

Chapter 2

Social Influence History and Theories

Give me a firm place to stand I will move the world.

Archimedes of Syracuse

Abstract Social influence is an umbrella concept encompassing the work of many theorists such as Paul Lazarsfeld famous for social communication theory and E.M. Rogers known for diffusion of innovation theory. Theories are useful for structuring thought and knowledge about consumer behavior such as how an innovation is communicated through channels over time to members of a social network. Researchers have found that certain people, opinion leaders whether online or offline, are more central and influential than others in a group. The Two-Step Flow Model illustrates that ability and access are crucial to gaining successful influence.

Foundations of Social Influence

Do you want a spiked milkshake that costs \$7.50 with an added brandy infused cherry for an extra dollar? This was a menu item advertised by a new restaurant across from a college campus. Students said they would not pay the extra dollar for a cherry but they would be interested how it tasted and whether it was worth the extra dollar. Advertising is a social influencer; the in-class discussion was another. Chapter two is about the foundations of the study of social influence. Where did it come from? How do things catch on? Who first thought of selling combinations of milkshakes and liquor? On another subject, why was sterling silver flatware (spoon, knife, fork, place setting, or serving piece) once a typical wedding gift for upper middle class Americans and now stainless steel or silver plated flatware are more likely requested on wedding registries? How do styles and ways of behaving change? How does technology influence our lives? Who are the players? What are the triggers? What is the cultural value of knowing about social influence? What gets more word of mouth—Starbucks or Apple? So much

is out there, how do you measure consumer behavior shifts, tastes, or track trends let alone figure out how they happened? If we look to the past, perhaps we can find some answers.

Social influence has many branches with issues such as compliance and reactance introduced in the first chapter. It is an umbrella concept encompassing various theories such as social communication. Leading theorists include Paul Lazarsfeld famous for social communication theory and E.M. Rogers who advanced social communication theory and added diffusion of innovation theory. Much of their research is about how humans make decisions and what affects these decisions, whether voting decisions or purchasing decisions. On the basis of this research, theories of human behavior can be formed.

Theory is as an organized system of ideas or beliefs that can be measured; it is a system of assumptions or principles. The word ‘theory’ comes from the Greek verb *theorein* (to behold or contemplate). We form theories, for example, when we wonder why a couple has decided to marry or divorce. We look for clues to the outcome—why is the couple compatible or not compatible? A theory summarizes what is known about a phenomenon and permits the formation of hypotheses, or predictions about future occurrences (Goldsmith 2013, p. 45).

One could theorize that social influence is a balancing act between self-interest and the interests of others. In other words, do I listen to my inner voice (an internal source) when I make decisions and look out for myself first or do I think about consequences for others?

...experience suggests that when consumer behavior is involved that balance often becomes more oriented towards self-interests. Whether one wishes to emphasize the importance of emotions, relationships with others, dissonance reduction, negativity bias, or some other process, consumer behavior is ultimately about meeting self-defined needs. Although it seems somewhat narcissistic, consumer behavior is generally about ‘me’, and when it appears to be about ‘you’ that is because something about ‘you’ is important to ‘me’. In a very real sense ‘self’ focus is often a necessary condition for the effects of social influence on consumer behavior to occur (Howard 2012, p. 132).

Theories are useful to structure one’s thoughts and knowledge about behaviors. An agreed upon theory that applies to most situations from investing in stocks to buying groceries is that past behavior is a strong predictor of future behavior. People tend to buy the same brand of orange juice and laundry detergent for years. To get them to switch brands will take enormous effort on the part of companies and part of that strategy may include free samples or other types of promotions. A Whole Foods store grand opening in Tallahassee, Florida offered free continental breakfast in the parking lot from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 500 free goodie bags before the store opened at 9:00 a.m. The week before this grand opening the store offered tents and space outside for fundraising causes such as Sustainable Tallahassee. In one evening \$5000 was raised. Promotions and offers are types of marketing influence. Later in the year, a competing grocery store in the same city, Publix, gave away green-colored reusable to carry groceries tote bags to the first 1000 customers at a grand re-opening of a renovated store.

