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# Technological opinion leadership: The role of personal innovativeness, gadget love, and technological innovativeness

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## ABSTRACT

This study contributes to existing literature by developing and testing a model of factors that drive technological opinion leadership (TOL). We expand Bruner and Kumar's (2007) study by empirically testing the relationships between technological innovativeness and technological opinion leadership and between gadget lovers and technological innovativeness using a student sample and a national sample. We also contribute to the literature by (a) testing the relationships between personal innovativeness, technological innovativeness, and gadget lovers, and (b) investigating the mediational role of gadget lovers between personal innovativeness and technological innovativeness.

Results indicate: (1) technological innovativeness and gadget lovers are predictors of technological opinion leadership, (2) personal innovativeness is positively related to technological innovativeness and gadget lovers, and (3) gadget lovers partially mediate the relationship between personal innovativeness and technological innovativeness. Implications for managers and scholars are provided based on the two studies' results.

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## 1. Introduction

High-tech gadgets, such as iPad Air and Combi Monitor are becoming a part of everyday life. As technology advances, the acceptance of new gadgets advances in the marketplace as well. These innovative/novel products not only solve problems older products have but also provide new benefits, attributes, and functions for consumers.

Though research on innovation exists, the literature mainly focuses on the adoption and diffusion of innovation (Bartels & Reinders, 2011; Hauser, Tellis, & Griffin, 2006; Rogers, 1995). Most studies focus on the characteristics innovative products have that enhance diffusion into the marketplace. There is, however, scant research related to the constructs that serve as predictors of technological opinion leadership (TOL). Within the marketing field, we are aware of only two studies, Bruner and Kumar (2007) and Rogers (2003), which discuss the notion of technological opinion leadership.

In the literature, there are also studies on opinion leadership as a global construct. For example, Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) deal with

the motivational factors of opinion leaders. Ruvio and Shoham's (2007) study showcases the importance of new product/brand usage, information seeking, and risk taking as important attributes of opinion leaders. However, few studies research the constructs that serve as predictors for domain specific opinion leadership, e.g., technological opinion leadership.

This study contributes to the existing literature by integrating and testing a model of TOL built around and extending beyond the predictors of opinion leadership that exist in literature. More specifically, we empirically test two constructs, technological innovativeness and gadget lovers, which are not tested for their effect on TOL in Bruner and Kumar's (2007) study. We also study the relationship between gadget lovers and technological innovativeness.

Beyond extending Bruner and Kumar's study, this study also contributes to the literature by (a) empirically testing the relationships between personal innovativeness, technological innovativeness, and gadget lovers and (b) examining the mediational role of gadget lovers between personal innovativeness and technological innovativeness.

We first review existing literature, which includes factors that motivate individuals toward technological innovativeness and technological opinion leadership, then develop the hypotheses based on these factors. The methodology used for this study is described, followed by the presentation of findings. The results are discussed, and implications for managers and scholars are followed by limitations and suggestions for future research.

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## 2. Literature review and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Technological opinion leadership (TOL)

The construct of opinion leader originates from the work of sociologists Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948). In the 1960s, Rogers, and others who placed the term in the context of theories of diffusion of innovation in the marketplace, expands the idea Lazarsfeld and his colleagues proposed about opinion leaders. According to Rogers and Cartano (1962), “opinion leaders exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others” (p. 435). These leaders assume an important role in providing information and leadership to others as they make consumption decisions (Childers, 1986). Opinion leaders are influential members of a community, group, or society to whom others turn for advice, opinions, and views. They have the ability to influence public opinion because they are not only knowledgeable but also highly respected for their expertise. According to Goldberg, Lehmann, Shidlovski, & Barak (2006), opinion leaders are either experts, people who have a wide knowledge and understanding of a specific product category or social connectors, people who have many connections and tend to engage others (Goldberg et al., 2006). Whether socially, politically, or economically, opinion leaders exist in all areas of society (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). However, technological opinion leadership is a more domain specific construct (Rogers, 2003), meaning a leader's expertise and influence are usually related to a specific area of influence. Thus, technological opinion leaders are expert connectors.

Technological opinion leaders are individuals who attempt to influence peoples' opinions and their purchasing behaviors in a specific product field. These opinion leaders tend to be less dogmatic (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 1980), more innovative (Myers & Robertson, 1972), and they possess an affinity for technology (Geissler & Edison, 2005). They tend to be highly competent regarding the use of new high-tech products and have an impact on others' attitudes and actions. For this study, *technological opinion leaders* are defined as consumers who provide information to other consumers and influence their purchase decisions for technological products (Bruner & Kumar, 2007).

