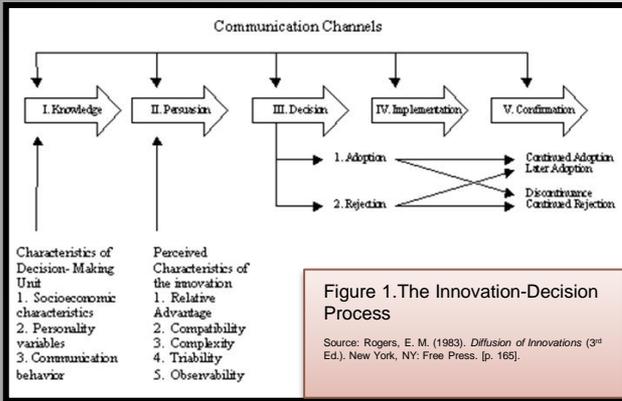# Seeking Knowledge: The Role of Social Networks in the Adoption of Ebooks by Historians

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Research Objectives:
1. To investigate how faculty in the history department are adopting Ebooks.
2. To understand the role of social networks in the adoption process.
3. To examine the perceived barriers by historians to Ebook adoption and use.

Figure 1.The Innovation-Decision Process

Source: Rogers, E. M. (1983). *Diffusion of Innovations* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: Free Press. [p. 165].

Theoretical Framework:
For the purposes of this study, we chose to examine the **Knowledge Stage** of Rogers' **Innovation-Decision Process**. (See Fig 1)
In the **knowledge stage** an individual learns about an innovation for the first time and obtains information about how it functions. Different kinds of knowledge are relevant in the knowledge stage.

- **Awareness knowledge** initiates the process by making an individual aware of the existence of the technology and its potential adoption.
- **How-to knowledge** emerges from the awareness of the innovation and explains how the innovation is used properly and in what settings it can be employed beneficially.
- **Principle knowledge** encompasses an understanding of the mechanisms that lie behind an innovation.

Methods:
Historians participated in semi-structured interviews regarding their perception of Ebooks. A coding scheme was developed by building on Roger's analytical framework and was then employed to analyze the data.
Example A: Coding Scheme Sample

Results:
There were two prevailing attitudes toward Ebooks: **skepticism** (a negative outlook) and **curiosity** (a positive outlook). Often the participants showed both of these attitudes in the interviews, depending on what characteristic of the Ebook was being discussed.
Another interesting finding derived from these interviews was the importance of the role of the **social network** in the adoption process. Although the media was the dominant area through which participants gained information about Ebooks, they were unlikely to try this technology without being assured of its necessity by their peers.

Discussion:
Skepticism regarding Ebooks was caused by four factors: the perceived lack of availability of online documents, the method of access to Ebooks as a hindrance to serendipitous findings, the costs associated with the tools used to view Ebooks, and the simple preference for the printed book.
There were also four main factors which sparked **Curiosity** about Ebooks amongst the historians: they expressed a comfort with technology that made Ebooks easy to use, they were drawn to using the library portal to access Ebooks, they were interested in using Ebooks on a course syllabus, and they believed Ebooks could benefit their own research.
Perhaps our most important findings involved the role of the social network in the adoption of Ebooks. It was found that librarians and other faculty members played an important role in faculty's decision to adopt Ebooks. Students played a passive role, as faculty often assumed that their classes would desire the latest innovation and adopt for their benefit. Figure 2 shows that, although Mass Media remains the main agent of change in the adoption process, the role of the social network (RSN) cannot be ignored.
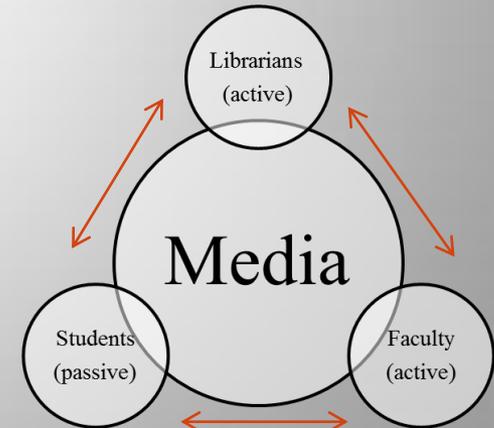

Figure 2. Role of the Social Network (RSN) in Ebook Adoption