

Determinants of Online Purchase Intention, Towards Firm Generated Content in Facebook

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Abstract

Customers' technology savviness and proneness to social media, have a positive influence towards the online purchase intention of branded products. These factors have a great contribution to generate positive inclination towards products. The Author developed and tested a conceptual model for the purchase intention towards content, generated by firms in the social media. In this study, not only the direct relationship between online purchase intention and customer technology savviness is measured, but also the mediating relationship between technology savviness and proneness to social media, and its impact on online purchase intention, was measured. In addition to the mediating effect of customer's proneness to social media, the impact of demographic variables such as age and education level effecting on online purchase intention, was also measured.

It has been found that customer technology savviness has a positive influence over online purchase intention of company products, influenced by firm generated content in social media. The study results revealed that customer technology savviness, leads to customer proneness towards social media. It was proven that proneness to social media has a direct and positive influence over online purchase intention of products. It was found that there is also a partial mediating effect of customer proneness to social media, in between, customer technology savviness and online purchase intention of products. It was hypothesized and was proven that that age and education do not have a positive influence, over online purchase intention of products.

Keywords: Firm Generated Content, Tech Savviness, Proneness to Social Media, Online Purchase Intention

Introduction

Social media are online applications and platforms, which are intended to facilitate collaboration and interaction,

by sharing of content in internet space. There is a large customer base for Social Media Messaging (SMM) activities. Brands are increasing their online presence through these activities, with a view to improve customer relationship. Twitter, Facebook and You Tube are common social media, where brands are increasing their marketing activities, which help in effective communication with customers. Ioană and Stoica (2014) stated that technology gives consumers immense connectivity-power to investigate products and services, to label them and criticize them in equal measure, and more. Therefore many companies have created web pages on social networks, to complement further information sharing, in order to encourage feedback from consumers about products and services. Social media interaction enhances the consumer connect with the firms, and they tend to relate more to a company, after reading various reviews and comments of those consumers, after their experiences on the company products. Brands are creating new services, products business models and values, through the understanding and insights derived from two-way communication through SMM activities. In his research report, Assael (1992) argued on the strong relationship between consumer behavior and marketing actions and how they are inseparably connected and bonded. These insights and understanding help marketing personnel, to orient their marketing strategy and strengthen relationships with customers. Study conducted by Kim (2012) showed that social media marketing activities have direct influence on customer equity, in terms of luxury fashion brand. Social media activities provide a formidable chance, to lessen prejudice and misunderstanding towards brands. It supports in enhancing and elevating brand value, and creating a platform to share information and ideas among online customers. Social media allow users to create, share and exchange information, ideas, career interest, and videos / pictures in virtual communities. It enables people

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to interact with each other, by consuming information and sharing through web based communication. Social media is a set of tools that allows marketing interaction between users. Services like email, discussion forums, blogs, microblogs, texting, chat, social networking sites, wikis, photo and video sharing sites, review sites, and multiplayer gaming communities facilitate communication between customers and firms. Social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram are some of the communication tools for internet users. These tools are being effectively used by the companies, to communicate and grab customer attention. The tools have huge communication and connection power. Fading traditional marketing tools is a challenge to the firms, where customers only receive passive information, through television advertising, and promotional selling. Social media marketing largely supports to have two way communication with customers, which prominently encourages users, to receive and search for information positively. Today's consumer has different demands than previous generations. They are technologically savvy and expect retailers to deliver an engaging customer experience both online and in-store, otherwise they'll simply choose to shop elsewhere. With unlimited access to product information, researching and purchasing a product, should be made fairly easy. Consumers expect product details, peer reviews, and competitor pricing to be made available for both online and in retail stores, to help them make an educated shopping decision. In fact, a new study from Kelsey and ConStat (2014) showed that 97% of all consumers use some form of online media, to research products, with an average of 7.9 different sources of information for local shopping.

Literature Review

E-Marketer (2015) and Ogilvy & Mather (2011) mentioned that with dramatic change in the media landscape in recent years, firms have embraced social media, as a means to engage with their customers. Recent business reports have suggested that total spending on social media advertising has increased worldwide (\$17.74 Billion in 2014 vs. \$11.36 Billion in 2013, which amounts to an increase of 56.2%) and that social media engagement drives sales very effectively.

