

Understanding Social Contagion in Adoption Processes Using Dynamic Social Networks

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Abstract

There are many studies in the marketing and diffusion literature of the conditions in which social contagion affects adoption processes. Yet most of these studies assume that social interactions do not change over time, even though actors in social networks exhibit different likelihoods of being influenced across the diffusion period. Rooted in physics and epidemiology theories, this study proposes a Susceptible Infectious Susceptible (SIS) model to assess the role of social contagion in adoption processes, which takes changes in social dynamics over time into account. To study the adoption over a span of ten years, the authors used detailed data sets from a community of consumers and determined the importance of social contagion, as well as how the interplay of social and non-social influences from outside the community drives adoption processes. Although social contagion matters for diffusion, it is less relevant in shaping adoption when the study also includes social dynamics among members of the community. This finding is relevant for managers and entrepreneurs who trust in word-of-mouth marketing campaigns whose effect may be overestimated if marketers fail to acknowledge variations in social interactions.

Social contagion

Social network theory

Adoptions of new technologies