Sometimes marketing communications campaigns or events fall short of expectations. A famous soda company made the mistake of putting a holiday motif on their soda cans which changed the appearance so much that loyal customers could not find it or were picking up the wrong version, non-caffeinated versus their preferred choice of caffeinated. As sales dropped and as complaints poured in, they quickly changed back to their conventional can design. The same held true for an orange juice producer who changed the design on the package enough to confuse consumers who thought maybe the contents had changed too. Within three months, the old design was back and sales resumed.

On the other hand, some new package designs succeed and “new and improved” is a slogan that sells. It all depends on the product and the skill of the designer and thorough marketing research before it hits the shelves. Innovators want to try something new, take risks so they are attracted to new products, stores, and services.

An established brand will try and retain loyal customers while seeking new customers with a feature or price that attracts. Why offer one type of hamburger when you can offer fifteen? This is easily done by adding bacon, different kinds of cheese, pickles, lettuce, onions, salsa, tomatoes, and avocado. One restaurant advertised 4000 different combinations were possible given twelve kinds of sauces and lots of other add-ons. Another restaurant offered 100 craft beers, 15 types of signature burgers, and 16 spiked milkshakes and endless options with design-your-own burgers.

The primary function of theory is to organize observations and other forms of information. We use theories to make sense of our world. Theories are abstract but once they are applied, put into action we see the usefulness of theories. Theorists often develop models which are representations or schematics or illustrations of relationships. They are used to take an intangible into a visual so the relationships are easier to understand and follow. Examples are the Social Influence Model illustrated in the first chapter or sets of blueprints of houses, office buildings, or boats. Blueprints which used to be flat and two dimensional are now replaced or complemented with three-dimensional models which can be easily made with 3-D printers or are shown on computers.

Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz: Social Communication Theory and the Two-Step Flow Model

Social influence theory within social communication theory was posited by Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues in the 1940s and 1950s. Their focus was on the power of informal communication as a complement to the influence of mass media. They discovered that informal communication is widespread and that certain people were more central and influential than others in a group. They termed these individuals ‘opinion leaders’, thereby instigating a major topic of

research that confirmed, expanded, and refined this idea (Weimann 1994). The theory has since been applied to political science, education, marketing, and a host of other fields. For example, studies of social networking activity find that social influence is not evenly distributed among cybercitizens, but instead, opinion leaders arise to be particularly influential on the Internet just as they are offline (Kozinets et al. 2010). They can be called e-influentials and are actively tracked by a number of public relations firms including Burson-Marsteller (see <http://www.burson-marsteller.com>).

Social communications theory goes by several other names such as “opinion leadership”, “word-of-mouth”, “talk”, or “buzz.” It can be traced to the groundbreaking 1940 study of the presidential election in an Ohio city by Columbia University’s Professor Lazarsfeld who found that the mass media had a small effect on how people voted compared to personal influence such as word of mouth.

Interviewing people about what influenced their decisions, the study found that, rather than starting from above and percolating down, influence appeared to be ‘horizontal.’ Each social stratum had its own opinion leaders – the neighborhood barber swapping insights throughout the day with his customers, for example. The media’s effect was ‘two-step’: the opinion leaders would digest the articles and broadcasts and then disseminate what they’d learned, mixed with their personal reflections, to their circle of friends and acquaintances (Keller and Berry 2003, p. 18).

This was expounded upon further in *Personal Influence*, a 1955 book authored by Elihu Katz and Lazarsfeld. They interviewed women in Decatur, Illinois about not only voting decisions but also about fashions, movies, groceries, and civic affairs. They found again that personal influence (vs. mass media) weighed heavily on their decisions. Younger women noticed what older women bought. Even today, grocery stores often use middle-aged women as product demonstrators and sample distributors as they are thought by younger consumers to be more knowledgeable about cooking and food. This may not be the case with other products such as electronics products where often the salespeople are younger men and women.

Katz and Lazarsfeld said that individuals interact with other individuals to transmit information and hence, influence each other, and further, that this influence is far more powerful than that previously recognized. This solidified the two-step model of communication and this stands today as one of the seminal models for consumer research. Marketers pass information to market influencers also called opinion leaders who subsequently pass this information to other consumers within their network. To explain this further, here are the two steps:

1. The market influencer has the ability to diffuse information (they are in a position to move information along).
2. The market influencer or opinion leader has access to a network of people through which to pass the information along.

