext/-/E-RES48072
We believe the findings would be quite beneficial to the Insurance industry would be quite beneficial as they are extremely data rich as well as the implementation of digitization is the easiest for this segment as compared to the other 2 industries. Since this is a service sector that has the properties of highest-degree of separation (since this has the characteristics of non-physical acts to the intangible assets of the consumers, or processing of information by them), the more self-sufficient the consumers would be the better it would be for the insurer, as the cost of marketing spend will reduce. As financial literacy makes a consumer self-sufficient, a lot of efforts is needed to make the consumers knowledgeable about insurance offerings. Insurance underwriters should spend time creating case studies and make those available online. Online content delivery should be made available customized to consumers need.

- **Product**

  In case of Insurance, digitization of services could be enabled by offering customized solutions. For example, pay-as-you-drive concept for auto insurer, could enable the consumers to trigger right questions such as what would be the optimum premium for a particular year. Highest degree of customization with respect to riders/benefits could be designed given the consumers’ life events scenarios. A lot of cross-selling opportunities could be leveraged.

- **Pricing**

  Given the customized offering, real-time pricing could be designed in case of insurance offering. Bundled pricing and customized pricing would benefit both insurer as well as consumers. Suppose there is a consumer whose driving is more
accident-prone, insurer could enable a value added service for the consumers to be alert on his/her driving pattern which might influence the premium amount. For example, with the help of telematics and such devices, if a driver is identified as a risky driver then there is a chance that the premium would be higher for him/her, and similarly lesser premium for safe drivers. These characteristics are individual driven, and would certainly trigger motivation and knowledge among consumers to assess themselves, in a way enable themselves to gather the right information.

- **Place**

  Delivery of insurance services could be very much online as well as offline depending on consumer’s level of comfort and ease of access to systems. Marketers should gather the right expectations and strategize accordingly. With the emergence of smart devices and new technological concepts such as cloud computing and Internet of Things, consumer reach is maximum. Insurers must devise their strategies to leverage the ubiquitous consumer presence.

- **Promotion**

  An integrated marketing communications would be the key, with series of customized advertisements. Since salesperson plays critical role in insurance, they must be well trained with the customer data & customer reports. They must remember that the customer finds the process generally of little interest therefore the conversations should be simple, direct and helpful. In many instances it may only be the salesperson who is able to explain the services on offer to the purchaser and therefore the purchaser will be influenced by their advice. Social media and e-
WoM are a definite place to be for the marketers. A series of real-life case studies should also be developed and used as pamphlets/brochures both on-line and during in-person meetings. Consumers would connect better to real-life scenarios which would enable motivation to search among them.

As a summary, we had taken up this study to understand the role of consumers since with the paradigm shift in services consumers are considered as co-creator of value. To have a broader perspective we had considered the services across the spectrum. As concluding comments, we would like to mention that across the three studies, we have found out that the individual dimensions play a significant role in consumer information search. Consumers’ attitude towards category influences abilities to search information being influenced by category knowledge and motivation to search. Perceived risk influences ability to search and extent of information search. Cost of search did not seem to be influencing the strength of relationship between ability to search and extent of information search. Marketers of individual sector practitioners should leverage the respective findings to devise their strategies by involving consumers and the online media. From a managerial point of view, customer connect would be the key going forward. Existing customers have the potential to participate for new customer acquisition healthcare, insurance and education providers can do cross and up-selling to the existing customers. Some marketers might already be following the approaches, however, this study scientifically proved that individual dimensions do matter in services as well.

In Summary, across the three services the providers should engage the customers, learn from them, customize the solutions/offerings and leverage the digitization and data for real-time and dynamic solutions. Plenty of consumer information are available across social media. Marketers should
make use of those to assess the market pulses, and design the solutions and offerings and use social media to communicate. Fundamentally, this is a time for a transformation in all aspects of Strategic Marketing with respect to changing times and from our findings it’s scientifically proven that Marketers must consider the changing minds as well. As the technology trend\textsuperscript{64} has predicted that in next 4-5 years mobile phones/wearables, social media, cloud computing and Internet of Things would take centre stage and drive customized solutions such as pay-as-you-drive insurance etc. Therefore, Marketers must take advantage of the findings and redefine their strategies to learn from consumers and get to mainstream real-time decision making. Base lining our thoughts from the changing world economy to the need of the time we realized that it would be beneficial to take up a research that would directly be in line with industry needs.

\textsuperscript{64} http://www.itbusinessedge.com/slideshows/top-10-strategic-technology-trends-for-2015.html
12. Limitations & Future Research Scope

Contextually, our research was limited to the study of B2C (Business-to-Consumer) sector. Though we intended to study in the B2B (Business-to-Business) domain initially, due to non-disclosure agreement with many B2B customers at the workplace it was not feasible to study. A comparative study in B2B may be looked upon as a future study.

We did not control for first-time vs repeat purchase, since all the three sectors that we had studied were of high-credence value. As per Nagle (1984), consumers of services with high-credence properties don’t exactly know what they were getting the first time they buy and even for repeat purchase. If the objective would be to study specifically to understand for first-time vs repeat purchase, a complete controlled experimental setup with very large sample size would be required (Nagle (1984).

A multi-group simultaneous controlled experimental study could be performed to assess the comparison across samples and classes of studies.