
The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

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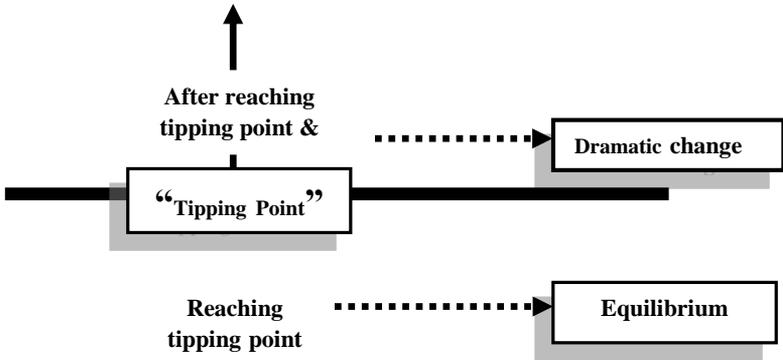
Introduction

“A waterfall only begins with one drop of water.”
(Anonymous)

The central theme of the book is ‘Tipping point’ described as an idea that explains how certain fashion and smoking trends in teens arise, crime statistics fall down and how other mysterious changes take form of an irresistible trend in the world around us. To understand such superfluous trends, it is necessary to consider it as epidemics.

The book opens with narrating some of the past provoking events and commonalities among these past events are highlighted that these were always unexpected and sudden. These happenings were referred as social epidemics relating their patterns to biological disease epidemics. The social epidemics are no more different than disease epidemics and the way virus spreads, similarly an idea or a product or a behavior spreads, infect and create a social epidemic.

Gladwell states an epidemic has three important characteristics to be declared as epidemics. Firstly, these are highly contagious. Secondly, in epidemics it is always a little cause that results in a drastic effect. The third characteristic is ‘Tipping Point’. Tipping point is that one dramatic moment in any epidemic when everything gets change at once. It is the threshold or boiling point or critical moment followed by a sudden change. The following diagrammatic form can explain it more explicitly:



Source: Developed for the review

These three characteristics are followed by social epidemics like biological epidemic having the same line of action. To understand it better, consider these examples that followed the three characteristics of epidemics in each case:

Biological Epidemic	Social Epidemics	
Baltimore City's Syphilis	Hush Puppies	Drop in Crime Rate of New York (NY)
Contagious Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease. It is caused by Treponema Pallidum spread in Baltimore city as epidemics.	Few kids simply started wearing shoes in New York with a view to look cool and in the process of exposing their fashion taste to others; they infected them with virus called "Hush Puppies".	In 1993, police didn't get a magic to cause such a huge drop in crime rates but it was actually few people started behaving differently in small number of situations caused by the efforts of police & other social forces. This changed behavior started spreading to other people.
"Little" cause results in a "gigantic" effect Three different reasons are given for Baltimore Syphilis epidemic to occur are : - Crack was already there but in 1995, slight severity occurred in it.	Few kids that may be 20 or 50 or 100 started the trend and made it an international fashion symbol confirming little cause responsible	A drastic decline in NY crime (effect) was a result of small changes like decline in crack trade along with aging of population and improvement in police strategies for stopping

- Zenilman said the for enormous little crimes (cause) number of clinicians cut effect. decreased overall down to 10 from 17. crimes rates in NY.
- Potterat referred to a small area hollowed out due to housing projects resulted in this epidemic. All of these explanations are referring to small changes (cause) brought huge Syphilis epidemic (effect).

One dramatic movement-Tipping Point

- When slight rise in crack Company sales In 1965, the total occurred, it disturbed the were 30,000 pairs number of crimes in NY equilibrium and disease annually. But in was 200,000. It got erupted. 1995, the company double in 2 years, continued this trend till
- Similarly when 36,000 sold 430,000 pairs. mid 1970 reaching 650,000 crimes and remained steady at that level until 1992 when it started deceleration (reversed trend). The crime rate didn't diminish in a gradual manner but it hit a certain point (dramatic moment) and changed everything.