So, ability and access are the keys to success as far as gaining influence. Public relations executives knowing this have long tried to reach opinion leaders at high-profile events such as the Olympics, the SuperBowl, or the Academy Awards, or to feature them in their advertisements. Well-known Roper opinion pollsters

focused on the government and political realm by saying for a person to qualify as an Influential in the government or political realm, they should do three or more items in the Critical Thinking box.

Critical Thinking

Circle the letters of the activities you have done and then determine if you are an influential (three or more) and explain what you think about that and what are your future plans for more or less involvement.

Here is a list of things some people do about government or politics. Have you done any of these things in the past year? Which ones and why?

- (a) Written or called any politician at the state, local, or national level.
- (b) Attended a political rally, speech, or organized protest of any kind.
- (c) Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs.
- (d) Held or run for political office.
- (e) Served in a committee for some local organization.
- (f) Served as an officer for some club or organization.
- (g) Written a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine or called a live radio or TV show to express an opinion. Writing a blog or going online also fits here.
- (h) Signed a petition.
- (i) Worked for a political party.
- (j) Made a speech.
- (k) Written an article for a magazine or newspaper.
- (l) Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government.

Note: Over the years these questions have been modified slightly, for example, letter e would include twitter and other ways to express or share opinions and I have added to g to modernize it. Primary source: Keller and Berry (2003, pp. 19–20)

Everett M. Rogers: Diffusion of Innovation

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory about how ideas, products, and inventions go through an adoption process can be illustrated by the following case study, an advertisement about CISCO, a company known for networks and innovations.

Case Study

TOMORROW starts here

Today, it's easy to marvel at how far we've come.

Our phones talk to our TVs to record our favorite shows. Doctors in Estonia diagnose patterns in Denmark. Social networks help companies improve customer service.

And yet, up to now, more than 99 % of our world is not connected to the Internet.

But we're working on it.

And, tomorrow, we'll wake up pretty much everything else you can imagine.

Trees will talk to networks will talk to scientists about climate change.

Stoplights will talk to cars will talk to road sensors about increasing traffic efficiency.

Ambulances will talk to patient records will talk to doctors about saving lives.

It's a phenomenon we call the Internet of Everything—an unprecedented opportunity for today's businesses.

Tomorrow?

We are going to wake the world up. And watch, with eyes wide, as it gets to work.

#tomorrowstartshere

Source: CISCO advertisement, *Fast Company*, June 2013.

E.M. Rogers has been an active researcher and publisher for decades and his influence on current day business practice is enormous. His first edition of *Diffusion of Innovations* came out in 1962 in which he described a general diffusion model and in subsequent editions he has updated and given more examples of research about this model. The S-shaped curve of innovation diffusion (a simple diagram showing percent of adoption over time) led to a bell-shaped curve to illustrate the rate at which new products, services, or ideas are typically adopted (see Fig. 2.1).

Rogers says:

Diffusion is the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas. *Communication* is a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. This definition implies that communication is a process of convergence (or divergence) as two or more individuals exchange information in order to move toward each other (or apart) in the meanings that they give to certain events....Diffusion is a special type of communication in which the messages are about a new idea (Rogers 2005, pp. 5–6).

The newness he describes is necessary to understand the whole process of diffusion because newness implies a degree of uncertainty. Will the new idea (or

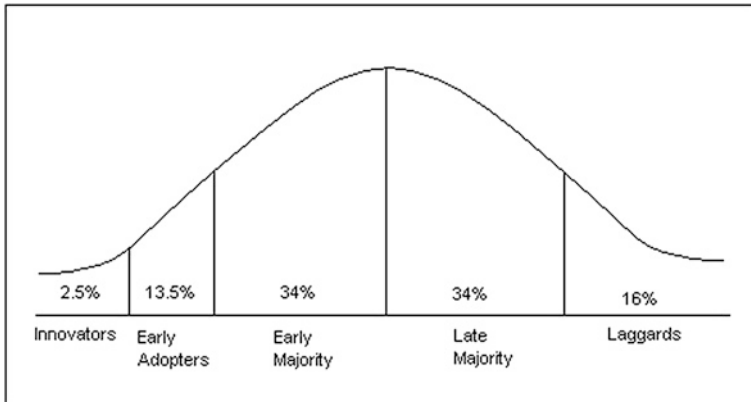


Fig. 2.1 Adopter categories of innovativeness. Adapted from E.M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th edition, New York: The Free Press, 2005

