

Expansion Diffusion

When a cultural trait, such as a religion, spreads, it typically does so from a hearth. Islam's hearth was on the Arabian Peninsula, and from there, Islam diffused to Egypt and North Africa, through Southwest Asia, and into West Africa. This is a case of **expansion diffusion**, when an innovation or idea develops in a hearth and remains strong there while also spreading outward. Geographers classify diffusion processes into two broad categories: expansion diffusion and relocation diffusion. In the case of expansion diffusion, an innovation or idea develops in a hearth and remains strong there while also spreading outward (Fig. 1.22).

Expansion diffusion takes several forms. The silicon bands that are different shapes and colors, like an animal, a football, or a continent, and that stretch into bracelets are called Silly Bandz. Robert Croak, a businessman from Toledo, Ohio, invented the bands in 2008 after seeing similar rubber bands produced by a Japanese company when he was at a trade show in China. The vast

majority of Croak's marketing came from **contagious diffusion**, a form of expansion diffusion in which nearly all adjacent individuals and places are affected. One child had Silly Bandz, and the next day, many more children in his classroom would have the bracelets.

Croak already had a company, Brainchild Products, that sold silicon awareness bracelets, and he worked with his Chinese supplier to create Silly Bandz. Croak trademarked the name and launched a website in the summer of 2008. Without spending any money on marketing, Croak started a Facebook page. Between the website and the Facebook page, the demand for Silly Bandz diffused contagiously and quickly. *Business Week* reports the company that once shipped 24 boxes a day out of its Toledo headquarters now ships 1500 boxes a day. Croak reports Silly Bandz are "carried in approximately 18,000 stores in 25 states."

Although several other competitors quickly entered the market, the demand for Croak's Silly Bandz increased in stores. Croak now offers Silly Bandz in partnership with celebrities and companies, including Justin Bieber.

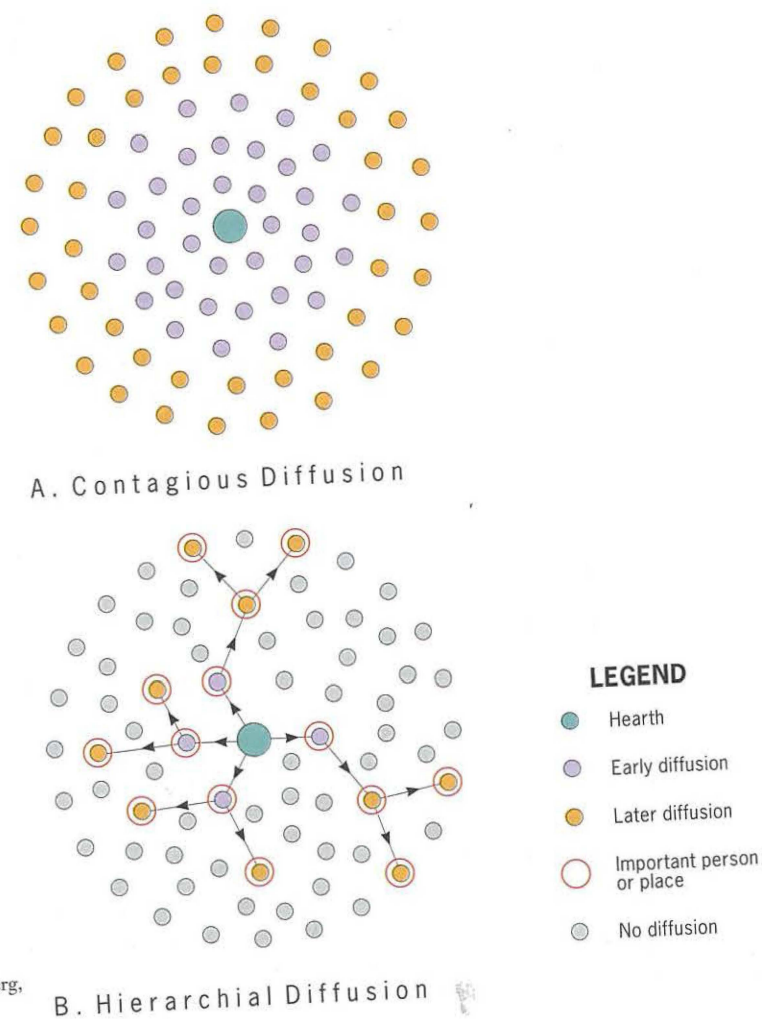


Figure 1.22
Contagious and Hierarchical Diffusion. © E. H. Foubert,
A. B. Murphy, H. J. de Blij, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

In addition to the contagious diffusion on the playground and in the classrooms, the diffusion of Silly Bandz, as opposed to a competing brand, is going to be greatest around the 18,000 stores in 25 states that sell this particular product. The stores create a hierarchy, a structure to the diffusion of the innovation, in this case a particular brand of bracelets.