Source: Developed for the review

The Three rules of Epidemics

Gladwell recognized the three rules to tip or start an epidemic. The epidemic comes out of equilibrium and tip when a change is triggered in one or two or three of these agents:

1. Law of few.
2. The stickiness factor.
3. The power of context.

1. The Law of the Few

Some people matters more than others in case of epidemic. The law of few is applicable for both disease epidemic and social

epidemic. These are the key people in starting an epidemic. This concept is evident from 80/20 principle. The origin of this concept is “Pareto Principle” an equation introduced by Italian Economist by Vilfredo Pareto stating 80% work will be done by 20% people involve in the process. These 20% or even smaller than this figure are the important people in epidemics. The law of few has further categorized these few people having potential to trigger an epidemic into three types known as connectors, mavens and salesman:

Connectors:

Connectors know many kinds of people (People specialists) and are exceptional people that are gifted with the ability to bring the people of different worlds together. The idea of connectors is more linked to experiment of Stanley Milgram of small world problem. Small world problem means how humans are connected. In experiment, packet was mailed to 160 people who lived in Omaha (Nebraska). The packet had the name of a stockbroker who was living in Sharon Massachusetts and working in Boston. Each person was asked to write their name on the packet and mailed it to a friend or someone that they know would make it closer to the stockholder. Most of these letters were received to the stockholders in five or six steps. Of the 24 letters stockholder received at home, 16 were handed over by the same person, a cloth merchant. Of the balance of letters stockholder received at office, the majority were reached through two men. This is the concept of six degree that small number of people who are linked with everyone else just in few steps and the rest of people are linked to the world through these special few people (connectors). Thus, word-of-mouth epidemic can be a job done by such exceptional people.

Mavens:

There are people who connect people to information are equally important known as Mavens. They accumulate knowledge, unselfish and not persuader (Information specialists). The main characteristics of Mavens are:

- These are people who keep marketplace honest because if they find any fault in the market, they will complain about it and will inform others to stop going there.
- Mavens are in every sphere of life and in every socioeconomic group.

- Maven connects people to the marketplace and keep eye on marketplace. They collect information about products, prices or places. It is meant not only to get a best deal for one self but have the purpose of helping others in the marketplace as well.
- Mavens concern in the marketplace and to solve other problems is a kind of social instinct, something automatic and reflex-like to satisfy his/her emotional craving or inner voice.

Mavens and connectors are different personalities who acting for different reasons but they both possess the power to ignite the word-of-mouth epidemics. The differences are:

Comparison between Connector and Maven	
Connector	Maven
Connect us to the people.	Connect us to the information.
Knows many people thus having more transmission power.	Less transmission power.
If a connector talked on a topic of a trip, he might not give advice on where to stay.	Maven always would advice.
If connector gives advice or recommendation, one may take it or may not. For example, if connector tells 10 friends about a place to stay on a trip, half of them may follow this advice.	But if Maven gives advice or recommendation, it is always taken up. For example, if Maven may tell 5 people about a place to stay on a trip, but Maven will present the case for that place emphatically that all of them will follow the advice.

Source: Developed for the review

i. Salesmen:

Salesmen are the people who possess the skills to persuade and convinced others on the message reaching their ears. They are as important as connectors and Maven to flourish an epidemic. Gladwell explains more of the features of salesmen make them different and influential in persuading others are:

- They use appropriate, rational and coherent arguments. They really know what response work better with what kind of people.
- They possess natural exuberance. They have some power, contagious trait of their personality with their eagerness and liveliness.
- Gladwell pointed some clues based on two of psychology studies that make salesmen more effective are:

i. Little and subtle things can make a big difference:

The psychologist Brain Mullen of Syracuse University (1984) proved in his studies that Jennings gave smiles for Republican than the Democrat but the bias was not obvious, in fact was hidden. It led his viewers to vote for Reagan. Similarly, a headphone study was carried by Gary Wells of the University of Alberta and Richard Petty of the University of Missouri in which the student participants were told to check the headsets. Songs were played followed by a short radio editorial related to rising tuition fee for the students. The editorial was effective for those who were told nodding head up and down and convinced them on rising tuition fee.

ii. Non verbal clues matter more than verbal clues:

At times, it matters more how we say a certain thing than what we say and non-verbal clues holds more importance in certain situations. In case of Jennings, he was not propagating all kinds of pro Reagan news but a small non-verbal gesture was influencing the audience.

iii. Persuasion often work in certain way that we do not appreciate:

The smiles in Jennings and nods in handset study were not hidden acts, these were on the surface but these were amazingly subtle. If the news viewer were asked why they voted Reagan, they wouldn't say that smiles of Jennings made them to act certain way. They will relate their behavior to some logical and obvious cause. They can never realize that they were persuaded to behave certain way by something so uninformed and apparently insignificant as a smile or a nodding of head.