product) be adopted or not? Uncertainty implies unpredictability, risk-taking. More information about the idea should reduce uncertainty and boost consumer confidence. Rogers in his book *Diffusion of Innovations* uses the word diffusion to refer to both planned and spontaneous spread of new ideas or inventions.

The four main elements or steps in diffusion are

1. An innovation (idea, practice, or object)
2. Is communicated (over channels)
3. Over time
4. Among members of a social system

Further descriptions of each step are as follows:

Innovations can be anything from a new religious practice to water pumps in an African village. It can be applied to art, enterprise, or science or any other domain. Most often, though, innovation includes technological advances. Technology can be defined in several ways such as knowledge applied to useful purposes or the application of scientific method and materials to achieve objectives. Diffusion is about how the technological advance or new way of doing things spreads throughout a given population. Counterbalancing this need for innovation is the concern for impact on the quality of the environment; hence, this book also addresses sustainability. Sustainability includes searching for innovations, processes, and products that preserve the environment for future generations, that enhance rather than pollute or destroy.

Communication channels are the means by which the message is transmitted whether it be print, broadcast media, word of mouth, the Internet, or a host of other means. According to Rogers:

Mass media channels are more effective in creating knowledge of innovations, whereas interpersonal channels are more effective in forming and changing attitudes toward a new idea, and thus in influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea. Most individuals

evaluate an innovation not on the basis of scientific research by experts but through the subjective evaluations of near peers who have adopted the innovation. These near peers thus serve as role models whose innovation behavior tends to be imitated by others in their system (2005, p. 6).

Critical Thinking

Do you agree or disagree with the impact of near peers vs. scientific research by experts? Can you name a near peer who serves as a role model in innovative behavior for you? Give an example of what this person recommended and why.

Time is, of course, an integral part in the diffusion process. What is peculiar about time is how quickly some innovations are adopted and how slowly it takes for others to catch on. Within months of the introduction of Tide detergent Pods (single pre-packaged packets thrown into the washing machine), the sales were over \$500 million. By contrast, the introduction of electricity in 1879 took well into the twentieth century to become commonplace as the main use of lighting in U.S. homes. Cars and horse-drawn carriages, likewise, shared roads for several years before cars became the more commonly used mode of transportation.

As shown in Fig. 2.1, Rogers put time into five adopter categories (indicating the categories by which an innovation is adopted through a social system) with estimates of the percentage of people who fit in each category.

1. Innovators, 2.5 %
2. Early adopters, 13.5 %
3. Early majority, 34 %
4. Late majority, 34 %
5. Laggards, 16 %

Not everyone is an innovator in every category. So, you will meet people who will say they are not innovative at all or only partially. People like to talk about their interests so it is easy to find out what their categories of expertise are. Research indicates that “more than 40 percent of what people talk about is their personal experiences or personal relationships. Similarly, around half of tweets are ‘me’ focused, covering what people are doing now or something that has happened to them” (Bergman 2013, p. 33).

As the percentages show, innovators are the smallest part but the most necessary part to get the ball rolling. They are the earliest buyers of new brands, services, and products. Innovators are the most studied of all the categories. Who are they? What drives them? They are attracted to grand openings, advertisements of new products, door prizes, and excitement. An innovative consumer is already highly involved or wants to be. They are interested in the new Spring fashions or

latest electronics. Early adopters are the next to buy followed by the vast majority, the early majority, and late majority followed by the laggards. These groups are defined by time from launch. Let us not forget the importance of each category in the process since early majority and late majority, for example, buy the vast volume of products and services, without them the launch would fall flat and not be sustained.

Research in a number of disciplines (from rural sociology to education, and from social anthropology to marketing) has shown a broad consistency in the general characteristics of innovators. Innovators frequently differ from later adopters in their:

- Socioeconomic status
- Social affiliations and behavior,
- Personal traits,
- Perceptions of new products, and
- Purchase and consumption patterns.

