

Chapter 4

UPDATING TOURISM THEORY The S-O-R Model

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Abstract: This chapter presents a case for updating the use and development of psychological theory in tourism through an examination of the psychological stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model. The historical development and the criticism of the model has been addressed. A revised version of the model is provided based on importing new theoretical knowledge from the original discipline. This chapter argues that with an explicit focus on tourism psychology, there is some evidence to suggest that tourism theory may benefit from adopting theory from the parental discipline rather than inventing its own. Future research can address other examples of imported theories and to further examine mechanisms for this

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knowledge transfer and update from original disciplines relevant to the study of tourism. **Keywords:** Theory; stimulus-organism-response model; cognitive appraisal theory; emotions; goal; arousal

INTRODUCTION

The first two chapters of this book discussed numerous problems and barriers associated with developing tourism theory, including the translation problem (Francken & Slors, 2018) (see Chapter 2), as well as the need for paradigm shifts and other issues associated with the ongoing development of tourism theory. Theory is critical to the representation of the social world, as it provides the grounds used to understand, explain or predict phenomena (Gerring, 1999; Seelos, 2010). Tourism and cognate phenomena, such as events and hospitality, are considered fields of research and derive theory from many disciplines (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Tribe & Liburd, 2016). Tribe proposes that tourism is a field of study ‘embracing and adapting theories from its contributory disciplines and neighboring fields’ (2010, p. 13).

A discipline is characterised by a well-defined object of study and a collection of related phenomena, concepts used to refer to them, theories to describe their interrelations and specific methods designed to study and test theories. Over time, foundation disciplines, such as economics, geography, anthropology, sociology and psychology, undergo their own paradigm shifts and develop new theories and concepts. Theory development in these disciplinary areas may occur inductively from the analysis of empirical data using, for example, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), or deductively where research is applied to test theory (Bricker et al., 2015). Theory evolution and obsolescence are a recognisable part of established disciplines. Over time new theories and concepts are developed and these then can be applied to study tourism phenomena. This continual development of theory in foundation disciplines, such as psychology, implies that it is necessary to periodically check back on the status of theories applied in the parent (sub) discipline which informs tourism research and scholarship.

Psychology is a discipline that is applied in tourism research to understand tourist cognition and behaviour (Koseoglu et al., 2019; Pearce & Packer, 2013), using concepts such as motivation (Weiler et al., 2012) and emotion (Ma et al., 2013). Psychology is not a unitary area but has a number of sub-disciplinary fields that have been used to study tourism (Crouch et al., 2004) including behavioural psychology (Weiler et al., 2018), social psychology (Tang, 2014), environmental psychology (Fridgen, 1984), positive psychology (Filep & Laing, 2019) and cognitive psychology (Glenberg et al., 2013; Skavronskaya et al., 2017). Each of these sub-disciplinary fields has an active research programme with new concepts and theories successively supplanting others and becoming mainstream.

Each of these subdisciplines of psychology has its own focal problems, assumptions, units of analysis and associated methodology (Skavronskaya et al., 2017). In tourism, most existing studies examine consumer behaviour and are based on theories and concepts from the environmental, behavioural or socio-psychological sub-disciplines. Each of these sub-disciplines is dynamic and indeed ‘mainstream’ psychology has developed over the past century from introspectionism, through behaviourism to a cognitive paradigm (Scott, 2020). This chapter presents an argument for updating the use and development of psychological theory in tourism through an examination of a particular example. It focuses on the psychological stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model and contrasts it with mainstream theoretical advancements from cognitive psychology. The chapter examines the historical development of S-O-R theory and explores the efficacy of this model in tourism. It provides insights on how to advance existing tourism theory through engagement with advances in parent subdisciplines.

