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Session

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## More is Not Always Better; The Pivotal Role of Desire for Control in Affecting Service Attitudes and Behavior

Many marketers and academics assume that customers always want control of the service experience and benefit (perceive value) from having more control (Namasivayam and Mount, 2006). However, empirical support for this assumption is limited.

The study proposes that beneficial effects will occur if the opportunity and capacity for control are aligned with desire for control. Conflicting control beliefs –on the other hand– will have a detrimental effect. The research question is: (How) does desire for control affect customer attitudes and behavior? To answer the research question, we conducted an experiment in a service context. We developed and produced 8 different video clips in which opportunity, capacity and desire for control were manipulated in a scenario. 379 students participated in the experiment. The results were analyzed with Man(c)ova.

The study demonstrates that the effect of capacity and opportunity for control is not always positive because the effect depends on desire for control. Customers having the desired level of opportunity and capacity for control are most satisfied (with self, the service provider, service process and service outcome); customers having more opportunity and capacity for control than desired are less satisfied and customers having less opportunity and capacity for control than desired are least satisfied. Furthermore, consistency with desire also increases the strength of positive behavioral intentions (like loyalty and positive word of mouth) and conflict with desire increases the strength of negative behavioral intentions (like complaining and switching).

The main theoretical conclusion of this study is therefore that more control is not always better: it is better when it is desired, but worse when it is not desired. The managerial implication is that the customer should be given the opportunity to choose *not* to exercise control.

This study demonstrates that the effect of opportunity and capacity for control in services is conditional and more complex than previously assumed.