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Public relations and social businesses: The importance of enhancing engagement

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ABSTRACT

Public relations is usually practiced within three clearly defined organizational settings: the public or governmental sector, the private or business sector and the social nonprofit sector. Over the past few decades, the boundaries between the three sectors have blurred, and new types of organizations and initiatives that combine environmental aims with business approaches have emerged. These new organizations and initiatives create a challenge for public relations practitioners: practitioners need to raise awareness among various publics to a new type of organization that combines both societal and business-like characteristics, and they need to promote dialogue and engagement with these publics.

This study focuses on social businesses—that is, self-sustainable businesses that address social goals (Yunus, 2007). Based on a representative sample of 202 respondents, this study utilizes the Diffusion of Innovations theory (DOI) (Rogers, 1962) to argue for the importance of engagement to a successful process of diffusion and to demonstrate how DOI theory might enrich public relations theory and practice.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, new types of organizations and initiatives have emerged. These organizations and initiatives combine environmental aims with business approaches, and they include corporate social responsibility (CSR), social marketing, cause-related marketing, social businesses, and others. Previous studies have shown that nonprofit organizations, as well as organizations involved in corporate philanthropy and CSR, try to utilize blogs and social networks to grab the attention of their publics and to cultivate relationships with members, donors, and volunteers, although these efforts have not always been successful (Duhé, 2012; Merrit, Lawson, Mackey, & Waters, 2012). Nevertheless, these studies have emphasized the important role that public relations plays in these endeavors, arguing that "the development of digital communication presents an opportunity for public relations to evolve in order to apply its existing strengths in earning coverage, building online relationships and managing corporate reputation" (Yaxley, 2012, p. 431). In other words, new types of organizations and initiatives have created a challenge for public relations practitioners who need to find out how to better utilize new media (i.e., social networks and mobile telephony) to raise awareness to their ideas, products and services and to promote public-organization engagement and relationship building.

One of these new types of organizations that combine business and societal characteristics is social businesses—that is, self-sustainable businesses that address social goals (Yunus, 2007). Referring to social businesses, this study will discuss the centrality of engagement to a successful process of diffusion and will argue for the relevancy of DOI theory to public relations theory and practice.

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2. Literature review

2.1. Relationship-building and engagement

In recent years, *engagement* has become a buzzword in public relations research and practice. The idea that organizations and publics can and should engage with each other in 'real conversations' seems to be a natural development of the *relational approach,* which emphasizes the building, management and maintenance of the organization–public relationship (OPR) (Botan, 1992; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001) and the *dialogic communication approach*, which adds to OPR building the notion of dialogue and 'dialogic communication' (Botan, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Pearson, 1989). According to Taylor and Kent (2014, p. 384), "engagement is part of dialogue, and through engagement, organizations and publics can make decisions that create social capital." They also suggest that dialogic engagement has many advantages for organizations and stakeholders because it improves understanding among participants, assists in making decisions that benefit all parties involved and encourages a fully functioning society whose decision making is based on information. According to Devin and Lane (2014), stakeholder engagement creates a network of mutual responsibility through relationships, while organizations involve their stakeholders in decision-making processes and dialogue. The result builds the legitimacy of an organization. Johnston (2014) suggests that 'as a multidimensional concept, engagement offers a foundation for building organizational relationships, and provides a means to facilitate community–organization interaction' (p. 381), while Ariel and Avidar (2015) add that online engagement enables publics to become co-creators of meanings.

The Internet, and mainly social media and mobile platforms, opened up new opportunities for OPR building and engagement. According to Sweetser (2014) "…social media has quickly grown into an organizational tool used to create a more human face and foster a relationship with stakeholders" (p. 205). Social media enable not only interaction among organizations and publics but also interaction among members of the public who consume, produce and share online information and become co-creators of meanings (Ariel & Avidar, 2015). Nevertheless, Yang and Kent (2014) note that "traditional" media and mainstream coverage still play an important part in raising the social media visibility of organizations.