THE STIMULUS-ORGANISM-RESPONSE MODEL

The S-O-R model was developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) as part of a comprehensive environmental psychology framework to examine how a person responds to their environment. Environmental psychology is described as an emerging interdisciplinary field of environment and behaviour, or ‘human-environment relations’ (Stokols, 1978). Environmental psychologists assumed that health and happiness derive from the harmonious and supportive nature of such relationships (Cicerali et al., 2017). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed the S-O-R model positing that certain environmental stimuli (such as heat or sound) influence an individual’s emotional state, which in turn affects approach or avoidance responses.

The S-O-R theory has incrementally changed over the past 50 years to adapt it to the consumer and retail context and subsequently tourism. Later authors such as Baker (1986) and Bitner (1992) extended the scope of this model to include a variety of concepts: social factors (people in the store, customers and employees), design factors (visual cues such as layout, colour, clutter and cleanliness) and ambient factors (non-visual cues such as smells, sounds and lighting effects). In the process, several of its original theoretical assumptions have been revised. Crucially, these adaptations have been based on theoretical developments in the original discipline of psychology (not the subfield of environmental psychology).

Environmental psychology was developing at the same time as the academic study of tourism and there appears to be an overlap between tourism and environmental psychology in concepts such as destination image (Fridgen, 1984), place identity and place attachment (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016). Since its inception, the S-O-R model and its underlying concepts and

assumptions have been applied in several studies of restaurant dining, events, theme parks and destination marketing (Bakker et al., 2014; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Jacoby, 2002; Kucukergin et al., 2020). As previously mentioned, the S-O-R model was originally developed to account for the effect of external factors, such as colour, temperature and sound on humans. Thus, its original focus was to examine the effect of external stimuli on perceptual processes that usually do not involve conscious mental awareness.

One important assumption of the S-O-R model is that, unlike previous behavioural models, environmental stimuli were specifically considered to affect a person mentally, and evoke individuals' emotional states, which then in turn determine behavioural responses. The emotional impact of natural and built environments was conceptualised by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) in terms of three basic mental dimensions: pleasure, arousal and dominance. Therefore, the S-O-R model provided a new perspective on emotion as a key motivator for consumption, clearly a departure from the traditional view that regarded consumers as rational and cognitive decisionmakers and neglected emotions in consumer behaviour (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

The Model in Consumer Behaviour Research

Several authors adopted the S-O-R model to various contexts. The first was Belk, a consumer behaviour researcher who was struggling with how 'consumer behaviour depends upon the situation' (Belk, 1975, p. 427). At that time, the model of the consumer was that behaviour was determined by innate characteristics (personality, general skills and intellect), but it was found that these factors did not predict purchase outcomes well. Belk found that behaviour was dependent on the 'situation', noting that 'there is ample evidence and speculation that consumer behaviour is a function of the interaction between the individual and the situation' (1975, p. 427).

Belk (1974) conducted research on buyer behaviour and how a purchase (say of a brand of cracker biscuit) was dependent on a situation. Belk found that the variance in the brand of biscuit cracker purchased could be reduced if the 'situation' were defined. As a result, his studies specified the situation or 'consumption setting' using statements such as 'you want to buy some things for a picnic you are planning with friends'. Belk attempted to make the case that a particular situation (having a picnic) provides a reason for why a particular type of product is chosen. This is true to the extent that every respondent reacts to a situation in the same way. Belk claimed that a 'picnic with friends' is a situational factor. However, if attributing a person with an internal mental function, this 'situation' may be interpreted as a person's goal in a usage case. For example, a person's particular goal in this consumption situation (to impress a girlfriend versus to celebrate with the footy team) would also affect the brand purchased.

Belk (1975) however appeared to assume that stimuli (a servicescape or even a destination) could be objectively evaluated like colour or temperature. Subsequently, this assumption has been 'forgotten' so that now the objective effects of a stimulus on internal states are taken for granted. Therefore, the literature using S-O-R and indeed most tourism research on emotion has built this assumption into it. This approach may be useful for simple purchase and 'usage situations' but ultimately relies on assumptions about the homogeneity of a consumer's goals.

