



Vicarious innovativeness or vicarious learning: The role of existing vicarious innovativeness in new product purchase intentions



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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on the consumer innovativeness literature to examine the relationship between existing vicarious innovativeness scale and other forms of consumer innovativeness scales and its role on predicting new product purchase intentions in Australia and China. This study found that existing vicarious innovativeness scale is negatively associated with other forms of consumer innovativeness. Contrary to a significant body of academic research, this study demonstrates the ability of the existing vicarious innovativeness scale in predicting new product purchase intentions rather than new product adoption behaviour. The results have important implications by validating the existing vicarious innovativeness scale in a cross-cultural context. The results of this study question the existing vicarious innovativeness scale that it should only be considered as a measurement for vicarious learning. Instead, further research should seek additional sources of both innovators' and imitators' new product information acquisition in order to develop a proper scale to better measure vicarious innovativeness.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

本文参考有关消费者创新性的文献，研究现有的替代性创新等级与其他形式的消费者创新等级的关系，以及它对预测澳大利亚和中国市场对新产品购买意愿的作用。本研究发现现有的替代性创新等级与其他形式的消费者创新是此消彼长的关系。不同于大量的学术研究，本研究展示了现有替代性创新等级预测新产品购买意愿的能力，而不是新产品采用行为。本研究在跨文化环境下对现有的替代性创新等级进行了验证，从研究结果中能够看出重要的引申意义。本研究的结果质疑了现有替代性创新等级只能用于度量替代性学习的理论。相反，进一步研究应寻找关于“创新者”和“模仿者”对获取新产品信息的额外来源，以创造能够更好地测量替代性创新的等级。

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1. Introduction

During the last decade it has become increasingly clear that consumer innovativeness is most often that of the indicator of identifying consumer innovators in today's marketplace (Tellis et al., 2009). Most practitioners see launching new products continually as an advantage, targeting innovative consumers who are willing to deal with the risks and uncertainty associated with new products. This strategy seems initially appealing when based on the assumption that innovators or early adopters actively search new product information, quickly adopt new products, and positively spread their opinions

to others. Theoretically, they are the adequate circumstances of diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 2003).

But are those with a higher level of consumer innovativeness better able to learn about a new product offering through impersonal and/or personal communications? Im et al. (2007) define this new product information learning process as vicarious innovativeness. Although some research has been undertaken to determine the nature of vicarious innovativeness as one type of consumer innovativeness, relatively little can be advanced in the way of generalizations.

Substantial numbers of research suggest that consumer innovativeness plays a major role in influencing consumer acceptance of new products (Im et al., 2007; Roehrich, 2004), and a range of scales have been developed to measure it (Goldsmith and Hofacker, 1991; Kirton, 1976; Raju, 1980). However, the definition and measurement of consumer innovativeness generally lack

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consensus, and the strength of the relationship between scales measuring consumer innovativeness and adoption behaviour has been mixed (Hauser et al., 2006; Roehrich, 2004).

Various forms of consumer innovativeness are proposed to exist, including consumer innate innovativeness (CII) (Midgley and Dowling, 1978) and domain specific innovativeness (DSI) (Goldsmith and Hofacker, 1991). Empirical research suggests that consumer innate innovativeness has a significant impact on the adoption of product innovations (Citrin et al., 2000; Lassar et al., 2005; Rogers, 2003). Other studies find that domain specific innovativeness is a better measure to capture innovators and early adopters who have a higher tendency for new product adoption (Handa and Gupta, 2009; Klink and Athaide, 2010). In addition, Hirschman (1980) suggests vicarious innovativeness (VI) to the group of consumer innovativeness.

To date only three studies have investigated the relationship between vicarious innovativeness and new product/service adoption with different measurements of vicarious innovativeness (Chao et al., 2012; Im et al., 2007; Pagani, 2007). However, findings range from a positive relationship (e.g. Im et al., 2007; Pagani, 2007) to no connection (e.g. Chao et al., 2012). We propose that inconsistent results may occur because innovators/early adopters make their novel product purchase decision on their own (Midgley and Dowling, 1993). Other individuals' opinions have little influence on innovators/early adopters. Empirical investigations lack of evidence on measuring innovators' information acquisition behaviour. Existing research might use vicarious learning instead of vicarious innovativeness in consumer innovativeness studies. Thus, we propose that existing vicarious innovativeness scale might be the indicator of new product purchase intentions rather than new product adoption. As a result, it is necessary to validate existing vicarious innovativeness scale.

