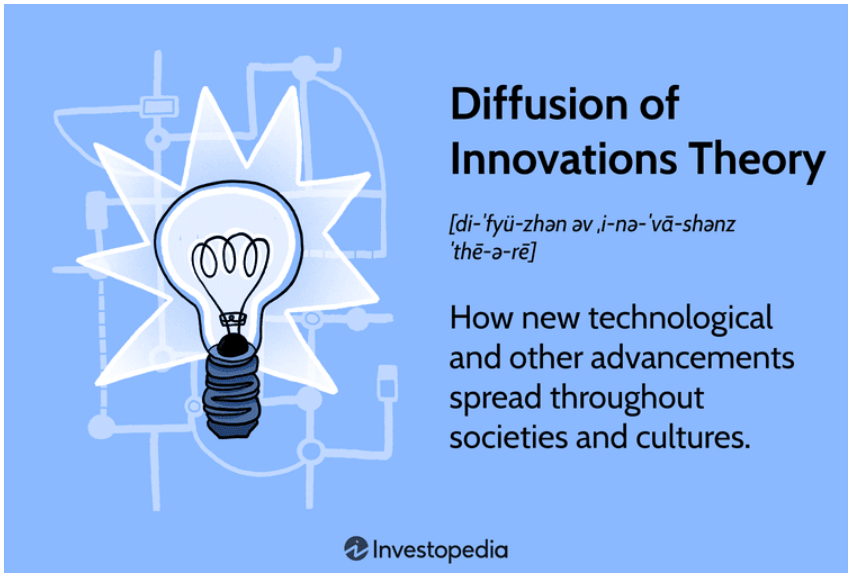
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Diffusion of Innovations Theory: Definition and Examples

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Credit: Investopedia / NoNo Flores

DEFINITION:

The diffusion of innovations theory explains the passage of a new concept through stages of adoption by people participating in or using the idea.

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What Is the Diffusion of Innovations Theory?

The diffusion of innovations theory seeks to explain how and why new ideas and practices are adopted, including why they can be

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spread out over long periods. The way in which innovations are communicated to different parts of society and the subjective opinions associated with the innovations are important factors in how quickly diffusion—or spreading—occurs.

This theory is frequently referred to when companies are developing a marketing strategy for new products and developing market share,

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The diffusion of innovations theory describes the pattern and speed at which new ideas, practices, or products spread through a population.
- The main players in the theory are innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.
- In marketing, this diffusion of innovations theory is often applied to help understand and promote the adoption of new products.
- The diffusion of innovations theory can also be used in areas such as public health to encourage populations to adopt new, healthy behaviors.

Understanding the Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The diffusion of innovations theory was developed by E.M. Rogers, a communication theorist at the University of New Mexico, in 1962. The theory explains the passage of a new idea through stages of adoption by different people who participate in or begin using the new idea. The main people in the diffusion of innovations theory are:

- **Innovators:** Those who are open to risks and the first to try new ideas
- **Early adopters:** People who are interested in trying new technologies and establishing their utility in society
- **Early majority:** Those who pave the way for the use of an

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innovation within mainstream society and are part of the general population

- **Late majority:** People who follow the early majority into adopting the innovation as part of their daily life and are also part of the general population
- **Laggards:** People who lag behind the general population in adopting innovative products and new ideas[1]

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In general, innovators and early adopters are open to the possibility of risk that comes with trying our new innovations, technologies, or ideas. Laggards, on the other hand, are risk-averse and set in their ways of doing things. Eventually, the integration of an innovation into mainstream society makes it impossible for them to conduct their daily life (and work) without it. As a result, they are forced to begin using it.

FAST FACT

The "new ideas" in the diffusion of innovations theory can be things like ideas, technologies, goods, services, or behaviors.

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The diffusion of innovations theory was developed in part by integrating previous sociological theories of behavioral change. Factors that affect the rate of innovation diffusion include the mix of rural to urban within a society's population, the society's level of education, and the extent of industrialization and development. Different societies are likely to have different adoption rates—the

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Different societies are likely to have different adoption rates—the rate at which members of a society accept a new innovation.

Adoption rates for different types of innovation vary. For example, a society may have adopted the internet faster than it adopted the automobile due to cost, accessibility, and familiarity with technological change.

Examples of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory

While the diffusion of innovations theory was developed during the mid-1900s, most new technologies in human progress, whether it is the printing press during the 16th century or the internet in the 20th century, have followed a similar path to widespread adoption.

The diffusion of innovations theory is extensively used by marketers to promote the adoption of their products. For example, marketers can find a set of people passionate about the product to receive it for free in return for sharing it widely. These early adopters are responsible for evangelizing its utility to mainstream audiences.

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A recent example of this method is Facebook. It started off as a product targeted at students and professionals in educational institutions. As students' use increased beyond school, the social media site spread to mainstream society and across borders.

Influencer marketing is another use of the diffusion of innovations theory. Social media influencers are often contacted by brands with new products or services. The influencers become early adopters who use and post about the new product, normalizing it for a mainstream audience and causing its use to spread.