Donovan and Rossiter (1982) adopted the S-O-R model to examine the atmosphere of a retail setting. The advantage of the model was that previously store atmosphere and other physical in-store variables such as aisle width, brightness and crowding were seen as a component of store image. These authors considered physical variables as antecedents of store atmosphere. Donovan and Rossiter also considered that 'store atmosphere effects are basically emotional states' (1982, p. 35). While Donovan and Rossiter (1982) maintained that the environment (as store environment) affected behaviour, they did update S-O-R theory to remove the dominance dimension in measurement of emotion based on the work of Russell and Pratt (1980), who found that the two dimensions, pleasure and arousal (pleasant-unpleasant, arousing-sleepy), were adequate to represent people's emotions.

Further Development of the Model

Bitner (1992) was next to use the S-O-R model. The study adopted the assumptions of previous authors that particular physical settings are associated with recurring behaviour patterns and thus their social behaviours can be predicted. Here the action of a person is associated with (although not necessarily determined by) the situation. Similarly, Bitner adapted the environmental assessment dimensions of novelty (mystery) and complexity, writing that 'preference for or liking of a particular environment can be predicted by three environmental dimensions: complexity, mystery, and coherence' (1992, p. 63). While perhaps applicable in the particular area of study, these are dimensions that are not necessarily universally applicable to study consumer situations. However, Bitner was able to recognise that the consumer's goal was important, writing 'Each individual comes to a particular service organization with a goal or purpose that may be aided or hindered by the setting' (1992, p. 61).

Critically, the servicescape model developed by Bitner (1992) included moderators of the relationship between stimuli and organism. These include personality as previously noted in the S-O-R model, as well as the person's 'plan or purpose for being in the environment' as discussed by Donovan and Rossiter (1982). Bitner goes further and notes that 'what the individual notices and

remembers about the environment, as well as how he or she feels about it, is influenced by the purpose for being there' (1992, p. 65). Bitner also identifies expectations: 'What an individual expects to find in an environment also affects how the individual responds to the place' (1992, p. 65). In effect, the study identified expectations and goals as moderators of emotional responses. Later writers adopted this model although also extended the type of elements in a servicescape (Rosenbaum et al., 2011).

Consistent with Bitner's extension of the S-O-R model, later studies examined the relationships among external environmental stimuli, perceptions and emotions, assuming that cognitive perception of the external environment (perceived servicescape/atmospherics and perceived service quality) elicits customer emotions (Tuerlan et al., 2021; Wirtz & Bateson, 1999). However, how perceptions elicit emotions is not discussed or subsequent cognitive processes articulated (Massara et al., 2010).

The Model and Research on Emotions

The Bitner (1992) model is applied in several tourism studies without modification. Jang and Namkung (2009) applied the model to examine how the physical servicescape of theme restaurants affects customers' emotional states. This study reiterates the S-O-R assumption that 'emotions are caused by customers' exposure to specific stimuli' (2009, p. 146). These results indicate that emotions mediate between perceived quality and consumer behavioural intentions. Other studies also assume a causal link between stimuli and emotions (Chen et al., 2022; Flavián et al., 2021; Hwang & Lee, 2018; Su, Cheng, et al., 2020; Su, Hsu, et al., 2020; Su & Hsu, 2013; Tsaour & Lo, 2020; Tubillejas-Andrés et al., 2020).

Indeed, a recent literature review of the literature of emotion in tourism found that 42 studies among the selected 178 hospitality and tourism management articles attempted to establish an external stimulus–emotion relationship (Tuerlan et al., 2021). These studies regard stimuli, in line with S-O-R, as direct antecedents of emotion without considering how individuals' emotions are evoked through (cognitive) mental processes. Essentially, these studies assume that stimuli, such as a building or a certain environmental attribute, is emotion-arousing and that a stimulus automatically elicits emotions of the same type (Tuerlan et al., 2021).

