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The second-curve model

A promising framework for ethical consumption? Veganism as a case study

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1 Introduction

Innovation and diffusion theories have a long tradition in marketing and consumer behaviour literature (Black 1983; Petrosky 1991; Rogers 1976, 2003). However, thus far, little research has been conducted into understanding the diffusion (and adoption) process of ethical consumption under innovation theories (Carrigan, Moraes, and Leek 2011), even though ethical consumption has been recognised as an innovation trend (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Wooliscroft 2015; Lundahl 2014). The aim of this paper is to build on the literature on ethical consumption from the lens of the theories of innovation and, specifically, from diffusion theory. First, key concepts regarding these theories are given. Second, ethical veganism (hereafter, veganism) is used as a case study to show how the second-curve model offers an opportunity to reframe the understanding of ethical consumption and, subsequently, its analysis. Finally, some implications for researchers and practitioners are considered.

2 Diffusion of innovation theory

Briefly, the theory of diffusion of innovation is a social theory, popularised by Rogers (1995) and Moore (2002), which seeks to explain why, how and at what rate innovations spread over time among members of a social system. We understand innovation as 'an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption' (Rogers 2003, 12). As such, most innovations have two interrelated components: 'software' aspects, referring to information, ideas and/or ideologies; and 'hardware' aspects, referring to objects, products and/or practices (Rogers 2003).

Literature has also consistently shown that innovations, depending on their perceived newness, can be of two types: 'incremental innovation' (also known as 'continuous', 'sustaining' or 'evolutionary'); and 'radical innovation' (also known as 'disruptive', 'discontinuous', 'breakthrough' or 'revolutionary')

(Christensen 1997; Rogers 1976, 2003). While incremental innovations introduce some change(s) in existing innovations, radical innovations represent novelty or new paradigms (Christensen 1992, 1997; Morrison 1996; Sandström 2010).

According to the theory of diffusion of innovation, the adoption of most innovations follows a normal or bell-shaped curve. Furthermore, on the basis of innovativeness, this normal curve is divided into five sections, or ideal adopters categories: innovators (2.5%), early adopters (13.5%), early majority (34%), late majority (34%) and laggards (16%) (Rogers 1976, 2003) (see Figure 1). Moreover, the normal curve, when plotted on a cumulative basis over time, results in an exponential or S-shaped curve (Rogers 1976, 2003) (see Figure 1). Recently, a 'double S-curve' model (also called 'second-curve' or 'two-curves' framework) has been proposed to portray the change dynamics between incremental innovation (the first curve) and radical innovation (the second curve) (e.g. Handy 2015; Morrison 1996) (see Figure 1). The second curve not only has different characteristics than the first curve, but it also implies future orientation and introduces economic, social and personal transformation (Morrison 1996); in this sense, '[t]he second curve has effects that are far-reaching and far-felt, affecting us as individuals, changing the marketplace, reorganizing corporations, and even transforming major industries' (Morrison 1996, 14).

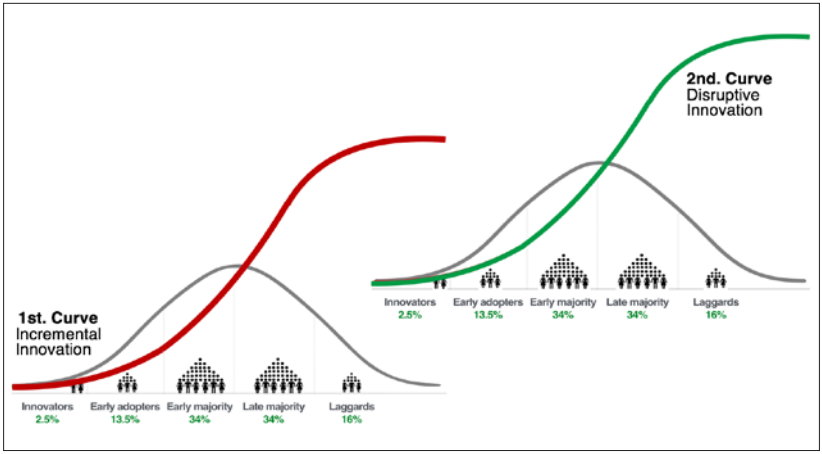

Figure 1: Representation of ideal adopters categories in diffusion of innovation and the double S-curve model. Source: adapted from Morrison, 1996.