Instead of Silly Bandz on their wrists, many Major League Baseball players now wear necklaces. The colorful necklaces are not made of silicon. They are made of a nylon fabric that matches their uniform and is imbued with titanium. The baseball players, including Justin Morneau of the Minnesota Twins, Joba Chamberlain of the New York Yankees, and Josh Beckett of the Boston Red Sox, wear titanium necklaces sold by Phiten. Phiten is a Japanese company with corporate stores in Honolulu, Hawaii, Torrance, California, and Seattle, Washington.

Formed in 1983, the Phiten Company uses what it calls aqua technology to disperse titanium throughout the nylon fabric it uses to make necklaces and bracelets. Phiten supporters believe the titanium helps restore balance and allows the flow of energy through fatigued muscles. The company's website states that wearing a Phiten will "restore normal relaxation" for customers. Phiten not only sells necklaces and bracelets, but also compression sleeves and shorts, athletic tape, patches, and even bedding infused with aqua metals, typically titanium.

The diffusion of Phitens from its hearth in Japan to the United States began with a sport the two countries share: baseball. In 2001, New York Yankee Randy Johnson traveled to Japan and saw baseball players wearing titanium necklaces. He started wearing a Phiten, and other Major League players in the United States soon followed. The custom caught on hierarchically, from team to team and contagiously from player to player. In an article published by CBS News, a regional sales manager for Phiten in Seattle is quoted as saying "I'd say about three-fourths of the Detroit Tigers and Minnesota Twins players use them." Baseball players adopted the custom because they believe the titanium helped alleviate muscle pain.

An idea such as a new fashion or new genre of music may not always spread throughout a contiguous population. For example, the spread of Crocs footwear is a case of **hierarchical diffusion**, a pattern in which the main channel of diffusion is some segment of those who are susceptible to (or adopting) what is being diffused. In the case of Crocs, founder Scott Seamans found a clog manufactured by a Canadian company that was created out of the unique croc resin material. Seamans, an avid sailor, put a strap on the back and holes for drainage. He and two co-founders of the crocs company based the company in Boulder, Colorado, had the shoes manufactured, and sold them at boat shows in 2002 and 2003. Crocs footwear diffused from boating

enthusiasts to gardeners to the American public—becoming especially popular among children, who adorned their crocs with Jibbitz, or charms designed for crocs. The hierarchy of boaters, gardeners, and then the contagious diffusion that followed helps explain the rapid growth of the crocs brand, which had revenues of over \$800 million in 2007.

A third form of expansion diffusion is **stimulus diffusion**. Not all ideas can be readily and directly adopted by a receiving population; some are simply too vague, too unattainable, too different, or too impractical for immediate adoption. Yet, these ideas can still have an impact. They may indirectly promote local experimentation and eventual changes in ways of doing things. For example, the diffusion of fast, mass-produced food in the late twentieth century led to the introduction of the hamburger to India. Yet the Hindu religion in India prohibits consumption of beef, which is a major cultural obstacle to the adoption of the hamburger (Fig. 1.23). Instead, retailers began selling burgers made of vegetable products. The diffusion of the hamburger took on a new form in the cultural context of India. With expansion diffusion, whether contagious or hierarchical, the people stay in place and the innovation, idea, trait, or disease does the moving.

Relocation Diffusion

Relocation diffusion occurs most frequently through migration. When migrants move from their homeland, they take their cultural traits with them. Developing an ethnic neighborhood in a new country helps immigrants maintain their culture in the midst of an unfamiliar one. **Relocation diffusion**, in contrast, involves the actual movement of individuals who have already adopted the idea or innovation, and who carry it to a new, perhaps distant, locale, where they proceed to disseminate it (Fig. 1.22). If the homeland of the immigrants loses enough of its population, the cultural customs may fade in the hearth while gaining strength in the ethnic neighborhoods abroad.



Once you think about different types of diffusion, you will be tempted to figure out what kinds of diffusion are taking place for all sorts of goods, ideas, or diseases. Please remember that any good, idea, or disease can diffuse in more than one way. Choose a good, idea, or disease as an example and describe how it diffused from its hearth across the globe, referring to at least three different types of diffusion.