Later papers developed the S-O-R model in unexpected directions, modifying the existing parameters to suit the research context or the type of activity engaged in, but still assuming that the environment will determine the emotional arousal experienced as per the standard model. Su et al.'s (2020) study extends the model on the basis that emotions experienced and activity type will both directly influence the storytelling intentions of tourists. Thus, the study considers that an adventure activity situation is related to a

story telling activity, noting ‘a tourist engages in a particular type of activity, eliciting their affective experience (arousal) and ultimately a response (storytelling)’ (Su et al., 2020, p. 3). The results demonstrate a correlation between type of activity (relaxing or challenging), emotional arousal and storytelling intentions and indicate that arousal fully mediates between tourism activity type and storytelling intentions.

These results extend S-O-R theory, whereby the stimulus now appears causally antecedent to storytelling behaviour. Later in the paper the authors note that emotional arousal only increases the likelihood of storytelling. This statement appears to transform the theory into a probabilistic model, although these implications are not discussed. The application of the model to a destination further complicates the picture (Kucukergin et al., 2020). A destination provides a number of usage situations and does not allow identification of a specific goal for visiting. A set of destination attributes are provided for a person to choose as their reason for visiting, but there is no assessment of whether these attributes have any relationship to a person’s goal. Thus, a respondent will answer a question as to whether the mountainous scenery in a destination is beautiful and whether or not it is important for a particular person. While use of the S-O-R model in tourism research may have been useful, there is a need to consider recent developments in psychology to determine how it could be improved or superseded.

Criticism and Developments of the Original Model

Since its development, the S-O-R model has been subject to at least four major criticisms in the original discipline of psychology. The first is its assumption of a passive reaction to stimuli. While the model was an advance of stimulus-response models where people are machines which react automatically to stimuli (Lazarus, 1998, p. xvii), the nature of the ‘organismic’ reactions unclear. The S-O-R suggests that when a person is exposed to external stimuli, ‘inner organism changes’ precede behavioural responses. However, the model only discusses personality as linking stimuli and emotional response.

The second is that the model assumes stimulus situations have an objective meaning: the model assumes that a stimulus has only one interpretation by the organism, but stimuli ambiguity is inevitable. The interpretation of a situation is found to depend on various factors, including the stimulus context, some form of social priming, the level of arousal, experience, motivation and thinking (the search for a proper interpretation). Third, the model is linear and implies a unidirectional environment–behaviour relation. Fourth, the model assumes that emotions are caused by stimuli novelty and complexity (as will be discussed below, this is found to be incorrect). Two people experiencing the same stimuli may express vastly different emotions.

There is a need for an understanding of the cognitive or mental processes which underpin the elicitation of emotion. Here, a cognitive appraisal model of emotions can be used to replace this assumption.

Since the development of the S-O-R model, much progress has been made on the process of elicitation of emotions in cognate subdisciplines of psychology. Indeed, cognitive psychology has developed an impressive body of research on emotion based around cognitive appraisal theory (Scherer & Moors, 2019; Watson & Spence, 2007). There is general agreement in this literature that goal congruity determines emotional valence (pleasantness-unpleasantness) and while novelty, goal importance and other dimensions determine physiological responses such as degree of arousal (Chapter 8 on emotion and Chapter 10 on novelty). Certainly, in situations involving non-habitual responses, an appraisal process mediates between stimulus and emotional arousal. The level of novelty of an experience for a person undertaking an activity, such as mountaineering willingly (therefore goal congruent), affects the degree of arousal. A person who has climbed a mountain many times will not be aroused as an inexperienced climber.

