

11.800, Knowledge in the Public Arena: The Uses and Abuses of Research
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Session 6

Diffusion of Innovation

- I. Overview of Readings
 - a. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2000), ch.2.
 - i. Main Idea: success of the spread of social phenomena is dependent on a few people with particular social gifts.
 1. Connectors: people who span worlds, gives access to opportunities, and are connected to opinion leaders in various networks
 2. Mavens: people accumulate knowledge to share it with others, provide the message
 3. Salesmen: highly persuasive, skilled communicators
 - ii. Success vs. Failure:
 1. Character profiles
 - a. Paul Revere (Connector/Maven)
 - b. William Dawes (neither)
 - iii. Methodology
 1. Gladwell took research that had been done by others and wrote about it in a very engaging manner
 - a. Not a scientific research project
 - b. Highly effective storyteller
 - i. Who tells the story?
 - ii. Who gets the credit for the idea?
 2. Applications for research
 - a. Who is representing your work?
 - b. How much time do you want to spend focusing on getting ideas out?
 - c. Importance of needing an idea first
 - d. What kind of society are you functioning in?
 - b. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*. Chapter 1, "Elements of Diffusion."
 - i. Innovation: must be perceived as new, though it doesn't need to actually be a new idea
 1. Characteristics:
 2. Most diffusion research has analyzed technological innovations
 3. Re-invention
 - ii. Diffusion
 1. Messages about an innovation are communicated through channels over time.
 - iii. In public health: "health communication" subfield separates innovation diffusion from actual research
 1. Designated Driver:
 - a. Came out of Harvard
 - i. Was it research based?
 - b. Chose something that didn't fight drinking itself
 - c. Communication channels

- i. Television and movies were a significant channel to spread it through popular culture faster.
 - c. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*. Chapters 5 and 8.
 - i. See response notes.
 - ii. Cultural innovations
 - 1. What produced the move away from foot-binding in China?
 - a. How do such innovations take place?
 - b. Political forces as a factor?
 - i. Importance of political innovation?
 - 1. Role of trust between citizens and state
 - 2. Practice related to political behavior, political meaning
 - 2. Meme: concepts and practices have a self-replicating tendency
 - iii. Critical point: Innovations are practices. They are a new way of doing things.