(Foxall, G., & Goldsmith, R. (1994). *Consumer Psychology*, p. 39)

Case Study: Joshua

Joshua is generally innovative but says he has no interest in clothing or fashion trends. He is interested in biking, camping, and fishing equipment. Joshua says he does not follow fashion but when a new Dick's Sporting Goods store opened he told Rob, his friend who was going there, to see if they had biking clothes and what brands. If a researcher asked Joshua about his level of clothing interest on a 0–5 Likert type scale with zero meaning highly disinterested and five being highly interested, he would choose zero; but with more specific questions or categories within apparel or clothing, it would be apparent that when it comes for clothes for biking or outdoor activities, he would say he was a 4 or 5.

To summarize, an individual can be an innovator in books but a laggard in the latest shoes. This makes sense because it is very expensive and time consuming to be an innovator in every category. Some categories such as new interiors (replacing kitchen countertops and cabinets every year) are simply not feasible. A person could consume a lot of magazines and television shows devoted to renovations but they are unlikely to buy completely new houses every year. Of course, there are exceptions of the very rich who have so many houses they do not know the count (this was true of a candidate for the U.S. Presidency a few years back) and some celebrities have bought and renovated houses and never lived in them. One does not need to be rich to be an innovator of less expensive products and services such as the latest fingernail polish or lipstick color and someone could be satisfied to know about them without buying or using them.

Numerous studies indicate that innovators have greater income or wealth that enables them to indulge their passions than later adopters or populations as a whole. They tend to be upwardly mobile (Robertson 1971).

Companies try to please their loyal customers and keep them happy so they buy more and spread the word. One way to do this is yearly reunions or owner rallies where someone who bought their recreational vehicle or grill are invited to several days of events usually at the factory or headquarters where they meet other owners and share tips. The company president talks to them about where the company is going and tries to make them feel a part of the company (and as loyal customers they are a very important part). We will talk about other ways companies engage existing consumers in the chapters ahead.

A social system refers to a group or unit “engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal” (Rogers 2005, p. 37). Systems have structure, rules, and members. Within these systems are opinion leaders or market mavens (Clark et al. 2008; Goldsmith et al. 2006). Psychological profiles of opinion leaders and market mavens have been researched in order to understand better who these people are and in what ways they influence others.

Opinion leadership is the degree to which an individual is able to influence informally other individuals’ attitudes or overt behavior in a desired way with relative frequency. A *change agent* is an individual who attempts to influence clients’ innovation decisions in a direction that is deemed desirable by a change agency (Rogers 2005, p. 37).

As mentioned, systems have structures, members, and rules. Adopting a system or not has consequences for the individual, group, or organization. Sometimes adoption is forced such as state laws requiring motorcycle riders to wear helmets. Rules about locations for cigarette smoking, for example, in a location outside a hotel or business building, are other examples of required adoption. Sometimes these rules or laws fall under the category of social marketing—changing behavior for the common good or for individuals whose behavior impedes others. Speed limits are another example; data show that reduced speed limits can save lives. Rogers gives the example of how a social marketing campaign for oral rehydration therapy in Egypt saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of babies (2005, p. 87).

Before going through the diffusion process, something has to be developed or invented. A question is how does this happen? What starts the process? Is it an individual or a group of people working as a team? Who is first? Sometimes it is a race to the finish. An innovation begins with recognition of a problem or need. In some instances, inventors are so far ahead that they develop something that consumers do not know they want or need (example of such an inventor and a forward-looking company is Steve Jobs and Apple). Most typically, the need or problem is identified and then research (basic or applied) begins leading to further development and perhaps commercialization. Sometimes, the steps go together so that there is research and development or R&D. Other times products or practices go to market that have not been fully researched so not all steps have to be followed for a successful (or unsuccessful) outcome.

Case Study of Starbucks's Leap of Faith

The world's largest coffeehouse chain regularly launches products before they're perfect. Why does such a risky approach to innovation work so well?