- Salesmen got a kind of super-reflex, a fundamental physiological ability like other specialized traits of human. William Condon explained in his study that when two people are in conversation talking and listening, at the same time, they engage in “interactional synchrony”. Movements are perfectly in time to each person's own words and other person movements

are in line with the same rhythm exhibiting a perfect harmony. Some people possess more command over this reflex empowers them to dictate the terms of the interaction.

- The charisma of salesman is creating trust and connection with interacting person in shorter time than an ordinary person.
- Mimicry is a way to infect others with one's own emotions. One person smiling at other can make him smile back. Considering emotions transferable make it clear that how some people have profound influence over others and are more emotionally contiguous.

The Stickiness Factor

It is not always the vigorous efforts of a few carriers to tip an epidemic but it may flourish as a result of transformation of epidemic agent itself. Gladwell considers its implication for both biological and social epidemic by calling it a “stickiness” factor.

Stickiness factor refers to a unique quality of message itself that compels the phenomenon to “stick” in the minds of the people and influence their behavior in the light of that phenomenon.

Biological Epidemics:

For example, in case of biological epidemics, Syphilis in Baltimore was also a function of closing down of clinics in the city. It transformed the syphilis or infection from acute into a chronic disease when the agent itself was provided with the second life to infect people more than it could do before cutting down of clinics. In another example, the biological epidemic of flu pandemic of 1918 started with a docile flu virus passed through some transformation become much more fatal for next six months.

Social Epidemics:

In the context of social epidemics, the stickiness factor proposes deliberately engineering and structuring of a message that spark one into action. The stickiness factor reflects how much certain message or idea is memorable. Gladwell believes the said purpose can be achieved with minor changes in the presentation and structuring of an idea or message.

Health & Health (2007) reaffirmed this idea that how a little effort can make almost any idea stickier, and it is the sticky idea that is more likely to make a difference. They studied hundreds of sticky ideas and found six principles at work repeatedly. These six principles emphasize that sticky idea are simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional and Stories (make people to act via simulation - telling people how to act and inspired them to act.). Gladwell suggest that it is all about finding that simple way to package information that make it irresistible under the favorable conditions

Gladwell illustrates the importance of stickiness factor for idea or message and how little changes in presentation and structure can make it a turning point in social epidemics with examples stated briefly here:

Seasame street –Educational TV show	Blue’s Clues- Educational TV show
<p>The recipe for the success of Sesame Street lied in constant research and experimentation to hold children attention. The head of research, psychologist, Oregon, Ed Palmer tested the program before it was on aired in Philadelphia and found children didn’t like adult cast got into a debate. So they introduced “Big Bird”, mixing real people with Muppets, tipped the program with its stickiness and became a success story of all times in literacy shows.</p>	<p>Blue’s clue became an influential learning show for children with its stickiness factor. It was like an improved version borrowed some idea and techniques from Sesame street. The first idea was to engage more kids physically and intellectually in show to make it more memorable and meaningful. The second idea was of repeating episodes along with long pause in announcing the name of alphabet made kids adopt a certain pattern of learning i.e. first to learn the name of letter, second to associate its name with its appearance and third to learn the sequence of letters.</p>
Levanthal- Fear experiment	Golden Box Hunt- Marketing Campaign
<p>Howard Levanthal in the 1960s conducted an experiment to instill a fear of consequences in Yale University students to get tetanus shots. Some students were provided with the booklets explaining dangers of tetanus severely with pictures that convinced them more vigorously for tetanus shots than other students given booklets causing low fear. But students of both groups didn’t</p>	<p>In 1970s, the direct marketer Wunderman went into challenge with Erickson for increasing more sales with TV commercials for Columbia Records (mail order club). Wunderman chose fringe time for his commercials where Erickson had the prime-time slot advantage but still Wunderman succeed in his challenge because of a the creation of “Golden Box” treasure hunt . He promoted it</p>

practically come for the shots. Gladwell suggests that message wasn't that sticky to remember and when experiment was repeated shots rate were roused to 28% just by simply including a map and schedule of shots.

