

Concept of Innovation and Diffusion

What is diffusion?

- The process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.

- Diffusion is a special type of communication in which the messages are about a new idea.
- The newness of the idea gives diffusion its special character – it ensures that a degree of uncertainty is involved in diffusion.

- Uncertainty – the degree to which a range of alternatives are perceived with regard to the occurrence of an event. Uncertainty implies lack of predictability and therefore of information.

- Thus information becomes a means of reducing uncertainty.
- Any technological innovation embodies information and thus reduces uncertainty about cause-effect relationships in problem solving.

Four Elements in Diffusion of Innovations:

- An innovation
- Is communicated through certain channels
- Over time
- Among members of a social system

The Innovation

- An idea, practice or object that is *perceived* as new by an individual or other unit of adoption.

- *Characteristics of Innovation* –
- Relative Advantage
- Compatibility
- Complexity
- Trialability
- Observability

- Relative Advantage – over existing technologies - can be perceived, may be measured in economic terms, social prestige, convenience and satisfaction.
- Compatibility – with existing values, past experiences, needs of potential adopters (and their social system)
- Complexity - degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use.

The Innovation

- Trialability – degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis. A trialable innovation represented less uncertainty to a potential adopter.
- Observability – Degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others.

Communications Channels

- The means by which messages get from one individual to another.
- The nature of the information-exchange relation determines the conditions under which a source will/will not transmit the innovation to the receiver and the effect of the transfer.

Communications Channels

- Mass-media – most efficient way to create awareness knowledge of an innovation
- Interpersonal channels – more effective in persuading individual to accept a new idea.

- Time - third element in the diffusion process.
Involved in:
 - the innovation-decision process
 - the innovativeness of an individual
 - an innovation's rate of adoption in a system

A Social System

- Defined as: a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem-solving to accomplish a common goal.
- This sharing of a common objective binds the system together.

System norms and diffusion.

- Norms are: the established behaviour patterns for the members of a social system. They define a range of tolerable behaviour and serve as a guide or a standard for the members' behaviour in a social system.
- The norms of a system tell an individual what behaviour is expected. Thus a system's norms can be a barrier to change.
- Norms can operate at the level of a nation, a religious community, an organisation, or a local system like a village.

Conclusion

- Diffusion is a special type of communication
- Attributes of innovation plays key role in diffusion
- Social norms determine the process of diffusion