Drawing from Midgley and Dowling (1978), it is necessary to consider consumer innate innovativeness, domain specific innovativeness and vicarious innovativeness together and attempt to understand their relationship. In addition, it is also important to validate the existing vicarious innovativeness scale in other culture contexts. In order to address these issues, we empirically examine the relationships between these three consumer innovativeness constructs, and relate them to the purchasing intention of new products within the context of high tech consumer electronic products across Australian and Chinese consumers.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: The next section provides the theoretical background for the proposed research framework and review of previous empirical works, then the hypotheses for the relationships between vicarious innovativeness and other consumer innovativeness constructs. The final sections then address the empirical results before the contributions and practical implications are discussed.

2. Theory

2.1. Consumer innate innovativeness (CII)

Steenkamp et al. (1999) describe consumer innate innovativeness as the predisposition to purchase new products rather than to remain with previous choices. Prior studies suggest that consumer innate innovativeness is unchangeable, and each individual is born with a certain level of consumer innovativeness (Hynes and Lo, 2006). Empirical research identifies that understanding consumer innate innovativeness is considered to be the basic element to the success of the diffusion of product innovation (Hynes and Lo, 2006; Vandecasteele and Geuens, 2010). Various scales are available for measuring consumer innovativeness (Goldsmith and Hofacker, 1991; Kirton, 1976; Raju, 1980; Roehrich, 2004). Roehrich et al. (2003) classify these existing consumer innovativeness scales in three categories,

namely life innovativeness scales, consumer innovativeness scales, and domain specific innovativeness scale. As in the earlier discussion, this study considers consumer innate innovativeness as a predisposition of individuals. Consequently, the existing scales in the first category will be appropriate for the study to evaluate consumer innate innovativeness.

However, there are mixed results regarding CII – new product adoption relationship. Goldsmith et al. (1995) find that CII has no influence on adoption behaviour. Im et al. (2003, 2007) confirm a significant but weak relationship exists between CII and new product adoption. The relationship between consumer innate innovativeness and the adoption of product innovations in academic research is inconsistent (Im et al., 2007) and lacks consensus (Hauser et al., 2006; Roehrich, 2004). This observation suggests that consumer innate innovativeness may need further examination of its influences on new product adoption. More importantly, other than consumer innate innovativeness, it is necessary for the current study to investigate other types of consumer innovativeness such as domain specific innovativeness and vicarious innovativeness (Goldsmith et al., 1995; Im et al., 2007; Roehrich et al., 2003).

2.2. Domain specific innovativeness (DSI)

Prior studies suggest that consumer innovativeness has to be considered in a certain product category (Gatignon and Robertson, 1985). Im et al. (2003) conclude that consumer innovativeness and the adoption of new products should be considered as inconsistent across domains. Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991) develop domain specific innovativeness as another measurement scale of consumer innovativeness. Prior studies extend DSI to a variety of products and suggest a positive relationship between domain specific innovativeness and new product adoption (Klink and Athaide, 2010; Citrin et al., 2000; Flynn and Goldsmith, 1993b; Handa and Gupta, 2009). Empirical research expands DSI internationally including the U.S.A, Germany and France and found DSI to be the most useful scale to measure consumer innovativeness in a specific product category (Chakrabarti and Baisya, 2009; Handa and Gupta, 2009; Hynes and Lo, 2006; Klink and Athaide, 2010). The current study extends DSI to Australia and China.

2.3. Vicarious innovativeness (VI) or vicarious learning

Hirschman (1980) defines the communication process of new product information through mass media (advertising) and word of mouth as vicarious innovativeness, which is “the acquisition of information regarding a new product” (Hirschman, 1980, p. 285). In addition to advertising and word of mouth, Im et al. (2007) consider modelling to be the third component of vicarious innovativeness, and suggest that vicarious innovativeness has a degree of effect on new product adoption. However, their measurement of vicarious innovativeness seems to lack evidence in measuring innovators' new product information acquisition behaviour. In the study of Im et al. (2007), they examine advertising by asking respondents who report to have seen the selected new products in advertisements and new articles. Engel et al. (1969) suggest that innovators learn about new product information earlier than other individuals, and are frequently subscribers to specialized magazines relevant to new products. Internet is another source to innovators for new product information search (Rogers, 2003). As these suggestions, innovators make an extensive and systematic search for new product information. More sources need to be added in measuring advertising, one of the constructs of vicarious innovativeness.

Im et al. (2007) investigate word of mouth by asking respondents who report that they had personal conversations about the selected new products with others who own those products prior

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