Despite the relevance of the theory of diffusion of innovation, diffusion research has three important shortcomings. First, diffusion research has normally been conducted '*after* an innovation has diffused completely to the members of a system' (Rogers 2003, 112); this approach to study innovations can lead to pro-innovation bias (Rogers 2003). Second, diffusion scholars have been favouring the study of some types of innovation while neglecting others; for example, they have focused mainly on the hardware aspects of innovations to the detriment of the software aspects of innovation; and on the incremental innovations to the detriment of radical innovations (Rogers 2003). Finally, in the diffusion literature, there is abundant research on separated or independent innovations but a scarcity of research on innovation clusters, understood as innovations that comprise multiple and closely interrelated innovations (Rogers 2003).

3 Veganism as a form of ethical consumption

Anthropocentrism and speciesism are paradigms built on the belief that humans are at the centre of existence (Rae 2014), fully entitled to exploit 'the nonhuman universe' (Martínez, 1997) to pursue their own interests, and the sole bearers of moral standing (Wolf 2012). However, in recent decades, these paradigms have been openly and seriously challenged by different social actors (Novo 1998; Dunlap 2000; Rae 2014). Vegans, one of those actors, defy the dominant ideology that posits that non-human animals are mere objects to be owned, consumed and discarded by humans (McGrath 2000). Veganism is not a diet; it is a social movement, a countercultural phenomenon, and a form of transformative and ethical consumption expressed as the everyday consumption of goods and services that exclude, for moral reasons, the use of animals (Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw 2005).

Among academics, professionals and citizens there is growing interest in studying eating behaviours (e.g. Van Ittersum and Wansink 2016), human–

animal relationships (e.g. Serpell 1996), and transformative ethical lifestyles (e.g. Harrison et al. 2005; Lundahl 2014; Mick et al. 2012). However, veganism continues to be overlooked in empirical research, especially within the domain of social psychology and consumer behaviour (Díaz 2012; Povey, Wellens and Conner 2001; Ruby 2012), key fields for understanding the individual decision-making process and for designing more effective communication strategies. Not surprisingly, our understanding of the process of diffusing (and adopting) veganism remains extremely limited (Beardsworth and Keil 1991a; Jabs et al. 1998; McDonald 2000).

4 Veganism as a case study for the second-curve model

In this paper, veganism is chosen as a case study for how the 'second-curve' diffusion model may be applied to better understanding ethical consumption because it has three advantages. First, veganism is growing worldwide (Castricano and Simonsen, 2016) but it is still at the stage of being innovatory in most countries. This means that veganism is an innovation that is not completely diffused or 'an innovation in-process' (Roger 2003, 112), thereby avoiding the pro-innovation bias highlighted in the literature.

Second, veganism has not only hardware aspects of innovation but also software aspects, which have largely been neglected in the past literature. Veganism is an ideological, moral and political stance (the 'software' aspect) that is rooted in animal liberation and expressed in everyday consumer behaviours (the 'hardware' aspect), which exclude, for moral reasons, the use of animals (Díaz 2012; Harrison et al. 2005; Horta 2013; Larsson et al. 2003; McGrath 2000). In other words, veganism is an idea innovation and a practice innovation.

Third, veganism has counter-cultural features (Larsson et al. 2003) that introduce significant or revolutionary changes in both software and hardware

aspects; as such, veganism is a radical or disruptive innovation, which has also been overlooked in diffusion research. As an idea innovation, veganism proposes a new ideology that rejects the assumption that humans are at the centre of existence, are the preferential (or sole) bearers of moral standing, and are entitled to exploit non-human animals to pursue their own interests. As a practice innovation, veganism proposes a new style of consumption that rejects everyday consumer goods and services that involve the use of animals for human gain; for example, using animals for research, food, clothing and entertainment.

We propose that veganism is the second curve, an innovation that is radically different from *usoanimalismo* or 'usoanimalism', the first curve (see Figure 2). Usoanimalism is understood as an ideology or mental model (the 'software' aspect) that is rooted in anthropocentrism and speciesism, which sustain that animals are merely resources expressed in everyday consumer behaviours (the 'hardware' aspect) that involve the exploitation of animals. In this sense, usoanimalism is opposed to veganism, and it is broader than other concepts used in the literature, such as carnism, the psychological schema that conditions human beings to eat animals (Joy 2013).

