

This Week's Citation Classic®

Rogers E M & Shoemaker F F. *Communication of innovations: a cross-cultural approach.*
New York: Free Press, 1971. 476 p.
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The diffusion of innovations is the process in which a new idea spreads via certain communication channels over time among the members of a social system. An innovation is defined as an idea perceived as new by an individual or a system. [The SSC[®] indicates that this book has been cited in more than 960 publications, while its first and third editions, *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers, 1962 and 1983), were cited in more than 815 and 370 publications, respectively. The total number of citations for all editions of this book is more than 2,145.]

Rise of the Classical Diffusion Model

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My 1971 book was the second edition of a four-edition series, with a new edition appearing approximately every decade. So to tell the whole story, I must start with the 1962 edition. My interest in the diffusion of innovations began with my doctoral dissertation, an investigation of the adoption of agricultural technologies by Iowa farmers, at Iowa State University in the mid-1950s. My chapter on the review of literature argued that agricultural diffusion studies, research on how new educational ideas, like kindergartens and driver training, spread among schools, and the diffusion of a new antibiotic among medical doctors, all were characterized by a common set of generalizations.

While a young assistant professor at Ohio State University, I expanded this chapter into book form, summarizing the same 305 diffusion studies then existing into a general model of diffusion, that later came to be called the "classical" model. Three publishers did not respond to my letters of inquiry (there was no apparent market for the book as a text at that time; only three university-level courses on diffusion were then taught). But the editor of Free Press "overcame his better judgment," he told me, and agreed to publish the 1962 (first) edition. The book was

an instant publishing success, going into a fifth printing during the first year of publication. No one was more surprised than I.

During the 1960s, scholars in a variety of disciplines studied diffusion; criticisms of the classical diffusion model appeared, and the model was modified in certain important ways. The 1971 (second) edition was based on some 2,000 diffusion studies, findings of which were summarized in a series of 104 generalizations. Floyd Shoemaker, a colleague at Michigan State University, where I was then teaching, helped write this second edition, titled *Communication of Innovations* to distinguish it from the 1963 edition and to ensure that its content was not confused with work on diffusion processes in physics.

By 1971, numerous university courses in diffusion were taught, and textbook use was an important part of my book's readership. In 1975, the American Marketing Association selected my book for the Converse Award as one of the most important books of the previous decade. W. Paisley¹ reported that my 1962 book, and the 1971 second edition, considered together, was the second most widely cited book in the social sciences.

Why? Diffusion is of interest to scholars in many social sciences because it explains how social change occurs at the micro level. The diffusion of any kind of innovation can be studied with the classical model, from the steel axes of Australian aborigines, to fax machines in the US.

The diffusion field has been characterized by consistent, incremental progress toward greater understanding of how individuals adopt new ideas, with few wildly creative intellectual breakthroughs occurring. Today, approximately 4,000 publications about the diffusion of innovations have appeared. Other books about diffusion have been written, dealing with its geographical/spatial aspects,² applications to business and marketing,³ innovation in organizations,⁴ and with mathematical models of diffusion.⁵

1. Paisley W. Communication in the communication sciences. *Prog. Commun. Sci.* 5:1985.
2. Brown L A. *Innovation diffusion: a new perspective.* New York: Methuen, 1981.
3. Robertson T S. *Innovative behavior and communication.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.
4. Zaltman G et al. *Innovations and organizations.* New York: Wiley, 1973.
5. Mahajan V & Peterson R A. *Models of innovation diffusion.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1985.

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