One topic that has become popular in recent years as a platform for OPR building and engagement is organizational concern of society and the environment (Dhanesh, 2013; Du-Plessis & Grobler, 2014). The next section will explore societal and environmental engagement.

2.2. Societal and environmental engagement

Public relations is usually practiced in three clearly defined organizational settings: the public or governmental sector ('first sector'), the private or business sector ('second sector'), and the social nonprofit sector ('third sector').

Over the past few decades, the boundaries between these sectors have blurred, and many organizations have started to blend social and environmental aims with business approaches (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006; Berg & Sheehan, 2014; Young, 2001). This amalgamation, in addition to a growing demand from the public that organizations should take responsibility for their actions and provide transparent communication (DiStaso & Bortree, 2014), led organizations, and mainly businesses, to add two additional "P's" to the line of "Profit": Public and Planet (Du-Plessis & Grobler, 2014). Thus, various companies and firms have become more 'socially involved businesses' and have created positive social change through CSR programs. Although CSR activities were always present among businesses, the use of CSR as a marketing tool has increased over the years (Berg & Sheehan, 2014). CSR is defined as a "commitment to improve societal well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources," (Kotler & Lee, 2005), and CSR programs are aimed at reducing environmental and societal concerns, such as pollution, exploitation, poverty and crime. Indeed, CSR has been recognized by public relations professionals as a strong public relations tool that enhances mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders, and CSR programs are now globally implemented (Dhanesh, 2013; Du-Plessis & Grobler, 2014; Kim & Choi, 2012; Trapp, 2014).

Various other forms of organizational social engagement that emerged in the second half of the 20th century include cause-related marketing, socially responsible investing, corporate philanthropy and social marketing. Social marketing was first presented by Kotler and Zaltman (1971), who defined the field as "the design, implementation and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving consideration of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution and market research" (p. 5). According to Andreasen (2006), "Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of the society in which they are part" (p. 91). Social marketing uses marketing techniques to achieve social change and promote social causes, such as health, environmental protection, animal welfare, freedom and human rights (Toledano & Riches, 2014). Although social marketing is part of the discipline of marketing, McKie and Toledano (2008) argue that uniting public relations and social marketing might benefit both fields.

Both CSR and social marketing focus on an organizational contribution to society and the environment, and they are conducted by one of three sectors: CSR is mainly conducted by businesses and the private sector, and social marketing is mainly conducted by the governmental and the nonprofit sectors (McKie & Toledano, 2008). However, in recent years, a new type of organization has emerged (i.e., the *social business*), which is part of a new sector: the *fourth sector*. The fourth sector utilizes the strengths and resources of all three sectors to achieve social purposes through business methods. Thus, businesses take care of people and the environment, nonprofits look for new ways to become financially self-sustainable, and governmental agencies work to actually promote the benefit of their citizens (Smartrade, 2015). This study will focus on the fourth sector and mainly on social businesses.

2.3. Social businesses

It was Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof. Muhammad Yunus from Bangladesh who introduced the world to a new type of organization, which he called a *social business*. In 1976, Yunus first established the *Grameen Bank*, a community development bank and a microfinance organization that gave small loans (also known as *Micro-credit*) to poor entrepreneurs without requiring collateral. The concept behind the loans was that loans are better than charity, and poor people who have under-utilized skills can use the loans to earn more money and gain financial independence. As Yunus explained in his book (Yunus, 2007), a social business is a financially self-sustainable business that is created and designed to address a social problem. Unlike a "regular" business, its aim is not to maximize profits (although profits are desirable), and the business owners do not receive any dividends because the profits are re-invested in the business. Unlike a nonprofit organization, a social business does not rely on donations or grants because it is self-sustainable. "The impact of the business on people or environment, rather the amount of profit made in a given period measures the success of social business. Sustainability of the company indicates that it is running as a business. The objective of the company is to achieve social goal/s" (Yunus Centre, 2015).

