

INTERNET MAVENS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Internet penetration is growing dramatically in the emerging economy of India. Between 2000 and 2007, India's Internet penetration grew by 700%. Still, it remains at an estimated 3% (Sinha, 2007). Although the overall penetration rate in the country remains small, Indian e-commerce, which reached \$130 million USD in 2004-2005 was predicted to quadruple in the following three years (Internet & Online Association of India, 2005). With the overall Indian retail market expected to increase by almost 90% by 2012 (Krishnamurthy, 2008) it follows that the potential and ultimate growth of e-commerce in the sub-continent should be significant. Reflecting on a 27% increase in Indian users on the Internet between May 2007 and May 2008, Jack Flanagan, Executive Vice President of comScore, a global Internet information provider, commented, "India truly represents one of the most promising emerging Internet markets, given both the size and technological sophistication of the population" (comScore, 2008).

This study examines whether the Internet maven construct, first identified in the United States, exists amongst the online population in India. Internet mavens, an extension of the market maven, are savvy Internet users who act as sources of consumer information for others. Just as the market maven has been found to have more knowledge of and interest in the overall marketplace, Internet mavens, relative to others online, have developed similar characteristics in the virtual world and as a result are perceived as Internet mavens. As such, they are expected to exhibit greater knowledge of the virtual marketplace, greater interest in and enjoyment of using the Internet, have higher levels of usage of the Internet for a variety of purposes, and have acquired more information on products/services from this medium.

In this study, Internet mavens are identified in the Indian population. Various aspects of Internet usage (amount, purpose, and enjoyment) are found to be predictors of Internet mavenism. Further, Internet mavens are found to more fully trust the Internet as a source of consumer information and to see the Internet as more essential to their day-to-day life than do non-mavens. Mavens were found to have significantly higher household incomes than non-mavens however despite looking across a variety of additional variables, no clear demographic profile of the Indian Internet maven emerged.

The study offers support for the existence of Internet mavens amongst the population of Indian Internet users. These individuals might be expected to play a valuable role in guiding other Indian consumers through a period of great growth in consumer opportunities and retail activity in the country. Thus their continued study should be valuable.

References available upon request