



The role of emotions in the choice to adopt, or resist, innovations by Irish dairy farmers

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we uncover the emotional factors that contribute to the adoption, or rejection, of different categories of innovation by dairy farmers in Munster, Republic of Ireland. Although emotions have been extensively researched in different fields, little research to date has examined the effects of emotions on farmers' decision making. Munster is the most important region for grass-based dairy farming in Ireland and this type of farming still plays an important role in Ireland's economy and sense of self. By using in-depth interview data from 27 dairy farmers and 6 other participants in the local industry we identified three categories of innovation that were influenced by different emotional pathways. We further uncovered the strong value-driven emotions that underpin the Irish dairy farmers' beliefs about what farming is, and means, and the influence that this has on innovation choices.

1. Introduction

In this paper we uncover the emotional factors that contribute to the adoption, or rejection, of different categories of innovation by dairy farmers in Munster, Republic of Ireland. By using in-depth interview data we uncover how rational or cognitive elements (Doloreux & Lord-Tarte, 2013; Snijders & Rieple, 2014) interact with emotions (Choi, Sung, Lee, & Cho, 2010; Maye, Enticott, Naylor, Ilbery, & Kirwan, 2014; Silvasti, 2003), to shape the adoption of specific types of innovations. Our findings have surfaced the strong value-driven emotions that underpin the Irish dairy farmers' beliefs about what farming is, and means, and the influence that this has on innovation choices.

Emotional or affective dimensions are rather under-represented in research into innovation adoption and rejection, especially by businesses; most of the research that has examined the interaction between emotions and innovation adoption has focused on industries other than agriculture (Vuori & Huy, 2016). We would argue that the important role of emotions in social settings (Parkinson & Manstead, 2015), combined with the heavily values-driven nature of Irish farming (Fahey, 2002; Ni Laoire, 2005) and the inherently emotional nature of work that involves interactions with the land and with animals (Scotney, McLaughlin, & Keates, 2015), means that innovation in Irish dairy farming is worthy of investigation. The rural literatures have also tended to 'understate emotional dimensions' and have seldom made feelings an explicit focus for analysis (Jennings, Edwards, Devereaux Jennings, & Delbridge, 2015) despite the fact that these "loom large in

idealised imaginings of rurality" (Pini, Mayes, & McDonald, 2010). We also challenge the prevailing dominance within innovation adoption theory of a bias towards a pro-change stance, which we address by shedding light on the underpinnings of passive and active innovation resistance (Heidenreich, Kraemer, & Handrich, 2016; Talke & Heidenreich, 2014).

This paper unfolds as follows. We first review the innovation adoption and emotions literatures to understand the factors that influence acceptance of, or resistance to, innovation and the types of innovations adopted, focusing especially on the role of emotions in the innovation adoption or rejection decision. We then describe our methodology and research setting, including the selection of interviewees, our interview protocols and data analysis methods. The following section discusses our findings and proposes a novel framework for understanding the interaction of external and emotional influences on the adoption of innovation and the types of innovations adopted in the Irish dairy industry. This is followed by a final section that draws out implications for theory and for further research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Innovation adoption

Research on both the adoption and the diffusion of innovations has a long and wide-ranging history (Büschgens, Bausch, & Balkin, 2013; Kapoor, Dwivedi, & Williams, 2014). Much of this body of literature

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focuses on the role of innovation in fulfilling a perceived need or solving a problem, whether this is economic or social (Rogers, 2003). Much of the early literature focused on product or technology innovation; subsequent theory has extended to include innovation in services and in business models. Each tends to be diffused via a different path (Kapetaniou & Rieple, 2017) and involves different players in the process.

How and why an innovation takes hold has been the subject of considerable research on diffusion and adoption processes. A number of models of product or technology innovation diffusion paths have focused on the characteristics of the adopter, defined as, for example, innovators, early adopters or laggards (Reinhardt & Gurtner, 2015; Rogers, 1983). Early adopters are characterised as novelty-seekers, who are discontent with the status quo (Gourville, 2006). Laggards are content with the status quo and more fearful of the disruption of change (Heidenreich & Handrich, 2015). However, these models neglect the influence of emotional factors in the process.

In one of the best known models Rogers (2003) proposed that five factors influence an innovation's adoption: relative advantage (the degree that an innovation is perceived to be better than the product it is superseding), compatibility (the degree to which the innovation is perceived to be consistent with the adopter's values, experiences, and needs), complexity (the degree to which an innovation is perceived to be difficult to understand and use), trialability (the degree to which an innovation can be trialled or experimented with), and observability (the degree to which the benefits of an innovation are visible to its potential adopters). However, models such as this tend to focus on the individual adopter and ignore the systemic and social aspects of the adoption process.

