

# **Identification of Opinion Leadership: A Literature Review**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of Diffusion of Innovation outlines the transmission of innovatory solutions in different fields and among its key components social systems and communication channels act in the effective dissemination of novice solutions. Thus, Opinion Leaders are required to be identified within a social system where interconnectivity among the actors imply the nature of the Social Network for effective dissemination of innovative solutions. Under this context, it is essential to understand the Opinion leadership, their relationship with adopter categories in relation of diffusion of innovation, communication channels, threshold of adoption and the methods by which an opinion leader could be identified in a social system. A comprehensive literature review is conducted to review and analyze opinion leadership and its attributes in relation to effective dissemination of innovative solutions. The research findings elaborate on the characteristics of opinion leadership and their identification methods and the involvement of organizational opinion leaders in innovation diffusion. The findings of this review would be beneficial for those researchers who are attentive in identifying opinion leaders and their influence in social networks and related fields.

## **Keywords**

Diffusion of Innovation, Opinion Leader, Characteristics.

## **1. Introduction**

Diffusion of innovation has taken an important perception among various range of specialties among different fields ranging through sociology, management, economics and marketing over forty years of time (Kale & Ardit, 2009). Correspondingly, Murray (2009) indicated that Diffusion of innovation theory has been utilized in wide range of areas including communication, marketing, and public health while it aided for researchers to figure out the technique by which innovative notions and technologies have driven into extensive practice. Masuda (2015) widely recognised that peer-to-peer collaboration among the persons rooted in social networks influence the opinion creation on a great scale. Limited, but as if any, innovation researches undeviatingly explore the primary dissimilarities amongst project-based and non-project based industry organizations yet, certain researches have focused on more through innovation studies on the project-based nature of the construction field (Gann & Salter, 2000). Conferring to Downs and Mohr (1976), several innovation studies emphasised on primary and secondary innovations characteristics but not succeeded to focus on the differences among them where “Primary characteristics” are integral considering the innovation or technology and steady along organizations whereas secondary characteristics are focused upon opinion-based characteristics.

## **2. Research Methodology**

A literature review enables to demarcate the significant knowledge gap in the current knowledge with evidence. Hence, with reference to conductance in the research, a literature review enhances and strengthen the initial research process. Consequently, a comprehensive literature was conducted and represented identifying Diffusion of Innovation theory, opinion leadership, their characteristics and methods of locating them on a social network. Literature review was conducted through the accumulated knowledge form with reference to books journal articles, published and unpublished bibliographies, conference proceedings, and reports related to diffusion of innovation, opinion leader threshold of adoption, identification of opinion leader.

## **3. Diffusion of Innovation theory**

Diffusion of Innovation has been studied under many areas in areas such as management )organization theory, innovation and diffusion theory(, communications, sociology, geography, marketing )consumer theory, new product acceptance(, economics )especially industrial organization, microeconomics, economic history(, and agricultural economics )Sexton & Barrett, 2003(. Yet it has been covered also in the construction industry but with only to a limited area with respect to other fields. Diffusion is the procedure where an innovation is transferred through a particular channel over time amongst the followers of a social system )Rogers, 2003) where four key fundamentals to be identified as innovation, communication channels, social systems and time.

## **4. Opinion Leadership**

Innovative applications or else new technologies enables leadership to subsequently origins within the persons who initially accept and execute the innovations whereas the fellow members trail on the leader and attempt to progress on their technological and organizational superiorities (Koçak, Kaya, & Erol, 2013). Accordingly, Koçak, et al. (2013) highlighted for adherences and for the diffusion procedure of an innovation, the characteristics of adopters or rejecters are imperative along with the characteristics of the innovation. For the proper dissemination of innovation, the adoption of innovation should be carried through the most apposite method for the effective adherence on to the specified individuals. In respect of that as stated by Turnbull and Meenaghan (1980) have identified three distinctive ways of which a certain social system would follow in the adoption of innovation as the Theory of Random Selection, Opinion Leader and the Trickle-Down Theory. It enabled to identify through this Opinion Leader can be identified as a mode of Diffusion of Innovation in a selected social system.