Although social businesses can be found in various parts of the world, this study was conducted in an Israeli context. Nevertheless, the issues raised here and the findings of the study are relevant to social businesses globally. The next section will explore social businesses in Israel.

2.4. Social businesses in Israel

In Israel, the interest in social businesses is growing, mainly from the part of corporations, philanthropic organizations, governmental offices and civic society (Feit, 2011). In 2009, there were 212 social businesses in Israel (Arlozorov, 2012; Benziman, 2009; Gidron & Yogev, 2010; Feit, 2011), and today, the number is estimated to be a few hundred (Minga, 2015). In comparison, in England, a leader in the field of social businesses, there are over 250,000 social businesses (Minga, 2015).

Social businesses engage in various social activities, such as employing and empowering distressed youth (i.e., a bakery that trains distressed youth to be confectioners), employing mentally and physically disabled (i.e., a factory that provides packaging and printing services to other businesses or a boutique winery that employs people with disabilities to harvest, bottle, package and sell wine), and promoting weakened and minority populations (i.e., catering work opportunities for Bedouin women and Jewish Orthodox communities). Although the activities and initiatives led by social businesses are diverse, a common challenge faces all social businesses: they must reach out to their publics, raise their awareness of and interest in their products, services and activities and engage with them. In other words, they must rely on professional public relations.

2.5. Identity and reputation

Among public relations practitioners, working for businesses, nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies is a common practice (Einwiller, & Steilen, 2015; Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). However, social businesses are a new type of organization that combines characteristics of both for-profits and nonprofits and therefore sets a new challenge for public relations practitioners.

As does any other organization, social businesses must define their identity, communicate it to their publics, engage with them and try to build a strong and positive reputation. According to Huang-Horowitz (2015), organizational identity, which refers to the various attributes with which an organization describes itself, and organizational reputation, which refers to perceptions that others have about the organization, are important. Other scholars also emphasize the importance of building a strong, consistent and socially valued organizational identity. They argue that a strong identity helps an organization both internally and externally by increasing its reputation, contributing to a feeling of trust and attracting customers and employees (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Bouchikhi & Kimberly, 2008). Others emphasize the importance of building a strong and positive reputation. These scholars describe reputation as an asset for organizations, a competitive and strategic resource, a contributor to the bottom line and a catalyst for encouraging employee engagement (Deephouse, 2000; Duhé, 2009; Huang-Horwotz, 2015; Men, 2012).

In the model of other organizations, social businesses also must build a strong, consistent and socially valued identity and reputation. As a relatively new type of organization, social businesses must raise the awareness of potential publics to their products and services, use various media to communicate their identities to their publics, engage with them and try to build a positive reputation. According to McKie and Toledano (2008), public relations practitioners can help expose an individual to an idea and raise its awareness and interest in it. In addition, public relations practitioners can promote dialogue and engagement between organizational representatives and strategic publics. As suggested by Taylor and Kent (2014), to achieve engagement, there must be a two-way relational give-and-take based on interactive communication that aims to improve understanding among participants.

The theory of Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) will be used in this study to argue for the importance and centrality of engagement to a successful process of diffusion and relationship building. As will be discussed in the next section, the process of DOI is both a communicative process aimed to raise awareness to innovations and a social process that involves interaction and engagement among potential adopters and others (Rogers, 1962).

2.6. The diffusion of innovations theory

In 1962, E. M. Rogers introduced the Diffusion of Innovations theory. Rooted in various social sciences, the theory explains how a

new idea, behavior or product spreads and diffuses over time through a specific population or social system and is adopted by the population.

To be self-sustaining, an innovation must be widely adopted by the population and reach a critical mass. According to Rogers (1962), there are five different adopter categories: (1) Innovators – the first 2.5% of the individuals in a system to adopt an innovation. These individuals are venturesome and willing to take risks. (2) Early Adopters – the next 13.5% of the individuals in a system to adopt an innovation. These individuals are opinion leaders who easily embrace change opportunities. (3). Early Majority – the next 34% of the individuals in a system to adopt an innovation. They usually adopt new ideas before the majority but first need to see evidence that the innovation works. (4) Late Majority – the next 34% of the individuals in a system to adopt an innovation. They are skeptical of change and willing to adopt an innovation only after it has been tried by the majority. (5) Laggards – the last 16% of the individuals in a system to adopt an innovation. They are conservative, skeptical of change, bound by tradition and the hardest group to convince.