Loren, Janofsky, and Albergotti (2014) have reported that more than 80% of marketers, are seriously concerned

about measuring the returns on investment from social media. Recently, the popular social networking site Facebook implemented certain policy changes, to filter out unpaid promotional material in users' news feeds that the corporate business companies post surreptitiously, as status updates. This policy change makes it difficult for business houses to reach their Facebook "fans" with marketing content that has not really been paid for. Although this example illustrates the value of firm-initiated content on firms' social media pages, it also calls into question the added value of such postings, beyond traditional media marketing platforms (e.g., television advertisements) and / or other digital media marketing communication (e.g., e-mails).

In this study, the relationship between the Customer Technology Savviness (CTS) and Proneness to Social Media (PSM) and its impact over Online Purchase Intention (OPI), are measured. In the fast changing business era, marketing technology has taken more advantage of the influence of social media, in promotions of concepts and products, the activities which are critical to firms. The wide reach and the power of social media, to engage people in their hangout places, makes it a relevant and popular media for marketing communications. In recent years, the online environment is viewed by users from a new perspective, in a commercial way. Development and the emergence of online stores, have turned users into consumers. Also, the most important role of social media has changed the way, as to how consumers and marketers communicate with each other in the internet space, using social platforms.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) specified that informational society, influences and affects the consumer decision making processes and product evaluations. Social media provides a new channel to acquire product information through peer level communication. As per Kozinets (1999), by using social media, consumers have the power to influence other buyers, through their reviews of products or services, which they consumer and used. Consumers are also influenced by other psychosocial characteristics like: income, purchase motivation, company presentation, company or brand's presence on social networks, demographic variable (age, sex, disposable income etc.), work place method of payment, type of stores (online or physical), etc. Given the unprecedented reach of social media, firms are increasingly relying on it, as a channel for effective and efficient marketing communication.

Firm Generated Content

Firm Generated Content (FGC) formally refers to the messages posted by firms, on their official social media pages, and they argue that FGC can help firms develop one-on-one relationships with their customers through social media's interactive nature. A recent business report by Lea (2012) has suggested that unlike in traditional media, the interaction between customers and firms over social media is mutually beneficial. Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) argued that FGC will positively affect customer behaviour for the following reasons: Firstly, similar to the role of traditional advertising, it helps in informing consumers of products and services and then driving sales. That means, FGC can help firms tell customers about their current product offerings, prices, and influence them with attractive promotional offers. Secondly, interactions with customers and virtual presence of other brand-aficionados or fans, can help in reinforcing favourable brand attitudes.

Naylor, Lamberton, and West (2012) referred to "mere virtual presence", as the passive exposure to a brand's supporters in social media and argued that the inferred commonality between a focal user and other users in a social media community, can create positive brand evaluations. Finally, when firms post content in social media, customers can respond by "liking" or commenting on the content, which can generate more positive brand evaluations.

Technology Savviness

Firms are constantly introducing new technologies to appeal to tech-savvy customers. For Macy's recently introduced an app that enables its tech-savvy customers to shop from catalogues, billboards, and magazine ads, as per Healey and Gomez (2013). Tech-savvy customers are accessible through multiple digital touch points, and as retailers and brands engage with such customers through FGC, the firm expect tech savvy customers to reciprocate by engaging more interactively with them through their social media platforms. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) stated that tech-savvy customers are also more likely to supplement information they receive from FGC with other online sources and derive greater benefits from social media engagement, thus leading to a greater response to FGC.

Proneness to Social Media

In digitally connected world, consumers are spending increasing amounts of time in online interaction with other consumers, with whom they may share common interests and consumption experiences. Naylor, Lamberton and West (2012) referred to such consumers as "social network-prone" consumers. Mere virtual presence of a brand's supporters in social media, can positively influence a focal consumer's purchasing behaviour. Social network-prone consumers will place greater value on the ability to connect with a firm's other customers, to share their consumption experiences and thus will be more receptive to social media engagement, as per arguments forwarded by Schulze, Scholer and Skiera (2014). Furthermore, customers who use social media regularly, will place more weight on the opinions of people with similar views and thus will likely exhibit a greater response to FGC and messages by other customers, in the social media community.