In late March, as Starbucks was preparing to introduce its first offer on Groupon, the daily-deal service, the coffee chain's chief digital officer, Adam Brotman, realized he had no clue whether the gambit would pay off. The discount wasn't for anything crazy like bungee jumps or skydiving lessons – it was for 50 % off a \$10 Starbucks Card eGift – but to Brotman, the deal was just as risky because of how the company would be offering it. His team had to integrate Starbucks's eGift platform with Groupon's system for the one-off promotion and it was about to go live to the world....The deal with Groupon, for example, brought in \$10 million overnight – despite traffic loads that crashed the site mere hours after it went public.

Source: Austin Carr (June 2013). Starbucks's leap of faith. *Fast Company*. 46–47, this quote is from page 46.

On June 1, 2013, Starbucks announced that smoking is no longer allowed on its patios or outdoor spaces less than 25 ft from its building. They are an innovative company as is Apple, TOMS which gives shoes, eye glasses, and water to people in over 70 countries, and 3M (famous for post-it notes and other inventions). Companies who take the lead such as these are often imitated or at least watched by others. So companies can be innovative as well as individuals and families.

Gabriel Wiemann: Author of *The Influentials: People Who Influence People*

It is difficult to differentiate many of the researchers who follow Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz because their research and even their knowing each other overlap. For example, Elihu Katz wrote the Foreword for Gabriel Wiemann's 1994 book entitled *The Influentials: People Who Influence People*. Wiemann begins his book with a nod to the past:

The concept of opinion leadership was first introduced in an era dominated by the powerful media and mass society theories. As the nineteenth century came to a close, the image of society that had emerged was one which was changing from a traditional and stable social system, where people were closely tied to each other, into a mass society in which individuals were socially isolated. This idea has been championed by some sociologists well into the twentieth century (p. 9).

He goes on to say the mass society idea was really quite frightening in its portrayal of easily manipulated human populations controlled by the media. Some current day politicians and opinion leaders still promote this idea, but most today see this as an old image of mass media. We know that not all eyes and ears hear the same messages (they are on different channels, may or may not use the Internet or watch television) and even if they heard the same messages, they would not react the same way.

Wiemann further says that the two-step flow model (of Lazarsfeld et al., discussed earlier) or hypothesis was the most influential and at the same time

problematic contribution of the fore-running theories and models. The significant contribution was to highlight the importance of primary groups, personal contacts, and face-to-face influences (such as the barber). The complication comes in when trying to see how these opinion leaders from small groups and in-person contact mesh with the opinion leaders are more related to the mass media. It is fairly easy to see the differences. Would 10,000 people show up at the last minute to see a local small town politician in a Civic Center? No, but they would for First Lady Michele Obama, during the fall of 2012, when her husband was running for re-election. So, what emerges is a complicated sphere of influence and we move in and out of these spheres, accepting or at least considering (sifting through) them all. Use of mass media also differs. Weimann concludes that the flow of mass media was not so direct and powerful as once assumed. Consumers are not passive acceptors of media messages.

Opinion Leadership: Degrees or Types of Influence

The term “opinion leaders” is not without its problems. Katz and Lazarsfeld who coined the phrase had this to say:

What we shall call opinion leadership, if we may call it leadership at all, is leadership as its simplest: it is casually exercised, sometimes unwitting and unbeknown, within the smallest grouping of friends, family members, and neighbors. It is not leadership on the high level of Churchill, nor of a local politico; it is the almost invisible, certainly inconspicuous form of leadership at the person-to-person level of ordinary, intimate, informal, everyday contact (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955, p. 138.)

In opinion leadership studies, then, what is measured is not leadership in the conventional meaning and connotations but rather degree or type of influence. There may be some similarity (intellect or knowledge, for example) between the opinion leader and those he or she influences. This may explain how some political candidates do not fit well enough with the general population to be elected. Opinion leaders are usually extroverts at least on a particular subject such as Irish music. They want to be connected. If there is an Irish band playing, they want to be there. They are probably socially gregarious. While the band is playing, they are clapping or singing along. To put this back into the context of E.M. Rogers, some early adopters may be less risk averse and more connected than later adopters. They do not care what others think. They join in and enjoy themselves.