According to Rogers (1962), there is a five-stage process by which an individual (or other decision-making unit) decides whether to adopt an innovation and whereby diffusion is accomplished. The first stage of the process is *knowledge*, when an individual is exposed to the existence of an innovation; the second stage is *persuasion*, when an individual forms a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation; the third stage is *decision*, when there is engagement in activities that lead to adopting or rejecting the innovation; the fourth stage is *implementation*, when the innovation is used; and the last stage is *confirmation*, when an individual seeks reconfirmation of an innovation-decision already made or reverses a previous decision.

In addition, according to Rogers (1962), there are five main factors that influence the adoption of an innovation: relative advantage (i.e., perception of the relative advantages of the innovation over existing ideas or products), compatibility (i.e., to the needs and values of potential adopters), complexity (i.e., of the innovation), triability (i.e., the possibility to try an innovation and experience with it before deciding to commit), and observability (i.e., the extent to which an innovation provides concrete results) (Rogers, 1962). Years later, Hall (2004) updated this list and added the amount of improvement that the innovation offers over any previous technology, costs of adopting an innovation, information and uncertainty about the innovation, industry environment and marketing characteristics and network effects, or the extent to which the innovation is adopted by other consumers.

Rogers (1962) argued that gaining awareness-knowledge is usually not a passive activity; rather, it requires that people actively expose themselves to messages about an innovation. In addition, their predispositions influence their behavior towards communication messages and the effects of the messages on them. Rogers (1962) also stresses that whereas mass media channels can play an important role in achieving awareness-knowledge, in the persuasion stage, most individuals turn to their close ties and others to obtain their subjective opinion of the innovation.

2.7. Public relations and social businesses

When looking at social businesses as a new type of organization that seeks awareness, reputation enhancement and engagement the challenge for public relations practitioners is twofold: first, they must introduce a new type of a business to strategic publics and raise their awareness and interest in the attractiveness of its products and services as well as its social goals; second, they must promote engagement with potential clients.

Unlike public relations for 'regular' businesses or nonprofit organizations, this task is often more complicated. According to Benziman (2009), identifying a business as a *social business* might damage the reputation of its products and services because they are perceived as low-quality products that were manufactured by underserved or distressed communities. For example, practitioners that emphasize the high quality of a bottle of a boutique wine also must explain that it was made by distressed populations. Hence, wine-lovers who are willing to pay a high price for a bottle of wine might hesitate about the quality of a wine made by distressed population. In another example, practitioners who try to attract clients to a coffee shop by emphasizing its excellent location and low prices also have to communicate that all workers are mentally ill or ex-prisoners. In other words, although social businesses contribute to society and environment, from a public relations standpoint, they raise a challenge.

In addition to the challenges facing the practitioners, various critics raise additional concerns about social businesses. For example, some argue that not every socially oriented organization can endeavor and succeed in business entrepreneurship and become financially self-sustainable (Benziman, 2009). Others argue that the term 'social business' is not yet well-defined from a legal and a tax perspective, which makes it difficult to decide which organization is entitled to be called a 'social business' and which is not (Benziman, 2009; Feit, 2011). Another critique refers to the employer-employee relationships inside social businesses, arguing that there are social businesses that exploit weak populations by paying them very low salaries for their work (Atiya, 2012). Binda (2014) claims that terms such as 'social problems' or 'fair salaries' are not objective terms that are easily agreed upon, but they are subjective terms that are defined in the eyes of the observer. Hence, a 'fair salary' according to an employer might be perceived as exploitation by a potential customer. Furthermore, Binda (2014) claims that the title 'social business' is sometimes used as a disguise by 'regular' businesses that become social businesses just to improve their images because they believe that the public perceives social businesses positively. These businesses believe that becoming social businesses will reduce criticism against their acts and that they will gain more trust and sympathy from their publics.