For example, social and spatial proximity to other adopters can be important factors in the adoption process. This happens through a number of different mechanisms. Social contagion (Hinz, Schulze, & Takac, 2014; Hatfield, Rapson, & Le, 2009; Angst, Agarwal, Sambamurthy, & Kelley, 2010) works because of humans' psychological need to belong to a group (Fischer & Manstead, 2016). However, although concepts such as mimetic isomorphism (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983) focus on imitative processes to explain why firms within the same industry tend to have the same structure and operating frameworks, few have attempted to understand the socio-psychological underpinnings of such mimesis (Delgado-García, La Fuente-Sabaté, & Manuel, 2010; Smith & Mackie, 2015; Thagard & Kroon, 2006). The proximity of the source of contagion to the receiver also affects the potency of the influence (Gaba & Meyer, 2008), as does the 'infectiousness' of the influencer, often based on their perceived legitimacy or reputation (Greve, Kim, & Teh, 2016). Word of mouth is a potent source of new ideas, especially if those come from highly respected peers. Here the geography of identity and embeddedness is important (Cheshire, Meurk, & Woods, 2013; Stenholm & Hytti, 2014; Woods, 2007). The frequency of interactions that comes from physical proximity (Cantwell & Zhang, 2011; Zander & Kogut, 1995) as well as social and cognitive proximity (Boschma, 2005; Uzzi, 1996; Hardeman, Frenken, Nomaler, & Ter Wal, 2014) affects access to, and adoption of, knowledge.

Agricultural innovations frequently concern not so much the adoption of newly introduced technologies, but the adaptation of existing ones (van der Veen, 2010). Agriculture is a regulated industry and product innovation is controlled, limiting the types and scale of innovations available (McElwee, 2006). Other factors that are material to our study of innovation adoption by dairy farmers include historical farm ownership structures and identities that are strongly influenced by values and ideologies that focus on their role as keepers of the land (Maye et al., 2014; Silvasti, 2003). Many of Ireland's small farms have been within the same family for generations, a factor that has the potential to 'lock them into a way of being' (McElwee, 2006). This is a secure environment which has the potential to influence their willingness to take risks or destabilise their lifestyle, and blocks the desire

to acquire entrepreneurial resources. Those who are able to innovate can be constrained to a relatively small number of options because of restrictive tenancy agreements (McElwee, 2006).

2.2. Innovation resistance

Much of the literature on innovation resistance has also ignored systemic or environmental factors. It has also been dominated by a novelty-seeking paradigm that privileges the positive benefits of innovation (Heidenreich & Handrich, 2015; Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). As Mugwisi, Mostert, and Ocholla (2015) say, the pro-innovation bias has tended to privilege the individual and ignored systemic aspects so that there is a "tendency to hold the individual responsible for his/her problems rather than the system in which he/she is part". Recent theorising has focused more on the economic and systemic factors that block innovation adoption. One stream of research has focused on how differences between innovations, in terms of their novelty, difficulty, capital intensiveness, and the need for the involvement of complementary assets and infrastructure, affect the adoption process (Soriano & Huarng, 2013). However, there is still a relative paucity of research on the factors that inhibit innovation adoption (Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002; Talke & Heidenreich, 2014) and why novelty is either actively or passively resisted (Kleijnen, Lee, & Wetzels, 2009; Laukkanen, 2016).

In addition to the psychological and emotional aspects that we discuss in more detail below, there are numerous structural and systemic reasons why innovations may not be taken up (Paluch & Wunderlich, 2016). People may choose to adopt an innovation because it improves aspects other than profit, or they may choose not to adopt because adopting would be in conflict with their values or existing practices (Laukkanen, 2016; Sun, Hyland, & Bosch, 2015). It seems likely that strong values will shape resistance to innovation more than they will shape innovation adoption. This is especially relevant in our case as farming is one of the most strongly values-driven industries (Burton, Kuczera, & Schwarz, 2008; Warren, Burton, Buchanan, & Birnie, 2016).

One recent paper encountering these issues examined a potential change of land in Scotland, where non-financial factors related to identity, lifestyle, culture and the perceived importance of food production powerfully shaped the overwhelmingly negative attitudes of farmers to the introduction of a new crop, short rotation coppice willow for biomass fuel use (Warren et al., 2016). A study of mental models towards innovation held by different actors in the Australian beef industry also revealed the power of deep seated values and beliefs to shape innovation adoption (Sun & Bosch, 2013). One innovation (overstocking to increase productivity) was achievable in the short term and would improve profits, but only at the cost of damage to pastures which would cause problems in the long term (Sun & Bosch, 2013). As a result of the farmers' concern for the land the innovation was rejected. Such research also hints at farmers' tendency to be influenced by socially-shaped perceptions of what constitutes 'good farming' (Burton, 2012; Winkler, 2016) and deep attachment to their preferred way of doing things (Gosling & Williams, 2010). Rather than seeking the pure profit maximisation of classic economic models of business they are strongly influenced by social norms, cultural beliefs, socio-psychological factors, aesthetic judgements and personal values concerning nature, family and community (Warren et al., 2016). Our study addresses these issues.

2.3. Emotional aspects to the adoption of innovation

The issue of attachment brings us to the important role of emotions in farmers' decisions as to whether or not to adopt an innovation. Emotion refers to a feeling state with an identified cause or target that can be expressed verbally or nonverbally (Fineman, 2003; Quy, Corley, & Kraatz, 2014), that results in physical and psychological changes, and that influences behavior Russell (2003). Some examples of emotions are

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