Traditional S-O-R vs. Updated Stimulus

This section critically analyses each component in the original S-O-R model prior to introducing a revised version of it based on the theoretical advancements from the original discipline. Its first component presented below is a stimulus. According to the S-O-R model, the environment can be described as consisting of stimuli, such as physical objects. These objects may be characterised as having an informational ‘load’ that is mentally assessed using two parameters, their novelty and complexity (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The mental mechanism by which these characteristics are assessed is not identified in the model. The organism reacts to these stimuli with emotions that can be differentiated on the dimensions of pleasure, arousal and dominance; keeping in mind that later dominance was dropped (Russell & Pratt, 1980). The emotional response is moderated by a person’s personality, which is a fixed characteristic that moderates emotional responses to particular stimuli. Finally, following the exposure to stimuli and the development of consumer emotion, responsive behaviour emerges as either approach or avoidance (Figure 4.1).

While much of the tourism literature adapts classical S-O-R theory or in some cases adapts it based on idiosyncratic assumptions, other scholars in consumer research applied more recent concepts from cognitive psychology. Jacoby (2002) provides some theory to support the S-O relationship by accepting cognitive psychology findings that subconscious processes, such as implicit learning and learning without awareness, may be involved. This was based on habits in determining automaticity of daily life (Bargh, 2002).

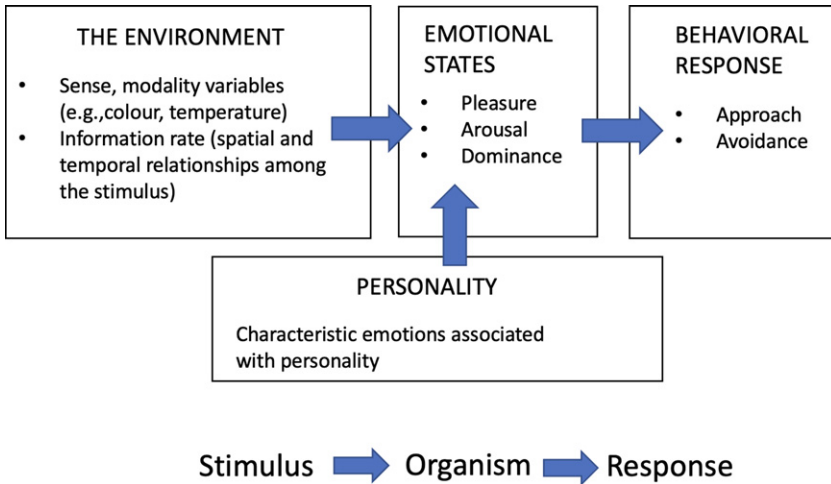


Figure 4.1. Original S-O-R Model of Approach and Avoidance.

Jacoby (2002) argued that rather than mediated by conscious thought and reflection, most psychological phenomena (including how one perceives and interprets the outside world) are unconscious. Concomitantly, subconscious processes determine the emotions resulting from stimuli. Bigne et al. (2020) applied this theoretical development to overcome the limitations of the traditional S-O-R model and accommodate automatic processing. Thus, for Bigne et al. the organism component includes prior experiences, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, predispositions, intentions, values, cognitive networks, schema, scripts, motives, the individual's personality and feelings. This would explain why the in-store aroma of coffee, a conditioned response, leads to a positive emotion (Walsh et al., 2011).

Improvements Using Cognitive Psychology Theory

Another major issue of the S-O-R model is providing an explanatory mechanism that relates perception of a stimulus environment and the elicitation of an emotion. While Bigne et al. (2020) have recognised that the appraisal of a situation may be subconscious and lead to the elicitation of an emotion, there is no psychological mechanism specified. Without such a mechanism, the results of S-O-R studies are based on correlation without explanation. In many cases, authors make the claim of causality based on theory, something that it cannot conceptually support. Other scholars have made a general claim that the

relationship between stimulation and behaviour is mediated by psychological structures and processes (Loureiro et al., 2021) but not specified a mechanism.

