Trickle Up Diffusion: An Integrated Theory Inferred from the Diffusion of Symbolic Products

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Abstract

The authors analyze the diffusion over 200 product categories based on a multidisciplinary re-view of over 190 diffusion studies and 8,000 reports. Findings are as follows. First, most journal articles in marketing focus on functional B2C product categories (predominantly consumer du-rables), while few focus on symbolic product categories. This focus suggests a data availability bias in favor of B2C functional product categories and questions the generalizability of existing marketing findings. Second, a substantial literature outside academic publications explains the diffusion of symbolic innovations in music, dance, and fashion and functional innovations in consumer durables. Third, while a trickle down diffusion (rich to poor) process seems to hold for consumer durables, a trickle up diffusion (poor to rich) process seems to hold for symbolic inno-vations. Fourth, the authors develop an integrated theory of trickle up diffusion whose founda-tional mechanisms are self-identity formation and rebelliousness among adolescents and signal-ing youth and vitality by mainstream consumers.

Keywords: *Innovation; Diffusion; Historical*

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