Opinion Leaders, Being at the Center, and the Rise of Social Media

In recent years, the increase in peer-to-peer networks especially the relationships formed online has led to a re-thinking of social communications theories. A friend

suggests what a friend of theirs said or a consumer consults online product reviews before buying, pushing the boundaries of our immediate circles to whom we turn for advice or information. Innumerable articles contain the results of studies about consumer networks. Obviously, a favorable network position is to be in the center of a network. This lends itself to studies diagramming relationships to find the center person, the most influential.

The centrality of opinion leaders in social networks gives them access to many to hear their message. Medical research often shows doctors are central opinion leaders. That makes sense, they give learned opinions everyday. People look up to doctors, most of the time. With the advent of the Internet and health/medical sources, consumers look up their own symptoms and remedies and sometimes this is misleading and even dangerous. A 27-year-old male worried he had some dreaded disease after reading about his symptoms on the Internet. He then made an appointment to see a cancer specialist. The doctor told him that disease is extremely uncommon in anyone under 90 and that he could just look at the young guy and say no this is not possible. This was followed by a checkup and tests that revealed a very minor easily fixed problem.

The rise and spread of social media have excited researchers in nearly all disciplines. The search for information (some sources better than others) has opened up a whole new realm of possibilities. Who are the opinion leaders and who is at the center are more difficult to be determined in some ways and easier in others. Changes in social values, social statuses, or social categories, result in changing the socio-demographic profiles of opinion leaders (Weimann 1994, p. 88). The next chapter delves into values, attitudes, and motivations.

Contagion: How Ideas Catch on: Bergman and Gladwell

One diseased person can easily infect many other people. Similarly, ideas can be contagious and have their origin in one person or group. Contagious means likely to spread through a number of means from talking to imitation. Styles catch on, ad slogans catch on, and campaign phrases catch on such as “It’s the economy, stupid” in the President Clinton campaign. The question is what to focus on and what not to. People love to share stories, write restaurant or movie reviews, tell people about their favorite vacation. We read books that friends recommend and avoid movies they say are bad. “Word of mouth is the primary factor behind 20 percent to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions,” (Bergman 2013, p. 7).

After analyzing countless messages, Jonah Bergman came up with six key steps that cause things to be discussed, shared, and/or imitated. These are as follows:

1. Social currency: Do people look dumb or smart when they talk about a product or idea? Do they gain in stature or lose in stature? A company strategy is to make customers feel like insiders, perhaps as the first to know or through private sales for store credit card holders only. Organizations do this as well,

reward the employees with inside knowledge of expansions and new products or samples.

2. Triggers: Stimuli that prompt people to think or buy. "Top of mind leads to tip of tongue" (p. 23). If soft music is played in grocery stores, shoppers will slow down and buy more. Jingles evoke need to buy.
3. Emotion: Sharing evokes emotions or feelings, can soothe, inspire, or anger.
4. Public: Observation, can others see what you are doing? Advertising plays a huge role in reaching the public.
5. Practical value: Who would find the information useful? Will money be saved?
6. Stories: Narratives about what happens (beyond simply stating or telling).

Uniqueness, exclusivity, and scarcity drive up demand and word of mouth. Football tickets that are hard to get are more desired than lots of empty seats and free admittance. Recent trends report that college students are not flocking to their university's football games as much as in the past. Why has this changed? Will the trend continue? In one big state university with a winning team, students get in free yet many graduate without going to any games. How can universities turn this around and get students in a rah-rah mood again? Is it because once universities get over 40,000 they become impersonal or has increased online education reduced feeling connected to a university? What keeps students participating? What keeps people talking and feeling involved? Heartfelt emotions and feelings lead to action.

Triggers, the second point on the Bergman steps list, are fascinating influencers of human behavior. Take a jingle like "I want to be an Oscar Mayer weiner, that is what I truly want to be..." hearing that ditty makes a person want a hotdog or to smile and remember what it was like to be a kid. The smell of popcorn triggers the desire for popcorn. Natural triggers are colas and snacks, peanut butter and jelly, and milk and cookies at bedtime. The color orange is used heavily in the month of October for things directly related to Halloween such as candy, costumes, and decorations but also for companies less associated such as Home Depot who heavily advertise in the month of October (their classic orange and white logo plays into this). Color is a trigger for all kinds of occasions and events besides holidays. Yellow is associated with the famous bicycle races in the Tour de France.