Social Media

According to Universal Maccann International, social media are defined as the "online applications, platforms and channels, which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and sharing of content". Social media have many forms such as; weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, video, rating etc. Hanna et al. (2011) in their research on social media, argued on the consumer's need to be technologically well-connected and networked. They highlighted the power of the social media and its ecosystem, to further the consumer connectivity need. Firms are actively using social media for marketing and advertising activities. Vinerean et al. (2013) highlighted the cascading effects of social media marketing on online consumer behavior. According to them, social media allows customers and prospects to communicate and interact directly to company's brand representative or pass on the brand recommendations to their friends and colleagues. Moreover, these evolving online marketing activities provide many advantages for firms, to reach customers by interactive two-way communications and thus, to perform integrated marketing communication activities with less efforts and costs than before.

The main objective of marketing activities, is to raise sales and profitability. The Internet is part of the day-to-day life of the vast majority of the world population, and within this environment, a new form of communication has gained prominence in recent years: social networking sites. It is one of the most effective and significant business development tools in the 21st century, because of its ability to connect individuals with others. The main aim of this research was to obtain insight into the impact of social networking on consumer behavior. Increasingly, consumers are looking at websites, as well as the habits and behaviors of peers, before making a decision on a product purchase or in selecting a type of entertainment service. Social networking breaks down barriers, between individuals, and builds communities. Internet has proven to be a lucrative communication channel, linking customers and organizations. As a result, for marketers, it had emerged as a splendid network or channel, to interact with consumers through social media tools.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Various researchers have conducted empirical studies on factors, which are related to the adoption of technological products such as different software, computers, and e-mail. Thus, these empirical studies are related to new age technological aspects of product adoption. However, there are few studies in the field of social media and firm generated content, influencing online purchase intention. An extensive literature review revealed that, not many empirical studies, which directly deals with consumer centric variables and online shopping behavior, especially in the area of firm generated content and social media, are done. There were a few studies in US and Germany conducted, but the contextual references are different. This study has, therefore, focused on social media and firm generated content in Facebook, and its influence on online purchase intention of consumers.

Problem Definition for the Study

The Research problem is to find out the influence of Customer Technology Savviness and Customer Proneness to Social Media, as Determining Factors of Online Purchase Intention, based on the Firm Generated Content in Facebook.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to find out the consumer centric variable related to social media and the content generated by the business entities, its direct and mediating effect on online purchase intention of firm's products. The impact or moderating effect of demographic variables such as age and education on online purchase intention, was also evaluated.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted in this study, was quantitative and descriptive research study. Exploratory study was conducted in the first phase, through intensive literature study, in order to understand the constructs and variables. The main constructs identified were customer technology savviness and proneness to social media influences. The proneness to social media was considered as a mediating construct, effecting online purchase intention. The research question was to study the relationship between the construct variables and online purchase intention. The Researcher referred a couple of journals with 'A' and 'A+' category rating, in order to solicit differential insights into the chosen research topic and to get an understanding of such similar studies, even if they were in different contextual references.

Based on the materials collected from the literature study, the researcher developed a theoretical model, and various hypotheses were formulated. Questionnaires were adopted from various tools developed by other Authors. A sample size of 150 online customers were chosen randomly.

The formulated questionnaire was sent to them and online data was collected. Google Forms were utilized to send the online questionnaire through e-mails, which were also sent through Whatsapp as well. The respondents were mostly from the students of Senior and Junior batch management students of Rajagiri Business School, Kochi. Respondents were spread across the State of Kerala. The target platforms for online data collection were social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp, in order to get diverse online customer response. Majority of the respondents were mostly using Facebook, whereas many of them were also found to be using Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp as well. Further, e-mails were sent to track and do follow up, for obtaining data feed from the respondents.

Variables of the Study

The variables used in the study are detailed in this section. They are:

- Independent variable: Customer Technology Savviness (CTS).
- Dependent variable: Online Purchase Intention (OPI).
- Mediating variable: Customer Proneness to Social Media (CPSM).
- Control variable: Age, Level of Education.

Measurement of Variables and Scaling

Items for measuring Customer Technology Savviness (CTS) variable were adopted from the tool developed by Kumar et al. (2016). Measurement items for the variable, Customer Proneness to Social Media (CPSM) - Effects of Firm-Generated Content in Social Media on Customer

Behavior – were adopted from Kumar et al. (2016). Online Purchase Intention (OPI) variable measurement items were taken from the tool developed by William et al. (2014).