In the wider psychology literature, it is noted that an individual takes action to regulate emotions for their well-being, with positive emotions motivating the continued pursuit of successful goals (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004). Cognitive appraisal theory has been developed to determine how the appraisal of an environment leads to emotion (Watson & Spence, 2007) (Chapter 8 on emotions). The theory was initially proposed by psychologists to understand subjective causes of the elicitation of a specific emotion for the sake of predicting and adjusting behaviours, especially negative ones (Lazarus, 2001; Roseman & Smith, 2001; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). In its simplest form, the appraisal theory of emotion is 'the claim that emotions are elicited by evaluations (appraisals) of events and situations' (Roseman & Smith, 2001, p. 3).

Appraisal is a 'cognitive process, the way [an] individual defines and evaluates relationships with the environment' (Lazarus, 1991a, p. 3). The quality and intensity of an emotional response depends on the appraised relationship between the individual and the environment. Appraisals are 'the results of the information-processing tasks that indicate the implications of the situation for the interests and goals of the individual and therefore determine the form that emotional reaction takes in a given situation' (Johnson & Stewart, 2005, p. 5). Thus, appraisals start the emotion process, initiating the physiological, expressive, behavioural and other changes that comprise the resultant emotional state (Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman, 1984; Scherer et al., 2001). An individual's appraisal of a situation depends on conditions both internal (personality, beliefs, goals) and external, such as product performance, responses to others (Lazarus, 1991a). In all, an appraisal process implies a cognitive mechanism – a subjective construal of personally relevant information that generates the variability in emotional reactions.

People generate various patterns or profiles on appraisal dimensions, and different emotions may be elicited by the same situation. The multi-stage appraising process is illustrated in three steps: the antecedents of the appraisal process: people's knowledge about the situation and perception of the personal relevance information that influenced the knowledge; the process of appraising personally relevant information within the organism of appraisal dimensions; and the consequences of the appraisals and emotions. These consequences include the elicited discrete emotion, people's emotional coping and action coping adaptation to the situation (Lazarus, 1993). See Chapter 8 on emotions and Chapter 10 on novelty for more information on appraisal dimensions and the mechanism of cognitive appraisal.

The Stimulus-Cognitive Appraisal Response Model

This section restructures the S-O-R model to introduce the assumption that stimuli are mentally evaluated before a response is evoked. This is a simple model as it avoids processes such as reappraisal and coping, feelings as information and so on. Also, the model assumes that emotions provide the foundations or motivation for behaviour. The revised model is specified in Figure 4.2.

The stimulus-cognitive appraisal response model indicates that a stimulus that does not attract attention is not responded to. This is different to the S-O-R model where attentional processes are not discussed. Next the model explicitly includes subconscious mental appraisal (cognitive appraisal) which are based on a small number of dimensions, goals congruence and relevance, novelty, certainty, etc. This approach allows a researcher to predict the emotional response based on an appraisal of how important a goal is to a person and if the situation is goal congruent or not. The revised model is termed the stimulus-cognitive appraisal response model. This model is presented as an alternative to the S-O-R model through the inclusion of cognitive appraisal process into the model. It should not be contentious, as mounting literature has already validated the usefulness of cognitive appraisal theory, discussed above (Hosany, 2012; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Hosany et al., 2015). The model is simply an application of mainstream cognitive thinking.

