



The application of social psychology theories and concepts in hospitality and tourism studies: A review and research agenda



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was the review of 282 papers that pertain to the application of social psychology theories and concepts presented in 12 leading academic journals published between 1999 and 2012. The papers were sorted by theory and concept, application level, journal, publication year, subject area, and statistical technique. The most frequently used theories were found to be social exchange, equity, and cognitive dissonance theories. The present paper offers a pioneering attempt to evaluate the use of social psychology theories and concepts in hospitality and tourism studies as well as identifying future research opportunities.

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1. Introduction

It has been widely accepted that interactions between psychology and hospitality and tourism management (HTM) studies have been fruitful (Woodside and Mazanec, 2004). Knowledge of psychology in relation to human resources and consumers is valuable in determining the success of hospitality and tourism ventures (Ross, 1998). Psychology offers a broad canvas of subfields. Pearce and Stringer (1991) stated that

... the analysis of psychology's contribution to tourism proceeds by considering psycho-biological and ergonomic studies, cognition, individual difference approaches, and the work in social psychology as applied to tourism.

Stringer and Pearce (1984) further suggested that more emphasis should be given to the "models of man" and to the applications of social psychology in the hospitality and tourism disciplines.

Social psychology has been defined as a social science that aims to examine and comprehend the influence of the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others on an individual's thoughts, experience, and behavior (Allport, 1984). Social psychological behavior takes into consideration not only what is occurring socially to the individual, but also what occurs mentally and emotionally within a person, which, in turn, impacts social behavior (Brown, 2006). The hospitality and tourism industry is also called a service industry (Darnay, 1998). A significant number of studies in this field have stressed that the consumer's consumption experience is influenced by many other people, including workers, employees,

managers and other consumers (Singh, 2008). Social psychology, which places an emphasis on the individuals within the social interaction paradigm, has been widely used as a theoretical foundation to explain human behavior in this field (Huan and Beaman, 2004). Previous studies which examine social psychology have largely adopted specific components (i.e., theories or terms) from this field to explain phenomena in the hospitality and tourism disciplines. For example, Kwon and Jang (2012) explained the effects of compensation for service recovery with equity theory. Nunkoo et al. (2010) examined island residents' identities and their support for tourism using the social exchange theory and the identity theory. Usakli and Baloglu (2011) identified the brand personality of tourist destinations with the application of the self-congruity theory.

Although piecemeal social psychology theories and concepts have been widely used by academic researchers to identify and understand various issues that may arise in hospitality and tourism disciplines, the only existing review of this research was conducted around 30 years ago (Pearce, 1982; Stringer and Pearce, 1984). Pearce (1982) collated scattered research from diverse disciplines to create a social psychological account of tourist behavior. He examined the economic, geographical, anthropological, and sociological backgrounds of tourism, investigated the social role of tourists, tourist motivation, and social contact between tourists and hosts. He also evaluated the relationship between tourists and environmental features. Stringer and Pearce (1984) briefly mentioned that social psychology could serve as an academic discipline which might serve tourism research. However, to the author's knowledge, no such comprehensive study has been conducted which applies specific social psychology theories and concepts to a review of HTM studies.

The current study aims to fill this research gap. It attempts to give an updated and comprehensive overview of prior HTM

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research in the light of social psychology theories and concepts, and provides directions for future research. Specifically, 282 articles from 12 major academic journals in the field between 1999 and 2012 were collected and reviewed with the following goals: (1) to profile social psychology's research according to theory and concept, publication journal and year, subject area, and statistical technique; (2) to make suggestions for future directions regarding the application of social psychology to HTM research.

2. Literature review

Chadee (2011) suggested social psychology could be classified into four categories, including (1) social cognition, (2) social comparison, (3) social reinforcement/exchange, and (4) the self. The theories and concepts from these four areas have been widely applied to understand human cognition, affection, experience and behavior in diverse disciplines, including health (e.g., Miller et al., 2006), humanities (e.g., Brehm, 1966), marketing (e.g., Jae and DelVecchio, 2004), media communication (e.g., O'Keefe and Jensen, 2008), education (e.g., Graham et al., 1991), human resources (e.g., Douglas and Martinko, 2001), and many other areas. In the following subsections, the theories, concepts, and examples of these applications in various disciplines for each of the four perspectives are discussed.

2.1. Social cognition

Social cognition assumes that parts of a person's acquired knowledge are impacted by observing others within the context of social interaction (Fiske and Taylor, 1984). Social cognition describes mental activities, including encoding, storing, retrieving, and information processing (Gallese et al., 2004). Chadee (2011) suggested five theories and one model from this perspective, including the theories of reactance, attribution, balance, and cognitive dissonance, and the elaboration likelihood model.