Scaling technique used to measure the variable items was Likert Scale. Likert scale measures attitudes and behaviors, using answer choices that range from one extreme to another, and thus, allows researchers to uncover degree or intensity of customer’s opinion. Therefore, all the variables in the study were measured, using a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 for “strongly disagree” to 5 for “strongly agree”.

Conceptual Research Model

The research model for this study was conceptualized and developed by the Author, by considering a couple of relevant variables from the study conducted by Kumar et al. (2016). The proposed research model for online purchase intention towards Firm Generated Content in Facebook, is shown in Figure 1.0.

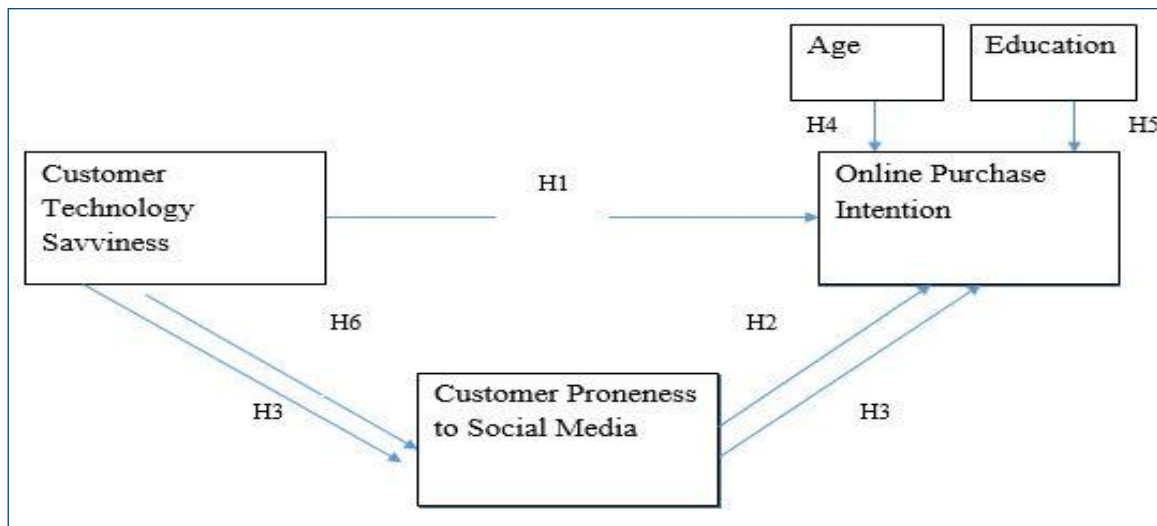


Fig. 1.0: Research Model Showing Independent Variable (CTS), Dependent Variable (OPI) and the Mediating Variable (CPSM). Age and Education are Moderating / Control Variable

Source: Compiled by the author.

Usage of Statistical Tools and Applications

The data collected from the respondents was examined, verified, edited wherever necessary, for completeness,

accuracy and reliability. Thereafter, data was further analyzed using statistical package SPSS and Amos.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which deals specifically with measurement models, that is relationship

between observed measures or indicators (e.g. Test items, test scores etc.) and latent variables or factors. It is important to examine whether the measure is appropriate for the population included in the current study. In using SEM, it is a common practice to use a variety of indices to measure model fit. In addition to the ratio of the χ^2 statistic to its degree of freedom, with a value less than 5 indicating acceptable fit, researchers recommended a handful of fit indices to assess model fit. These are the Goodness of Fit (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI).

A five point scale was used to measure the sub items of each of the variables, mentioned in section 6.1. The questionnaire respondents were asked to specify their choices for each of the sub items of these major variables, using a five-point Likert's scaling technique (strongly disagree, strongly agree, agree, neutral, and strongly agree). The score 1 was represented for the option "strongly disagree", while the score 5 on the scale, represented the category "strongly agree", for all the positive questions. Cronbach's reliability test was used to test the degree of consistency or stability of the scale adopted.