The diffusion of innovations theory is also used to design public health programs. Again, a set of people is chosen as early adopters of a new technology or practice and spreads awareness about it to others. However, cultural limitations or people's access to resources and social support for the new behavior can impede these kinds of health programs from being successful. In the

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these kinds of health programs from being successful. In the context of public health, this type of behavior diffusion is also more useful for encouraging people to adopt positive behaviors, rather than limit or cease negative behaviors.[1]

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What Are the Steps in the Diffusion of Innovations?

Diffusion happens through a five-step process of decision-making. The five steps are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Rogers renamed these knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation in later editions of his book.

What Are Barriers to Adoption in the Diffusion of Innovations?

At any point in the decision-making process, an individual might decide against adopting an innovation, usually due to some kind of barrier. These barriers are usually the usage or value of the innovation, the risk associated with adopting something new, or psychological factors such as cultural stigma.

What Are Some Areas Where Diffusion of Innovations Theory Applies?

In addition to marketing and public health, other areas where the diffusion of innovations theory has been used include agriculture, social work, communication, and criminal justice.[1]

The Bottom Line

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The diffusion of innovations theory describes how new ideas, behaviors, technologies, or goods spread through a population gradually, rather than all at once. Adoption starts with innovators and early adopters, then spreads through the population to the early majority and late majority. Laggards are the last ones to adopt a new innovation.

The diffusion of innovations theory can be applied to marketing strategies for new products, for example through influencer marketing. It can also be applied to fields such as public health, criminal justice, and communications. Though it has limitations in

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how it can be used in those areas, it can still be a helpful way to understand how technologies, goods, services, ideas, and behaviors spread through a population.

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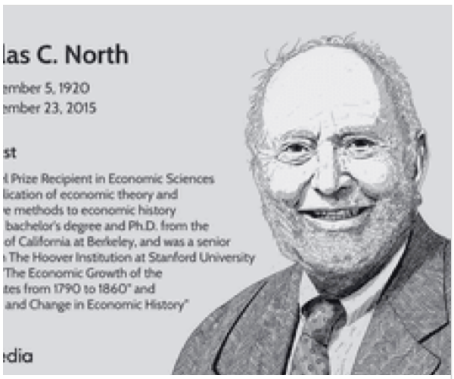
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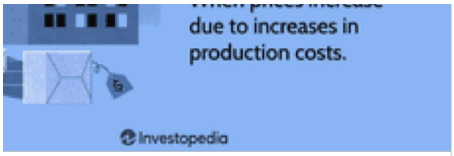
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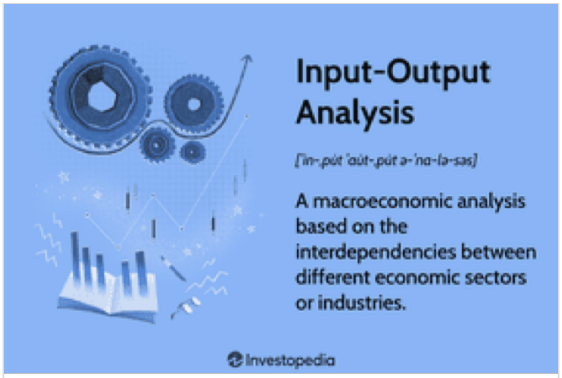
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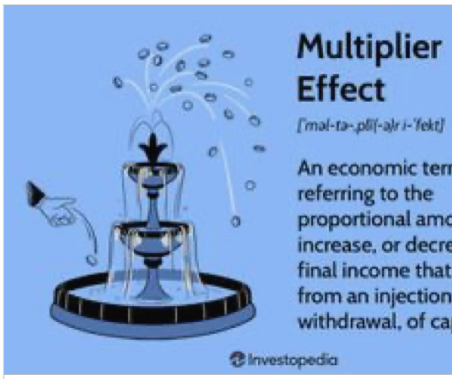
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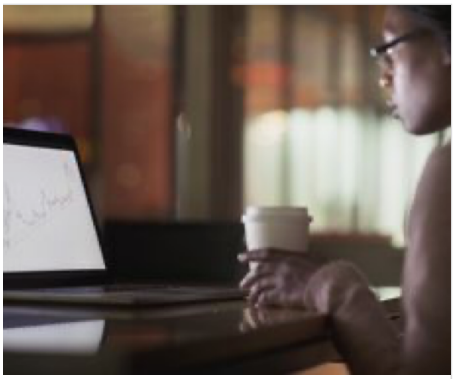
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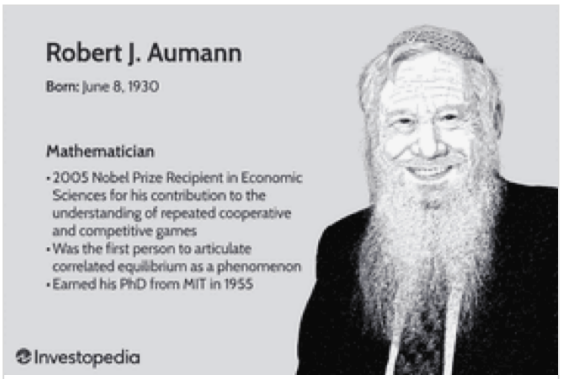
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