Promotional offers have a great deal to do with practical value. Is something on sale? Will 10 % off or free shipping make a difference? There is a psychology to what is an appealing offer to different consumers. Charity-minded women may be attracted to bringing in their old purse for 20 % off a new purse, whereas to another consumer that is too much trouble and would just prefer the 20 % off with no strings attached.

On the basis of research studies, Nobel Prize winners Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman developed Prospect theory which simply stated says that the way people make decisions often violates what economists hold to be rational courses of action. Judgments are not always sensible. An individual may spend more time picking out a toothbrush than signing up for an expensive vacation. Their work along with others opened up the door to "behavioral economics" which is a blend of psychology and economics.

In *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference*, Malcolm Gladwell says that social epidemics are driven by the efforts of a handful of exceptional people who may be called e market mavens, salespeople, or leaders. This book published in 2000 is instrumental in pushing the discussion of social influence forward in the twenty-first century. He takes social science research and makes it likeable and readable for the educated general reader. For example, he says things or ideas reach a boiling point when they suddenly become popular, visible, at their highest peak. That is the tipping point, the critical mass when things explode.

In the wake of the success of *The Tipping Point*, in 2005, Gladwell published another book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. In *Blink*, he talks about the power of spontaneous decision making over careful planning, that things can happen in the blink of an eye. He also says instant decisions can be disastrous; the point is that rapid decisions happen. We do not always have the time to carefully think things out and sometimes intuitive decisions work well. Gladwell also says we are much better at reading other peoples' thoughts and emotions than we realize and these often trigger our decisions and actions.

Time in the New Digital World

A few comments about time fit here because indulging in social media takes time away from other activities. Sometimes it is part of multitasking making it difficult to separate from other tasks for research purposes. Quantitative time is a measured or measurable period such as seconds, minutes, or hours, or the duration or repetition of an activity. Qualitative time is about the feelings, the meaning, or significance of time use.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks the quantitative time use of the average American adult. From the Bureau, we know sleeping takes on an average 8 h and 40 min, followed by work and work-related activities, and then smaller amounts in watching television, leisure and sports, household activities, education, eating and drinking, caring for household members, personal care, and purchasing goods and services. The category of time online is a moving target which was once 12 min a day on average put in the category of telephone calls, mail, and email but more recently the number of minutes or times per day is much higher and it varies as most categories do by age group and gender. In May 2013, it was reported on the news that the average adult was checking, reading, or sending online 150 min a day; previous reports said 2 h a day was the average. Would you say that sounds high or low?

Discretionary time is the time spent the way a person wants to spend it vs. non-discretionary time such as time at work (the evening shift) or in a classroom (50 min class) where there is not much personal choice. The top preferred leisure pursuit for most Americans is time with family and friends.

Since we all share in common 24 h a day, it raises the question of how this time is spent and, in particular, how the new digital age is figuring in our daily lives. If we spent more online, it is a fact that we spend less time sleeping or working or in other activities. Of course, the lines are blurred when it comes to time online and time spent working since it could be that our jobs necessitate a lot of time online. Time has value, it is a scarce resource—what would Paul Lazarsfeld make of our social communication patterns today?

Summary

Studying history has value. Social influence theory has sub-theories having to do with human behavior including time management and discretionary spending. The person at the center of social influence is worthy of study. Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues led the way in social communications theory and identifying opinion leaders. He is especially known for his research on voting behavior and the importance of informal communications versus mass media. Everett M. Rogers built on this strong research tradition and the work of other human behaviorists to form his own theory of the diffusion of innovation process. His model shows how an idea or product goes from innovators (first to buy or adopt) to laggards. Innovators tend to be upwardly mobile and have other characteristics differentiating them from the vast majority. The lessons learned from these theories and other studies are that there are innovators and opinion leaders among us influential on a variety of topics and brands. The more modern theorist Malcolm Gladwell says that changes can be made in the blink of an eye. Identifying these responses and innovators and opinion leaders is crucial to the success of advertising campaigns or any other strategies such as campaigns for improved sustainability, laying the groundwork for a better tomorrow.

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