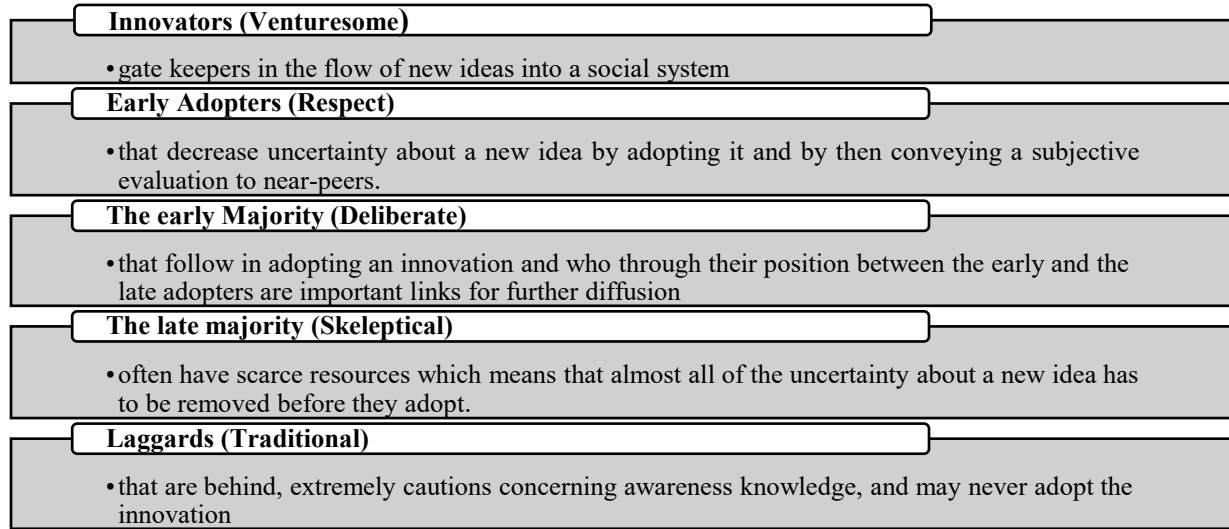
### **4.1. Identification of the term opinion leader**

“In a social network, opinion leader means the influenced person who may be an expert in a specific domain or have lots of people following his/her comments or ideas” (Chen, Cheng, & Hsu, 2016). Apparently with the extended view of Chen et al. (2016) Opinion Leader s are identified as information generators and message dispatchers who aware about media by a secondary communication. According to Dalrymple, Shaw, and Brossard (2013) within the specific network Opinion Leader are not accompanied with a formal position but lean toward their role of dissemination of information to their peers perpetuating the social norms. In addition to that, Kim (2015) underline information acquired by Opinion Leader spreads among the other people with comparative ease and with rapidity, ultimately result in the accelerating diffusion of modification midst them. As per the view by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and Keller and

Berry (2003) (as cited Dalrymple, Shaw, & Brossard, 2013) Opinion Leader tend to be further influential in convincing others within their SNs whether to adhere certain opinions and deeds. Additionally, Vishwanath and Barnett (2011) (as cited by Xu, Sang and Blasiola, 2014) highlighted that Opinion Leaders are recognized as innovators who comprised with qualities of high participation, high social status and immense societal contacts through studies of diffusion. However, as stated by Deroian (2002) if the considered innovation is highly radical the existence of the Opinion Leader may questionable as the existing SN is not in a position for the innovation. In the process of innovation Rogers (2003) and later by Smith (2005) accentuates innovativeness as a significant feature which explains the degree to which a person is comparatively faster in adopting an innovation among fellow individuals which comprises five groupings as represented in Figure 1.

#### **4.2. Classification of adopter categories based on innovation**

Rogers (2003) highlights in his process of diffusion, innovativeness to be an imperative component which explain on the degree to which a person’s adoption is speedier than the other individuals, which included five categories of innovativeness. Furthermore, as elaborated by Rogers (2003), throughout the stream of process of innovation, primarily at the knowledge stage, adopters dealt with the recognition of degree of the innovation to adapt and the mode of utilization of it whereas in the persuasion stage dealt with consequences, pros and cons of the innovation. With the surpassing on above stages the individual look forward on to adoption and rejection stage at where the decision is made on to accept or decline the innovation.