through their television adds that if audience find a golden box on the ad of Columbia records in their magazines will have a record for free. The purpose was that viewers pay their attention to magazine adds and place mail orders which was successfully achieved.

Source: Developed for the review

2. The Power of Context

The third factor that can spark an epidemic is the “context”. It is defined as the circumstances and the elements of the surrounding environment in which epidemics occur. Gladwell notes that like biological, social epidemics can be a function of context that he calls the “Power of context”.

Context influence in Biological epidemic:

Zenileman observed the contiguous syphilis of Baltimore was at boom in summer due to active activities like meeting bars, street corners and clubs. In winter, due to cold it was preferable to remain at homes and growth of syphilis was dropped down. In this explanation, an epidemic was influenced by the season i.e. the context.

Context influence in Social epidemic:

From the perspective of social epidemics, the Power of Context says that mankind is much more sensitive to their environment than what we might ordinarily suspect. Contextual changes that have the potential to tip an epidemic are different than what might one expects. Even the small and rarely noticed changes in our outside world can affect the way we act.

Gladwell credited “Broken window theory” proposed by criminologists Wilson and Kelling for decline in crimes in New York City. The theory says that if window is broken and left unrepaired without fixing it, will send signals to people passing through it that no one cares and will encourage more such incidences. This wave will soon spread from building to streets and provides a sense of doing anything. Similarly, apparently trivial problems like graffiti, public disorder, and fare breaking in city are

same as broken window providing an open invitation to more severe crimes. It should be noted that the tipping point in this epidemic is something from external environment where physical things like graffiti stimulated people for a kind of certain behavior. It was not contributed by a person but from a feature of outside environment. The concept of “power of context” is same as broken window theory as both holds the view that epidemic can be reversed. It can be tipped and tinkered with the little changes of the immediate environment. Gladwell supported his claim with the example of fall of New York City. He claimed that there was a time in 1980s when subway system was chaotic but David Gunn and William Bratton (disciples of broken window theory) after taking their new positions changed the situation of city with the successful application of broken window theory and crime rate was significantly dropped down. The way broken window theory worked is summarized in the table below:

Application of broken window theory in fall of New York City		
	Revamping the subway system : David Gunn	Transit Police Chief : William Bratton
Tipping Point of crime	Graffiti on the walls and coaches of the system.	Fare beating (ticketless travelling).
Methodology	New clean trains were brought. Special attention was given to eliminate graffiti. Daily cleanliness from graffiti of the walls and new coaches were ensured.	Assigned ten policemen on every entry gate to arrest all ticketless travelers and ensured offenders to stay in jail for a day.
Result	Safe and clean subway system, increased efficiency of trains, increased passengers and increased revenue.	Crime rate came down by 70%, ticketless travel came down by 90%, helped in tracking of criminals.

Source: Developed for the review

Gladwell’s Power of context can be explained more with Kurt Lewin equation but his power of context is more of environmental argument of Lewis equation. It is the most well known equation in social psychology showing behavior is a function of Personality and Environment. Johdai (1955) gives the equation as:

$$B= f (P, E)$$

Gladwell views behavior as a function of immediate external environment. He supported his view with other studies as of Zimbardo, a social scientist at Stanford University. Zimbardo is not refusing the importance of parents, school, friends, neighborhood, and genes in our behavior but refers to an important fact that there are certain situations and conditions when everything swept away and the behavior of a normal person belongs to good family and school is changed due to merely variation of situation in their immediate environment. His experiment of creating artificial prison where volunteers, psychologically normal subjects, were assigned the roles of guards and others as prisoners ended before the scheduled time because of growing cruelty and sadist behavior of guards towards prisoner. The adopted the behavior that they could not even expect themselves and prisoners despite knew that it was experiment, went into depression and acute anxiety with other behaviors.