Because social businesses are a relatively new type of organization, the DOI theory (Rogers, 1962) might be useful to explore whether and to what extent social businesses have succeeded in raising awareness to their products and services, whether this awareness was positive and whether there was any engagement between social businesses and their publics.

3. Research questions

Public relations practitioners can contribute to the success of social businesses by raising awareness to their products and services and by initiating and encouraging interaction and engagement between representatives of social businesses and various publics.

According to the DOI theory (Rogers, 1962), the first stage in the process of diffusion is *knowledge*, or when an individual is exposed to the existence of an innovation and gains awareness-knowledge. Since there was no Internet on 1962, Rogers (1962) argued that potential adopters are often exposed to an innovation for the first time through mass media channels (TV, papers, radio, and Internet) – sometimes passively and sometimes actively – by seeking information. Nowadays online media plays an important role in disseminating organizational information, managing reputations and fostering interaction among individuals who share information and personal experiences (Ariel & Avidar, 2015; Yaxley, 2012). Hence, the first and second research questions explore the level of awareness and type of exposure of potential adopters to social businesses:

RQ1: What is the level of awareness-knowledge of potential adopters to social businesses?

RQ2: Are potential adopters of social businesses exposed to social businesses mainly through 'traditional' or online media?

As suggested by Rogers (1962), after the stage of *knowledge*, the next stage is *persuasion*. In this stage, individuals form a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards an innovation and this determines whether the process of diffusion will continue. Rogers adds that in the stage of *persuasion*, individuals actively seek innovation-evaluation information and turn to close ties, organizational representatives, change agents and opinion leaders to obtain more knowledge and subjective opinions on the innovation, which is based on personal experiences. In other words, the stage of *persuasion* involves interaction and engagement between potential adopters and others. Thus:

RQ3: How do potential adopters perceive social businesses, and have they engaged with or about social businesses with others (i.e., organizational representatives, friends or employees)?

4. Methodology

The data for this study were collected using a survey among a representative sample of 202 Israeli adults 18–65 years of age (maximum sample error: 4.5%). Respondents were recruited from an online panel of Israelis. Based on current data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the distribution of the panel respondents was population proportionate. We employed two screening questions to 962 respondents: [(1) "Do you know what a *social business* is?" (2) "please choose from the list below the best definition of a *social business:* (A) a type of a nonprofit working to achieve social justice. (B) a type of a governmental agency serving distressed populations. (C) a business that tries to achieve social purposes through business methods. (D) Do not know/not sure."]. This resulted in an affirmative response from 20.9% (n = 202) respondents who completed the survey.

The sample was distributed evenly between females (43.1%) and males (56.9%), and their ages ranged from 18 to 65 years old; the mean age was 40.6 years (standard deviation [*SD*] = 13.2). Respondents mainly defined themselves as having an average income (37.6%). The percentage of respondents with and without an academic degree was similar (50.0%), and they resided across all geographic parts of Israel.

The survey contained 25 questions, including both structured questions and selected questions on a six-interval Likert scale (i.e., "strongly disagree," "disagree," "partially agree," "agree," "strongly agree," and "do not know/not sure"). The questions referred to participants' profiles (i.e., demographic variables), level of online and offline media exposure to social businesses (e.g., through TV, radio, Internet, Facebook), personal involvement and engagement with and about social businesses (i.e., employee, employer, volunteer or investor) and perceptions of social businesses (i.e., level of agreement/disagreement to various statements, such as Social businesses "sell low quality products", "sell cheap products," "contribute to community and society," "empower distressed communities," "abuse distressed communities, paying low salaries," etc.). The statements were selected based on the positive and negative aspects of social businesses presented earlier (Atiya, 2012; Benziman, 2009; Binda, 2014; Feit, 2011; Yunus, 2007).