Data Analysis, Results and Interpretation

The collected data was transformed into a form that was easy to understand and interpret. Mean and Standard Deviation for each of the variables in the model, were obtained. Means of all variable items (total of 11 items) were well above the neutral position (mean > 2.5). These results indicated a strong level of agreement among respondents on each of the statements used for measuring variables in this survey. The descriptive statistics of measurement items for each constructs, are discussed in the sub sections below:

Customer Technology Savviness

Three questions were asked to measure this variable customer technology savviness. All the questions were rated highly by most of the respondents. The mean and standard deviations of the question items are in the Table 1.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation of items measuring Customer Technology Savviness in the Model

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I prefer to read information on the internet rather than in a brochure.	3.64	.999
2	I am interested in new technology.	4.03	1.126
3	It is easy to locate the information I want on the internet.	4.01	1.117

Source: compiled by the author

Customer Proneness to Social Media

Four questions were asked to measure this variable customer proneness to social media. Question 1 and 2 showed higher means, as these were related to Facebook and product brands in social media space, with values 3.64 and 3.36. However, for the last two questions, with mean values, 3.25 and 3.28 respectively, customers showed an inclination in between 'neutral' and 'agree' stands. The values are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation of Items Measuring Customer Proneness to Social Media in the Model

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Social networking websites such as Facebook are a part of my everyday activity.	3.64	1.232
2	I follow companies and their brands using social networking websites or online blogs.	3.36	1.205
3	I would be sorry if my social network website shuts down.	3.25	1.154
4	I feel out of touch when I do not log onto a social networking website	3.28	1.101

Source: compiled by the author

Online Purchase Intention

Four question were used to measure the online purchase intention, all the four questions showed in the Table 1.2,

have a mean value of 3.3 and more, which shows an agreement towards online purchase intention.

Table 1.2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Items Measuring Online Purchase Intention in the Model

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I will definitely buy products from the website of advertisers in the near future.	3.33	1.007
2	I intend to purchase through these websites in the near future.	3.45	1.013
3	It is likely that I will purchase through these websites in the near future.	3.43	.966
4	I expect to purchase through these websites in the near future.	3.45	1.108

Source: compiled by the author

Validation and Acceptability of the Model

This section deals with the testing of the model fitness and hypotheses testing. A two-step approach was employed in this study, where confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the measurement model and path analysis was used to test the structural model. The results obtained when the model was tested and run in the IBM Amos, are:

- Chi-square test of goodness of fit - Minimum fitness was achieved.
- Chi-square value = 126.900
- Degrees of freedom = 59
- Probability level = .01

The structural model between CTS, OPI and CPSM is depicted in the figure 2 below:

