

Factors affecting the speed of idea diffusion

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Ideas and practices have an intriguing way of emanating and spreading across communities, countries, and geographical regions. Numerous diffusion events are highlighted occasionally in mass media as it shapes and radically transforms the daily lives of multitudes of people around the world. Notable examples include the Civil Rights movement in the U. S. A, The Arab Spring, and The European Debt Crisis, amongst others. However, the adoption of a new idea, policy, or practice does not happen concurrently across social systems. These variations can be caused by several factors including international collaboration, political institutions and their regulatory bodies, environmental impacts, costs of implementation, etc. The main factors that this paper will focus on are the cultural and social climate of a nation and economic competition between nations. Understanding these key factors and how they influence the speed of idea adoption is an important aspect of the efficiency of potential policy innovation dissemination.

There has always been the challenge of how to successfully spread transformative ideas and influence behaviour on a larger scale. There are disparities in the level and speed of innovation adoption, the implantation process and productivity level of diffusion across countries. Some societies are more or less apt to adopt new practices than others due to their social or cultural structure. Some populations are bound by tradition prolonging the success of the adoption of a policy. In such societies, although attempts might have been made to limit, control, or transform a particular issue or practice, popular support, deeply embedded social norms, or local structures and traditions can decelerate the success of these attempts. By way of illustration, there have been efforts made to address and modify the practice

of female genital mutilation in various countries around the world. In some of these countries, while policies have been placed to prohibit the practice of FGM and reports of the occurrence decreasing has been documented, is still widely accepted and continued. Van Rossem, Meekers, and Gage (2016: 2) state that, " For several decades the Egyptian authorities have tried to no avail to curb and regulate FGM. In 2007 and 2008 laws were passed that banned the practice...although the 2007 law prohibited general practitioners from performing FGM...incidents of FGM remained very high. " In this case, it can be argued that this practice is influenced by the deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and socioeconomic status of the society, which affects popular attitudes. Although when analysing the need for a society's culture and tradition to evolve, ethnocentric views are to be disregarded, one can claim that there are some customs and traditions that are untenably detrimental to the process of development. Learning and emulation have been the primary methods used to assess and reshape attitudes towards FGM in Egypt and reports from international institutions and international and regional treaties have been the safeguards used to fight FGM. Public education reforms and information dissemination aiming to change current cultural notions favouring FGM practices play an important role as well. However, one can ask if these mechanisms will bring radical change in a relatively swift time frame. Citizens of such societies might have to have a complete perspectival change and do away with customs that impede the process of development in order for behavioural change to occur.

Another factor affecting the speed of idea diffusion is the economic competition policies in a nation. One of the key benefits of globalisation is

that it has created access to a bigger global marketplace, which in turn creates greater competition and increases the diffusion of elements such as productivity across countries. This accelerates the rate of diffusion cross-nationally by lowering several barriers promoting change and productivity. This form of diffusion travels to developing nations from developed nations and vice versa. In India for example, a nation that used to have restraints to competition policies, a variety of strategies were used to deal with competitive pressures, such as the restructuring of its corporate sector. In order for the adoption of a new policy from a different country or geographical region to be successful, the target population has to see proof of success before it will be seen beneficial to the advancement to their context. In a lot of cases, developing nations adopt policies or standards from developed nations without international requirements in order to meet market requirements, stay competitive in the international market and gain or retain a competitive advantage. When an economic competitor adopts a particular standard there is a higher probability that another country will adopt the same standard, especially if it directly affects their product market. India has incorporated elements of investment growth in their competition policies and has been working on economic reforms in order to further strengthen their investment attraction. In this case, due to this pressure and their vulnerability, the government of a weaker 'economic' power would adopt these standards in a short time period in order to not lose their trade partners and stay competitive.

Policy diffusion is a thought-provoking phenomenon that occurs at different speeds and stages globally. There are several factors that affect the

mechanisms driving policy diffusion. Just because an idea might change a particular neighbourhood or region it does not mean it will spread as quickly in other regions. Concepts such as civic engagement or freedom of speech have changed communities yet; there are still countries that have not embraced them in widespread or persistent ways due to factors such as political institutions or civil liberties. The mechanisms of policy diffusion lead to multiple outcomes and it is important to explore the conditions of these mechanisms, as well as to understand the characteristics of the target population, in order for appropriate strategies to be used to appeal to the target group and benefit the society in the long run.