Reactance theory explains that individuals increase resistance to persuasion when their specific behavioral freedoms are threatened or eliminated (Brehm, 1966; Van Dyne and Ellis, 2004). Cognitive dissonance theory describes individuals' internal drive to keep their attitudes and beliefs in harmony and avoid disharmony when people face a situation involving conflicting opinions or behaviors (Elliot and Devine, 1994; Gawronski and Strack, 2004). The elaboration likelihood model proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1981, 1986) provides a framework for comprehending the cognitive processes underlying effective persuasions (Angst and Agarwal, 2009; Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). Attribution theory proposed by Heider (1920) assesses the information gathering process and how it generates a causal judgment (Laczniak et al., 2001). Besides attribution theory, Heider (1958) also created balance theory. Balance theory suggests that the motivation to maintain cognitive consistency functions as a push toward mental balance (Basil and Herr, 2006).

These primary theories and concepts elucidating social cognition have been widely used to explain individuals' mental activities, and to support their consequent behaviors in different fields. For example, reactance theory explains that patients' perception of threats to their control may generate noncompliance in a medical context (Fogarty, 1997). Cho (1999) used the elaboration likelihood model to understand how people process advertising on the internet. Asmus (1986) identified the achievement motivation characteristics of music education and music therapy students using attribution theory.

2.2. Social comparison

Social comparison is a cornerstone in social psychology which influences people's reasoning, knowledge, and practice (Suls and Wills, 1991). People frequently make social comparisons – the comparison of the self and others (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999). Whenever people receive information about others, such as what others do, how others are, or what others have achieved or failed, they are inclined to connect the information to themselves (Dunning and Hayes, 1996). Five primary theories and concepts on the perspective of social comparison have been assessed in this study, including the frustration-aggression theory, justice theory, social learning theory, role theory, and conflict management.

The frustration-aggression theory proposed by Barker et al. (1941) suggests that individuals' frustration is inclined to develop into aggression when they feel that they are being precluded from reaching a goal (Berkowitz, 1989). Justice theory is the classic work of John Rawls (Rawls, 1971). Rawls offered a model of a fair choice circumstance within which parties are assumed to select mutually suitable rules of justice (Husted and Folger, 2004). Social learning theory suggests that individuals' social behavior is learned primarily by observing and imitating the behaviors of others, and is also impacted when they are rewarded and/or punished for these behaviors (Tu, 2000). Role theory indicates that networks of people's social roles constitute a structure into which groups, activities in organizations, and even society as a whole are organized (Eagly et al., 2000). Social roles are a set of duties, expectations, norms, regulations, and behaviors that an individual must fulfill (Solomon et al., 1985). Conflict management describes the activities in which the parties continue the conflict but adopt less extreme tactics settlement (Daniels and Walker, 2001; Montoya-Weiss Massey and Song, 2001).

These theories and concepts explored from the angle of social comparison offer a fundamental psychological mechanism which informs individuals' decisions, experiences, and actions in different disciplines. For example, Hamermesh and Soss (1974) explained the problem of suicide with the frustration-aggression theory. Hagan (1989) discussed the connections between the imposition of political power and organizational forms in the criminal justice system with the justice theory. Mui (1992) examined caregiver strain among black and white daughter caregivers from a role theory perspective.

2.3. Social reinforcement

Social reinforcement refers to experiences that people encounter all around them, such as smiles, approval, compliment, applause, and awareness for other individuals (Lieberman et al., 2001). The reinforcement not only comes from an outside source, but also from internal feelings (Domjan, 2009). These studies of social reinforcement discussed five main theories which can potentially be applied to HTM studies, including the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, selectivity theory, equity theory, social exchange theory, and interdependence theory.

The expectancy-disconfirmation theory is commonly known as the expectation theory. It proposes that individuals' satisfaction/dissatisfaction is a comparative outcome between actual performance and predictive expectations (Ryzin, 2006). Selectivity theory is a life-span theory of motivation (Carstensen, 1992). The theory indicates that people become increasingly selective and invest more resources in achieving emotion-related goals and activities when they get older (Carstensen et al., 2003). Equity theory was first proposed by John Stacey Adams, a workplace and behavioral psychologist (Adams, 1963). The theory attempts to interpret relational satisfaction based on observations of fair/unfair distributions of resources among interpersonal relationships

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