**Figure 1: Adopter Categories based on Innovation**

Source: (Adopted from Rogers, 2003; Smith,2005)

In this Figure 1 category of Early Adopters has been substituted by the term Opinion Leader under the experience of the author Smith (2005) and classification of the most of early adopters can be done under Opinion Leader upon the characteristics of them identified below and significant characteristics of these Opinion Leader were further elaborated by Rogers (2003) as follows.

Table 1: Overview of the main characteristics and values of early adopters

Early Adopters Main Characteristics	
1	Decreased ambiguity on a new idea by adopting it and by then conveying a subjective evaluation to near-peers.
2	Ensure with the highest degree of opinion leadership in most systems.
3	A more cohesive part of the local social system than innovators.
4	Whereas innovators are cosmopolites, early adopters are localities.
5	Potential adopters look to early adopters for advice and information about an innovation.
6	The early adopter is considered by many to be “the individual to check with” before adopting a new idea.
7	Help to trigger the critical mass when they adopt an innovation.
8	Early adopter is respected by his or her peers, and is the embodiment of successful, discrete use of new ideas.
9	Knows that to continue to earn this esteem of colleagues and to maintain a central position in the communication networks of the system
10	Must make judicious innovation-decisions
11	Decreases uncertainty about a new idea by adopting it
12	Conveying a subjective evaluation of the innovation to near peers through interpersonal networks.
13	Put their stamp of approval on a new idea by adopting it.

Source: (Adopted from Rogers, 2003)

According to Eck, Jager and Leeftang (2011) Opinion Leaders and early adopters disclose parallel characteristics which indicate their similarity being an opinion leader is an early adopter and as their characteristics are further verified with the Table1. Nevertheless, as elaborated by Eck, Jager and Leeftang (2011) the concept of early adopter differs on Opinion Leader since early adopter concern basically on the position of the consumer in the adoption process although opinion leader’s status to induce on those consumers to spread on other people.

## 5. Characteristics of opinion leader

Prior to the identification of the significant features of the opinion leader it is required to identify Opinion Leader on the mode of their actions .Rogers (2003) mentioned within the tasks of the degree at which opinion leader could perform on numerous topics to identify as “Polymorphism ”which could be vary with the factors as the multiplicity of the topics where Opinion Leadership is concerned or the innovativeness of the social system contradictory to aforementioned, the degree to which person only rely his tasks upon single task identified as monomorphism .Thus, the characteristics of Opinion Leaders varies and further emphasized by the different studies and a summarization is in Table 2; (The related literature sources have been stated next to the table).

Table 2: Characteristics of opinion leaders

<b>External Communication</b>			<b>Ref</b>
<b>1</b>	Greater exposure to mass media than their followers.	I. Acquire their perceived capability by facilitating space for entry of new ideas into the social system II. Exterior relationship may be provided through mass media channels, by an opinion leader's cosmopolitanism, or by connection with Change Agents.	1
<b>2</b>	More cosmopolite than their followers.	I. Possess certain degree of cosmopolitanism which facilitate in injecting innovative notions to the social system from the exterior environment. II. Transmit information across the boundaries between groups. III. Act as the agents within the groups not as the leaders of the group IV. Through the higher connections apart from social system margins gained required knowledge on the innovation	1
<b>3</b>	Greater contact with change agents than their followers.	I. Change Agents attempt on employ Opinion Leader to impact diffusion activities; which inevitably extend the connections among Opinion Leader and Change Agent than their followers	1
<b>Accessibility</b>			
<b>4</b>	Greater social participation than their followers.	I. Engage in wide-ranging interpersonal networks to communicate on innovation for their followers II. Shall be socially reachable as in social participation III. Casual discussion and organizational official meetings would influence on the emergence of new ideas	1
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>			
<b>5</b>	Higher socioeconomic status than their followers.	I. Innovation generated at the lowermost positions require presence of supercilious promotions for the spread across in social system	1
<b>Innovativeness</b>			
<b>6</b>	More innovative than their followers.	I. Followers if required to be identified Opinion Leader to be capable, knowledgeable and truthful, Opinion Leader required to adopt novice concepts prior to their peers, II. Yet, Opinion Leaders are not essentially to be innovators it varies on being innovative or not	1
<b>Personality Traits</b>			
<b>7</b>	Public Individuation	I. Being Opinion Leader, individuate themselves by superior knowledge and awareness in a specified thing than other pursuers II. Might extend an influence on the effectiveness in spreading information to peers	2
<b>8</b>	Less dogmatic	I. Might be considered as newer, with higher educational level, receiving higher revenue, and displaying greater social flexibility	2
<b>Sociological behaviours</b>			
<b>9</b>	Personification of certain values	I. Convey key values of their social system and the followers want to follow up the Opinion Leader.	3