Similarly, Hatshorne and May concluded after their experiment regarding cheating that honesty is not a fundamental or unified trait but is considerably influenced by the situation. They found that kids cheated the same way under same circumstances in same test taken in a gap of six months but if any variable like test questions or situation in which it was conducted, kinds of cheating changed as well. In reference to these studies, Gladwell shed light upon mistake we usually commit. We all think in terms of absolute inherent traits that can be deceiving in digging the real causes of human behavior. Quoting an example of two basket ball player playing in two different gyms, one with bad lightening (missing more shots) and other with good lightening (more shots in court). When people were asked they declared good player the one who was playing in good lights. We think this way because we are a lot more attuned to personal cues than contextual cues.

Character cannot be categorized as the one we usually think it is or the way we want it to be. In fact, it is not something constant, easily identified set of closely related traits but it looks to us in this way due to the fault in the way our brains are organized. Character can be better defined as a collection of habits and tendencies and interests that are loosely tied and dependent in nature on external context. The reason for a stable character in most of people is that they are good at controlling their environment.

Darley and Batson decided to conduct a study influenced by the biblical story of the Good Samaritan (the only man to help a wounded person when left even by the priest and others). The study was indented to perform on theology students studying Samaritan. They gave a task to each of group of seminarians to prepare a discussion on Samaritan. On the way to auditorium, there was a victim placed to see who among Samaritans will help that victim. The basic theme of experiment was to know the situational effect. Therefore, an experimenter was standing to give students feelings of being late or early for speech. An ordinary expectation was that who will study Samaritans and will help the victim but the results were changed. At several instances students literally stepped over the victim when he was in hurry. 10% out of the group who were in hurry stopped for helping victim. 63 % stopped of the group who knew they had a time to help. The study suggests that the convictions of our heart and the actual contents of our thoughts are less important because in the end, it is the immediate environment that guides our actions than our behavior.

The magic number of 150:

Gladwell suggested small close-knit groups with the claim that these have also the power to amplify the potential for epidemic of a message or idea. He suggests a simple rule of thumb for effective group in order to start an epidemic or reach a tipping point called the Rule of 150. It suggests that the size of a group is another subtle contextual factor that can make a noticeable difference. He quoted “The figure of 150 seems to represent the maximum number of individuals with whom we can have a genuinely social relationship, the kind of relationship that goes with knowing who they are and how they relate to us.” Further, asserted that people in intact group or community will become divided and alien to each other if this group crosses the limit of 150 people. This margin (150) is the tipping point and if crossed, people begin to behave in a very different manner. It is the point above which the group loses the harmony to agree and act with one voice. In order to create epidemic, one often has to create many small movements first.

Conclusion (Focus, Test and Believe):

World is not up to our intuition. Success lies in testing your intuition but with the only belief that change is possible so we should think different from traditional cause and effect phenomena. There

is difficulty and volatility in world of tipping point but “hope” is there. It takes only the smallest infractions to cause the smallest changes. Just requires the slightest push in the right direction.

The inherent and fascinating lesson of the book is to start epidemics requires concentrating resources in a few key areas i.e. Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen. The message itself is transformable from less effective to more effective with little adjustment in its structure and presentation. People can transform their behavior if given the right kind of motivation. Another fact is that we all are influenced powerfully by our immediate context. So, it is all about

“Right people, with the Right message, at the Right time & place.”

Critical analysis

Gladwell has been criticized for his claim that broken window theory was responsible for drop in crime rates in New York. Levitt and Dubnar (2006) totally condemn his view and argued that it was the legalization of abortion responsible for dropping crime rates as unwanted children that used to be ended up as criminals declined. But at the same time they also gave a concept that the dramatic effect always has a subtle cause consistent with Gladwell’s tipping point. Similarly, Berger (2013) condemn the law of few proposed by Gladwell. He claimed that viral marketing is focusing more on people that is not beneficial but his contagious message idea is similar to Gladwell stickiness factor . Health and Health (2007) view of six principles that why some ideas die and some survive also supports stickiness factor concept.

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