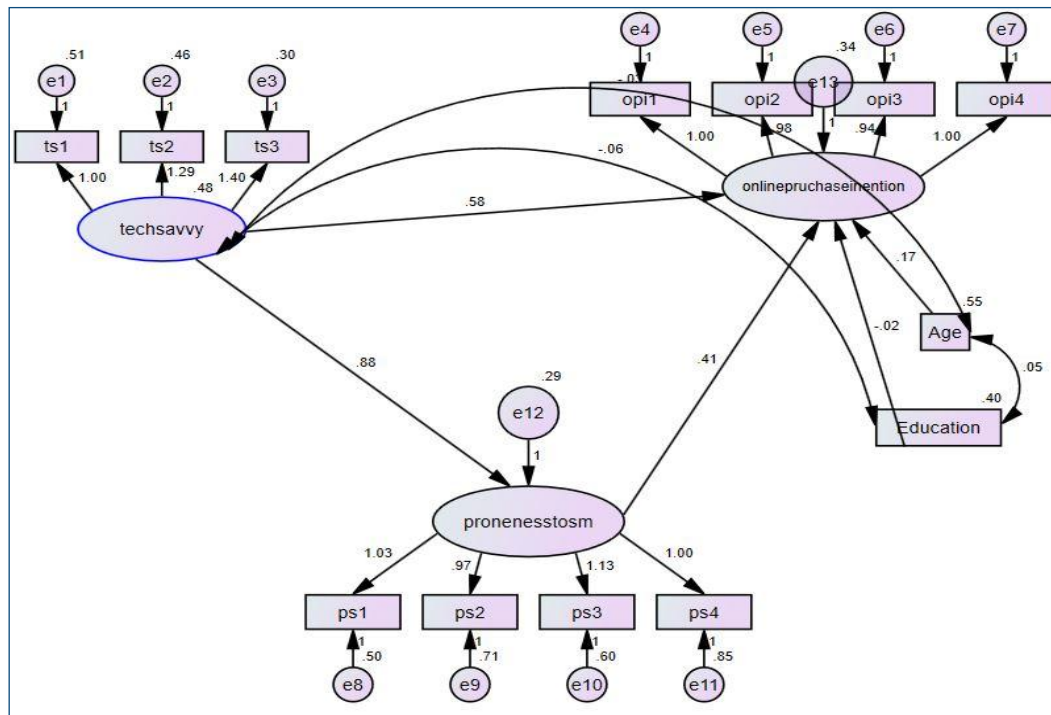


Fig. 2: The Structural Model Depicting Relationships Between CTS, OPI and CPSM, with Age and Education as Moderating / Control Variables

Source: compiled by the author

Model Fitness Test

The proposed model was tested for fitness through CFA and the fitness indices scores are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The Model Fitness Indices of the OPI (Online Purchase Intention) Model, Recommended Value, Actual Score and Result

Index	Score	Recommended Value	Result
GFI	.892	>.80	Accepted
RMSEA	.072	<0.08	Accepted
NFI	.096	>0.090	Accepted
CFI	.937	>0.09	Accepted
$\chi^2/d.f$	2.151	<5.0	Accepted

Source: compiled by the author

Hypotheses testing results are tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4: Hypotheses, Paths, Path Coefficient, CR Value and Result

Hypotheses	Hypothesized Path	Path Coefficient	CR (Critical Ratio) Value	Result
H1	CTS > OPI	.582	3.439	Supported***
H2	CPS>OPI	.408	2.834	Supported***
H4	Age >OPI	.174	2.310	Not Supported
H5	Education > OPI	-.016	-1.87	Not Supported
H6	CTS>CPS	.883	6.100	Supported***

Source: compiled by the author

Note: *** indicates strong significance.

Mediating Variable Role

The role of mediating variable, Customer Proneness to Social Media (CPSM) in influencing Online Purchase Intention (OPI) was tested. The results indicated that there was a strong mediating effect of CPSM on OPI, whereas direct influence of Customer Technology Savviness (CTS) was more prominent on OPI. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Hypotheses, Paths, Path Coefficient, CR Value and Result

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Standardized Coefficient		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
Online Purchase Intention	Customer Technology Savviness (CTS)	0.582	0.275	0.942
	Customer Proneness to Social Media (CPSM)	0.408	0	0.408

Source: compiled by the author

Summary of Major Findings

It has been found that customer technology savviness has a strong and direct positive influence over online purchase intention. It was also proven that customer tech savviness leads to customer proneness to social media. It was also proven that proven that proneness to social media has positive influence over online purchase intention. It was revealed that there is also a partial mediation effect by customer proneness to social media, in between customer tech savviness and online purchase intention. Demographic variable Age and Education have a positive influence over online purchase intention, but when the hypotheses was tested it has been proven wrong that age and education have a positive influence over online purchase intention.

Limitations of the Study

This model may not be applicable to media other than social media, as it is purely limited to firm generated content in social media and its aspects.

Scope for Further Research

This study addresses a wider concept, that is, social media and firm generated content in general terms. Therefore, scope for further research studies in more specific areas may bring out more interesting results.

Conclusion

This research is an empirical study, with comprehensive data analysis, making use of structural equation model (SEM), which employed to achieve a better understanding of the collected information. Results from this study indicated that the Customer Tech Savviness and Proneness to social media has a positive effect on online purchase intention. In this research, it has proven that customer tech savviness positively influences proneness to social media. It was also necessary to find out the mediating relationship of proneness to social media, in between tech savviness and online purchase intention. From the data analysis, it has been found that there is a partial mediation of proneness to social media on online purchase intention. However, the demographic variables such as age and education of the respondents, don't have positive influence over online purchase intention. It was proven that model is fit and it can be used for further research. Therefore, companies who are actually playing in the online space, can actually make more efficient practices to bring quality contents through social media, and increase their business opportunities. Also the social media space is actually playing a vital role in creating business opportunities. So, companies can focus on marketing strategies, that are meant for Tech Savvy People and people who are prone to social media. Lastly, but not the least, the Author appreciates and acknowledges the efforts put in, the strong support and contribution given by Mr. Ashwin Pavery, a final year PGDM (Post Graduate Diploma in Management) student of Rajagiri Business School, Kochi for the research work.

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