<b>10</b>	Competence	I. Composite with capability in their respective field. II. Peers favour opinion leader to be knowledgeable, awareness or proficiency on the field.	3
<b>11</b>	Strategic social location	I. Ensure more tactical position among followers in their social network	3

Source: (Adopted from 1- Rogers, 2003; 2- Chan & Misra, 1990; 3- Aleahmad, Karisani, Rahgozar, and Oroumchian ,2015)

## 6. Individual thresholds for adoption

Granovetter, 1978 as cited by Rogers (2003) stated a threshold as the number of other people or individual who must be involved in a specified activity prior a certain individual engages in that activity. Furthermore, Roger (2003) explained along the concept of Diffusion of Innovation at the point an individual is persuaded to adopt knowledge on knowing certain minimum other individuals who adopted it priory are satisfied in the network of the individual a threshold is reached. Furthermore, threshold arises at individual level while communities, organizations and system adoption go along with the critical mass. Correspondingly, Valente (1996) stated adoption of a new collective behaviour by an individual, subsequently can be the function of behaviour of others in a system where individuals with lower threshold adopt prior to other in a system and higher thresholds adopt after most of individual in the group has adopted to the collective behaviour. Hence, the Table 3 depicts the level of thresholds in an explanatory manner. (The related literature sources have been stated next to the table)

**Table 3: Different network approaches in threshold of adoption of behaviour**

	<b>Network Approaches</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Ref</b>
<b>1</b>	Initial approaches	Count the number of times an individual was nominated as a network partner and to correlate this variable with innovativeness as measured by an individual's time of adoption.	1
<b>2</b>	Second Approach	Weak ties (people loosely connected to others in the social network) were necessary for diffusion to occur subgroups within a system	2
<b>3</b>	Third Approach	Arguing on structural equivalence (the degree of equality in network position) influenced on adoption of innovation	2
<b>4</b>	Fourth Approach	Incorporation of threshold model of collective behaviour postulates that an individual engages in a behaviour based on the proportion of people in the social system already engaged in the behaviour	2

Source: (Adopted from 1- Rogers, 2003; 2- Valente, 1996)

## 7. Methods and techniques for identification of opinion leader

Valante and Pumpuang, (2007) stated detection of Opinion Leaders amongst a network, within a diffusion process or within an organization would be significant on dissemination of innovation and on the OL. Furthermore, Valante and Pumpuang (2007) stated choice of the most suitable technique would depend on the situation, accessibility of proper Opinion Leader, resource availability and along with the expected function or the responsibility with the opinion leader. Thus, the Table 4 summarized the methods available for identification of Opinion Leaders.

Table 4: Methods, techniques and instruments for identifying opinion leaders

<b>Methods</b>	<b>Techniques</b>	<b>Instruments</b>
<b>Celebrities</b>	Recruit well-known people who are national, regional, or local celebrities	Media or individuals identify
<b>Self-selection</b>	Volunteers are recruited through solicitation	Individuals volunteer for leadership roles
<b>Self-identification</b>	Surveys use a leadership scale and those scoring above some threshold are considered leaders	When you interact with colleagues, do you give or receive advice?
<b>Staff selected</b>	Leaders selected based on community observation	Staff determines which persons appear to be an Opinion Leader
<b>Positional approach</b>	Persons who occupy leadership positions such as clergy, elected officials, media, and business elites	1. Do you hold an elected office or position of leadership? 2. Are you a member of any community organizations. Which ones?
<b>Judge's ratings</b>	Knowledgeable community members identify leaders	Persons who are knowledgeable identify leaders to be selected and rate all community members on leadership ability
<b>Expert identification</b>	Trained ethnographers study communities to identify leaders	Participant observers watch interaction within the community and determine who people go to for advice
<b>Snowball method</b>	Index cases provide nominations of leaders who are in turn interviewed until no new leaders are identified	Randomly or conveniently selected index cases are asked who they go to for advice Those nominated or a random selection of those nominated are also asked this question
<b>Sample sociometric</b>	Randomly selected respondents nominate leaders and those receiving frequent nominations are selected	Randomly selected sample or cases are asked who they go to for advice
<b>Sociometric</b>	All (or most) respondents are interviewed and those receiving frequent nominations are selected	All respondents are asked who they go to for advice