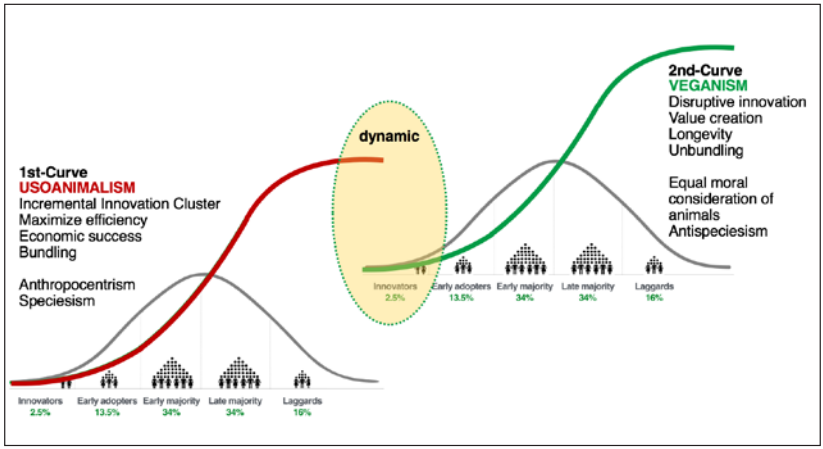

Figure 2: The second-curve model: usoanimalism as the first curve and veganism as the second curve. Source: adapted from Morrison 1996.

Additionally, we assert that while veganism is an independent or separated innovation, usoanimalism is an innovation cluster comprising multiple incremental innovations, such as plant-based diets, flexitarianism, reducetarianism, vegetarianism, conscious omnivorism and the vegan diet—what we consider to be, following Morrison (1996), an impostor or fake second curve because it is not a disruptive innovation.

This proposed framework has important implications for both researchers and practitioners. For researchers, the second-curve framework challenges the widespread assumption of a linear continuum model for studying veganism and other animal-related innovations, according to which omnivorism (anthropocentrism/speciesism/animal welfare/welfarism) and veganism (anti-speciesism/animal rights/abolitionism) are polarised ends of the spectrum, while other alternatives (such as reductionism, vegetarianism or biocentrism) are somewhere in the middle (e.g. Beardsworth and Keil 1998; Jabs, Devine, and Sobal 1991; Povey, Wellens, and Conner 2001).

Moreover, our approach is more sophisticated and dynamic than the linear continuum model. It is more sophisticated in the sense that it enables researchers to perform multidimensional analyses of behaviours. For example, instead of considering vegetarianism to be a one-dimensional phenomenon that stands in the 'middle' of the continuum, under our second-curve framework, researchers can study health vegetarianism, ethical vegetarianism and environmental vegetarianism as separate (but probably related) innovations in the first curve. The second-curve model is also more dynamic because it enables researchers to study the similarities and the relationships between different ethical consumption trends (e.g. environmental vegetarianism and voluntary simplifying, health vegetarianism and organic consumption, the vegan diet and reductionism, freeganism and downshifting).

Additionally, our proposed model could enable scholars to explore key questions, including: What is the current status of diffusion and adoption for each innovation? Do innovations have different rates of diffusion and adoption? What are the differences between innovations regarding their core perceived attributes (relative advantages, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability)? What are the different clusters of incremental innovations? Are these clusters affected by situational and dispositional factors? Are the ideal

adopter categories similar for different innovations? How does the innovation–decision process (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation stages) work for each innovation? And, very importantly, how do the different adopters 'jump' between incremental innovations, or between incremental innovations and disruptive innovations?

Finally, based on innovation literature that identifies key differences between incremental and disruptive innovations (e.g. Christensen 1997; Morrison 1996), one may wonder if such innovations require different theoretical frameworks for appropriate analysis. For example, is it possible that the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991) could be more suitable for studying the adoption of first-curve innovations (e.g. a plant-based diet, reductionism, vegetarianism) than second-curve innovations (veganism)? In other words, is TPB the 'right' model to understand disruptive innovations?

For organisations, companies and policy-makers, the second-curve model has strategic and organisational implications (Handy 2015). This framework can help organisations to better adapt to the environment and to be 'dynamic' (ensuring economic success and long-term survival). In other words, our framework can offer clarity to decision-makers by enabling them to develop strategies and to innovate business models, products and projects in accordance with their objectives: maximising efficiency on the first curve (e.g. usoanimalism), creating new growth on the second curve (e.g. veganism), or pursuing both (dynamic). For example, it can help first-curve organisations to prepare for the second curve (increasing longevity in the long term), or it can help second-curve organisations to capture value from the first curve (ensuring economic success in the short term).

Additionally, the second-curve model can help organisations to enrich or develop 'product/market fits': for first-curve organisations to find new products (incremental innovations or bundled value propositions) for existing markets; and for second-curve organisations to find new markets for new products (disruptive innovations or unbundled value propositions).

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