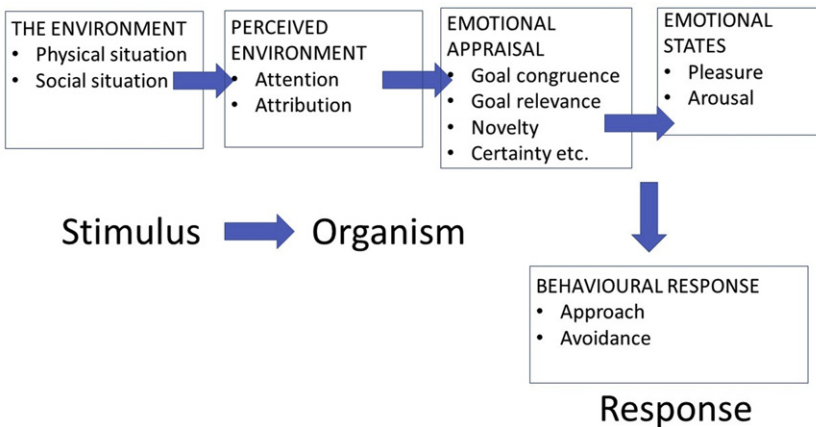


Figure 4.2. Stimulus-Cognitive Appraisal Response Model.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined how the S-O-R model evolved and was adapted and used in various fields, including tourism research. The development of the S-O-R model over a 50-year period has been based on importation of concepts and theories from psychology. This is evident in the use of implicit or subconscious processes by Jacoby (2002) and subsequently by Bigne et al. (2020). The ensuing discussion highlights that modification of the S-O-R theory in an ad hoc (post-disciplinary) manner without supporting theory, as in Su et al. (2020), appears to introduce inconsistencies. Cognitive appraisal theory was then introduced from the original discipline provides a way forward for S-O-R theory. Cognitive appraisal theory has already been shown to relate a situation and emotions elicited through appraisal on a number of dimensions (Hosany, 2012; Hosany et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2013).

This chapter advocates, with an explicit focus on tourism psychology, that tourism theory may benefit, as recommended by Larsen (2007), from adopting theory from the original discipline rather than inventing their own. This in turn suggests that at least in the study of tourists and their cognition and behaviour, researchers may benefit from adopting more recent psychological theory. This is consistent with the call by Pearce and Packer to 'discard some past approaches, focus more on contemporary studies and anticipate links to the new technologies and futures of psychology study' (2013, p. 402).

A more general point for future discussion is why it has taken so long to adopt theories and ideas from cognitive psychology into mainstream tourism thinking. The basic concepts of goal-directed behaviour were discussed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) when they emphasised the importance of task and involvement and intervening cognitive processes in emotional situations. Interestingly, a study of the distinct knowledge domains of tourism research indicates that consumer behaviour is declining in importance 'arguably, due to no groundbreaking additions to its theoretical pillars and no observable change in its ontological or epistemological stands' (Koseoglu et al., 2019, p. 10). One reason suggested for the lack of use of more recent psychological theory is its lack of accessibility. A solution to this problem is noted by Pearce and Packer who write:

...increasingly, major figures in the psychology field write more popular and accessible, but still research-derived, versions of their work in key monographs. The approach of monitoring the accessible work of well-established psychology scholars backed by detailed contemporary journal review articles offers stimulating educational pathways for many tourism students and scholars. (2013, p. 4)

Further research is needed to examine efficient mechanisms for this knowledge transfer to occur. This chapter has addressed only one example of imported theory; other studies would contribute to further corroborate this chapter's claims. This study has focused on psychological theory which is in itself a series of sub disciplines. It is important to 'match' the concepts used to study a tourism phenomenon of interest to an appropriate theory in a particular subfield. This requires a detailed knowledge of the current developments within these subfields which creates a problem for those in an applied field. For example, the study of emotion is a core area of cognitive psychology. Alternatively, personality is a focus of personality psychology. Cognitive psychology does not address the concept of an attitude except through schemata.

In a similar manner, this study has examined only one aspect of psychological theory. Further research to review recent theoretical developments in other original disciplines relevant to the study of tourism (social sciences) may be useful in applying useful knowledge from the core disciplines to tourism. Such integration may help to provide insightful knowledge to tourism stakeholders. Overall, this chapter presents a foundation for discussion of tourism theory development and also the nature of tourism as a field of study. Further, the approach to development of tourism theory based on disciplinary knowledge rather than radical non-disciplinarity is illustrated by the adoption of cognitive appraisal theory to address failures of the S-O-R model. The chapter supports the conceptualisation of tourism knowledge as the result of disciplinary knowledge applied to this field (Tribe & Liburd, 2016).