Source: (Valante & Pumpuang, 2007)

## **8. Communication channels among opinion leader**

Weinstein, Hecker and Kincl (2007) elaborated on that significant emphasis on the peer to peer communication network is required for early adopters who already embraced the innovation and divergence to above fact within the social structure if the specified innovation is not adhered direct communication among the followers and the Change Agent would facilitate in a successful dissemination approach. Moreover, reinforcing the above fact Bodendorf & Kaiser (2009) Opinion Leader's position along with their communicational conduct impact upon the opinions of individuals within the SN while establishing a platform for individuals to gather required information.

### **8.1. Homophily and heterophily in communication networks**

The concepts of the "homophily" was specified to this concept by the researchers and their definitions as per Rogers (2003) where it is the degree that two persons communicate in a similar manner contrary to "heterophily" where two people interact in different certain attributes. Homophilic procedures and their corresponding heterophilic procedures

consequently climax the characteristics of a cluster and narrate them to social actions along with consequences (Lozares, Verd, Cruz, & Barranco, 2014). However as explicated by Rogers (2003) homophily could be an unseen barricade in the dissemination of innovation within a social system which would lead on the fact that Change Agents should cooperate numerous Opinion Leaders. Nevertheless, more heterophily within a network could only utilize lesser number of Opinion Leaders near the top in socioeconomic status and innovative by the Change Agents Rogers (2003). In respect to the above fact Turnbull & Meenaghan (1980) documented information streamed from the mass media to persuasive within the community and that these influential or Opinion Leader were a significant impact for more submissive groups of the people.



**Figure 2: Concept of two flow communication**

Source: (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980)

A change agent is an individual who influences clients' innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency Rogers (2003). Furthermore, Turnbull and Meenaghan (1980) stated the two-step flow of communications or word-of-mouth advertising is based on the concept that certain persuasive persons in a community form an additional area in the procedure in which information flows from the Change Agent through these Opinion Leader to the mass audience. Thus, the Figure 2 represents the concept of two flow of communication where the Opinion Leader act in the intermediate position of the communication flow influencing a mass group to adhere on a specific innovation.

## **9. Organizational opinion leader for effective dissemination of innovative solutions**

Ozorhon et al. )2010( within their research briefly elaborated on the aspects which enable an organization to revolutionize as “drivers of innovation”, in which contribution to the promotion of innovation inside the firm are identified as “enablers of innovation” and the “barriers to uptake the innovation are the factors” are the facts that considered as impairments for the acceptance of innovation. With the competitive economy in order to upsurge in the top most position along with objective to endure the advancement of the organizations constant innovation is required )Songip, Lau, Jusoff, & Ramli, 2013(. Adhering on to above mentioned fact Brown et al, )2017( stated the application of notion of OL would inspire informal peer influence and other relationships within the organization. Further Lam and Schaubroeck )2000( emphasized Organizational Opinion Leader enforce a greater influence on the fellow employees when change or uncertainty arises within an organization to engage as a vital character in organizational sharing of knowledge )Smith, 2005(. Throughout modification stage, Organizational Opinion Leader could involve as a Change Agent even in the dispersion to motivate the change factor )Armenakis & Fredenberger, 1997(.

## **10. Conclusion**

Within the concept Diffusion of Innovation process, the position of Opinion Leader is identified who also identified as an early adopter. Subsequently, Opinion Leader'S characteristics, position on adopter categories and the modes of identifying them highlighted the usability of the Opinion Leaders as effective personnel in the dissemination of innovation. Their behaviour of an opinion Leader in a social system is prominent indicating that their recognition leading towards the adherence of innovative solutions to the whole system. Thus, it could be concluded that their conduct portrays on the higher social interactions through informal communication procedures with the required competency level to lead others on novice practices.

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