Although technological opinion leadership (TOL) is a fast emerging phenomenon, there is limited research on this domain specific area. The few research studies conducted in domain specific opinion leadership areas deal with issues like diffusion of new drugs (Iyengar, Bulte, & Valente, 2010) and technology (Bruner & Kumar, 2007). Bruner and Kumar (2007) found the existence of a strong relationship between gadget lovers and TOL, whereas Rogers (2003) indicated the importance of opinion leaders in the diffusion of technological innovations in a social network.

Excluding the Bruner and Kumar (2007) and Rogers (2003) studies, we have not been able to identify studies that address technological opinion leadership.

### 2.2. Personal innovativeness (PI)

Agarwal and Prasad (1998) define *personal innovativeness* as a risk taking propensity that arises in certain individuals and not in others. These individuals are willing to take chances and to try new things and are able to cope with high levels of uncertainty (Bruner, Hensel, & James, 2005). The construct personal innovativeness has an extensive presence in innovation diffusion research, as Rogers (1995) mentions, and in the domain of marketing specifically (e.g., Midgley & Dowling, 1978; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993; Agarwal & Prasad, 1998). In marketing literature, this construct is used for segmenting consumers into “innovators” and “non-innovators.”

The literature describes personal innovativeness as *global* or *general innate innovativeness*, a more abstract level than realized or actualized innovativeness (Midgley & Dowling, 1978; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993; Agarwal & Prasad, 1998). According to Midgley and Dowling (1978), innovativeness is “a function of dimensions of human personality”

(p. 235), and it is possessed by all individuals to a greater or lesser degree. Both theoretically and empirically, personal innovativeness is seen as a key variable in the innovation adoption process. Literature demonstrates the direct positive relationship between personal values and innovativeness (Hartman & Samra, 2008). Similarly, other studies (e.g., Leonard-Barton & Deschamps, 1988) also showcase personal innovativeness, an individual's receptivity toward change, as an important determinant in new technology adoption and innovation success.

Past studies show personal innovativeness, also labeled as global innovativeness - a more abstract level of innovativeness, as positively correlated with domain specific innovativeness (Bartels & Reinders, 2011). Consistent with the literature, this study accepts an individual's receptivity toward taking chances or trying new things should lead to his/her desire for innovativeness toward technological goods. Personal traits, such as an individual's openness-to-take chances, may be a better indicator of their innovativeness.

Based on the above statement, it is expected individuals who like to take chances and experiment with new ways of doing things should be motivated to be the first to own or adopt a new technology-based good or service, a concept known as technological innovativeness (Bruner & Kumar, 2007). Thus, we hypothesize:

**H1.** *Personal innovativeness is positively related to technological innovativeness.*

Personal innovativeness is a personality trait associated with risk taking individuals. Gadget lovers are consumers with a high intrinsic motivation to adopt and use a variety of leading-edge technology-based goods, and they can be presumed to be challenge seekers because they enjoy experimenting with leading edge technological goods/high-tech products where a certain level of uncertainty is involved. In general, personal innovativeness, characterized by a risk taking propensity and ability to cope with uncertainty, is more salient in gadget lovers who are presumed to be knowledgeable about gadgets. By using the new gadgets, they become more knowledgeable about them, enhancing their coping skills to handle new technology and the uncertainties or challenges that may arise while using them. The ability to cope with uncertainty allows gadget lovers to generate a high intrinsic motivation that drives them to use a variety of leading edge technological goods, as well as the services that complement them (Bruner & Kumar, 2007). Gadget lovers are willing to take on the challenge because new technology provides new benefits, features, and functions, and the usage of these high-tech goods excites them while enhancing their knowledge. Leonard-Barton and Deschamps (1988) conceptualize individuals who are willing to take challenges are more likely to adopt and/or use new products or services. Similarly, one can argue individuals who are willing to take chances are more likely to use leading edge technological goods and high-tech products, such as iPad Air, Combi Monitor, etc. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**H2.** *Personal innovativeness is positively related to gadget lovers.*

### 2.3. Technological innovativeness (TI)

Technological innovativeness is more *domain specific* innovativeness, i.e., innovativeness within a specific domain of interest such as technological goods (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993). Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991) first launched the idea of domain-specific innovativeness, and this concept has been applied in different domains such as fashion (Goldsmith, Kim, Flynn, & Kimm, 2005), consumer products (Goldsmith & Flynn, 1992), and information technology (Agarwal & Prasad, 1998; Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000). Domain specific innovativeness is important because it predicts innovative consumer behavior more accurately (Leavitt & Walton, 1975).

The literature defines *Technological innovativeness* as the extent to which a consumer is motivated to be the first to adopt new

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