5. Findings

The first and second research questions explored the level of awareness-knowledge of potential adopters to social businesses and type of exposure. The survey revealed that of 962 respondents, the vast majority (79.1%) did not know what a social business was, they had never been in any contact with social businesses and they were not exposed to social businesses via online or 'traditional' media. In other words, the majority did not even start the process of DOI and had not reached even the first stage of *knowledge-awareness,* although without this stage, people cannot engage, experience or adopt an innovation.

Only 202 respondents (20.9%) knew what a social business was and completed the survey. Since the members of this group knew what a social business was before the majority, they were categorized as *Early Knowers*. Several Chi-Square tests revealed that a significant ($p < 0.0001$) relatively high familiarity with the term *social business* was found among an "elite" group: men who hold an academic degree, have a medium/high income, are between 50 and 65 years of age and live in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. Nevertheless, most members of this group did not interact or engage with representatives of social businesses or others, but they had some kind of knowledge about social businesses, which they partially received from online media (52%) and 'traditional' media (36%). Indeed, as suggested by Rogers (1962), *Early Knowers* are not necessarily adopters of an innovation because they might decide to reject the innovation.

The third research question explored perceptions of social businesses and engagement with and about social businesses. Overall, the survey revealed that people who knew what a social business was had a positive attitude both towards the 'business-like' and

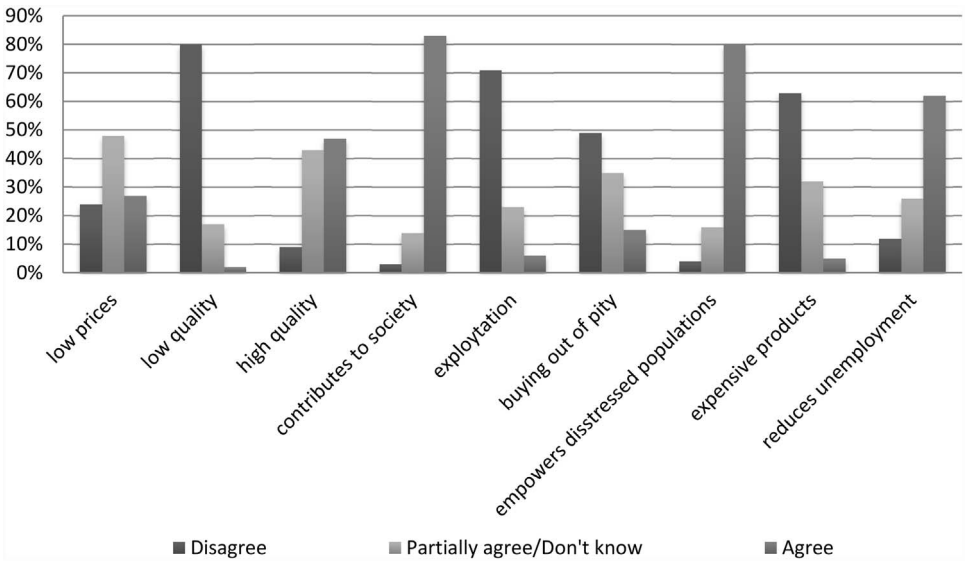

Fig. 1. Perception of social businesses.

societal characteristics of social businesses. Most respondents agreed that social businesses sell high quality services and products (47%), contribute to the community and society (83%), empower distressed populations in society (80%) and reduce unemployment (62%). Accordingly, most respondents did not agree that social businesses exploit distressed populations and pay them low salaries (71%), encourage buying out of pity (49%) and sell bad quality (80%) or expensive (63%) services and products (Fig. 1).

The survey also revealed that out of 202 respondents, 18 percent (n = 36) identified themselves as personally engaged with or about social businesses. The members of this group had mostly passed all five stages of the process of diffusion from *knowledge* to *confirmation*; they knew what social businesses were and what they do through online media, traditional media and exchanges with close-ties and organizational representatives and they were Facebook friends of at least one social business. In addition, they expressed a positive attitude towards both the "business-like" and "societal" characteristics of social businesses, and most importantly, they became personally involved with social businesses as volunteers, investors, employees or employers. Based on the distinction made by Rogers (1962), we can identify this group as *Innovators* or *Early Adopters* because they have had a personal experience with social businesses before the majority.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this study was to utilize social businesses and DOI theory to argue for the importance of engagement to a successful process of diffusion, and to suggest that DOI theory might enrich public relations theory and practice.

As previously mentioned, social businesses, as a type of financially self-sustainable business, need clients to survive. Public relations can help social businesses raise awareness of their products and services, build a strong and positive reputation and engage with strategic publics (McKie & Toledano, 2008; Wilcox & Cameron, 2010). According to Rogers (1962, 2002), raising awareness of an innovation is important, but it is satisfactory only for the first stage of *Knowledge*. To form a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards an innovation and proceed with the process of diffusion, potential adopters need to engage with "others" (e.g., organizational representatives, adopters, close ties, change agents, opinion leaders) and learn from their knowledge and experience about the innovation. As noted by Rogers (2002), DOI is essentially "a social process through which people talking to people spread an innovation" (p. 990).

The findings from the survey support the arguments of Rogers (1962, 2002). Since social businesses are still considered to be an innovation, the majority of the public does not know what a social business is, has never been in any contact with a social business and has not been exposed to social businesses via online or "traditional" media. In other words, the majority did not even start the process of DOI and have not even reached the first stage of *knowledge-awareness.* The second group of *Early Knowers* has been exposed to social businesses, mainly through online media. Rogers suggested that *Early Knowers* and *Innovators* share similar characteristics: they have more formal education and higher socioeconomic status. The findings also indicate that *Early Knowers* belong to an elite group with higher socio-economic characteristics, although most products and services offered by social businesses are popular products and services and not exclusive ones (Minga, 2015). The members of the elite group had a positive attitude towards both the business-like and societal characteristics of social businesses, but most of them did not engage with or about social businesses and did not continue the process of diffusion. Indeed, as suggested by Rogers (1962), knowledge and awareness alone do not guarantee the continuation of the process of DOI, since people tend to expose themselves to ideas that are in accordance with their interests, needs and attitudes, but they adopt an innovation when they find it relevant, useful and in accordance with their needs and values.

Referring to the public relations literature, we agree with McKie and Toledano (2008) that public relations can help expose an

individual to an idea and raise its awareness and interest in it, but we also stress that unlike advertising or other marketing efforts, the main contribution of public relations to the success of an organization is in fostering engagement and relationship building between organizations and strategic publics. As can be seen from the findings, *Early Knowers* that perceived social businesses positively but did not engage with or about them have not continued the process of DOI. Only a small group among the *Early Knowers* has engaged with and about social businesses and successfully passed all five stages of DOI. The members of this group knew what social businesses were and what they do, they were exposed to social businesses through online media, social networks and traditional media, and they were engaging with representatives of social businesses and others. In addition, they expressed a positive attitude towards both the "business-like" and "societal" characteristics of social businesses and committed themselves to social businesses by becoming volunteers, investors, employees or employers in social businesses.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study demonstrates the importance of engagement to a successful process of DOI and OPR. From a more practical standpoint, the findings suggest that the main challenge facing practitioners and organizational representatives working for social businesses is to try to promote DOI through engagement with potential adopters. For instance, they can utilize social media platforms to encourage *Early Adopters*, who are perceived by the public as opinion leaders (Rogers, 1962), to share their knowledge and positive experiences with social businesses, thus helping potential adopters to form a favorable attitude towards social businesses and continue with the process of DOI. Referring to Taylor and Kent (2014), we also suggest that practitioners working for social businesses will have to be trained on how to facilitate interactive communication and engagement with potential adopters through social media in order to have a more successful DOI process.

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