“Nothing is more exciting than fresh ideas, so why are areas of knowledge often so slow to adopt them? Discuss with reference to the human sciences and one other area of knowledge.

There are multiple interpretations of the term “fresh idea”. Initially, it seems to refer to ideas that have never been seen before, as they would certainly be fresh to any area of knowledge (AOK). Upon further thought, fresh ideas can also be ideas that were only known or accepted by a small group, fitting the definition of fresh since the idea is unknown to most of the AOK. In both interpretations, the fresh idea is different from or challenges what most of the AOK believes, leading to a definition for “fresh idea” as any idea that challenges the dominant view or belief of an AOK. The word adopt in the PT also has multiple interpretations—adopting an idea could be acting upon it or agreeing with it. This essay will consider both definitions as adoption. Now, a few different responses to the PT arise: adoption could be slow because AOKs take time to analyze fresh ideas for validity, or conflicting perspectives and their ensuant debates delay the adoption of fresh ideas. These responses have different implications, one being meticulous (and possibly overly meticulous) practices within AOKs, while the other can result in stubborn and drawn-out debates that delay effective progress.

The suggestions and assumptions of the PT can be helpful in determining the validity of these responses. The PT focuses on excitement, suggesting excitement should lead to the quick adoption of fresh ideas, but it often does not. This brings up a few questions: Are there different types of excitement? What types of excitement cause ideas to be adopted slowly?

Despite the often-positive connotation of the word, I argue that excitement is only a dramatic reaction to something, positive or negative. In the human sciences, excitement over a fresh idea is often shown through debates from differing perspectives. This can be seen in economic theory with the contention between the Keynesian and Neoclassical views. The Keynesian view rose as an opposite to the already existing Neoclassical view, causing debate among economists for years (FutureLearn). This excitement directly contributed to the slow adoption of the Keynesian view, as Neoclassical economists continued to resist the adoption of Keynesian economics. This indicates that this type of excitement, dissenting opinions, leads to slow adoption of fresh ideas.

Continuing with excitement that causes slow adoption, another factor is the success of old ideas indicating there was no need for change. This is somewhat different from debates which analyze the benefits and drawbacks of adopting a fresh idea, since this form of excitement rejects any need for change. The Neoclassical view was successful in maintaining the economy for many years as the economy followed the self-recovery cycle predicted by the Neoclassical view (Brinkley). This suggested that the Neoclassical view was successful. Proponents of Neoclassical economics pointed to these successes in their resistance to Keynesian economics. The pattern that can be extracted from this example is that because fresh ideas do not follow the beliefs of old ideas that were perceived to be successful, AOKs can be reluctant to adopt the fresh idea.

An important consideration when responding to the PT is the possibility that there is no excitement when a fresh idea arises, contradicting the PT’s assumption that “nothing is more exciting than fresh ideas”. My experience with holding chopsticks demonstrates this, which falls under the human sciences since it is an example of human behavior. I learned to hold chopsticks when I was four, and I didn’t change my holding habits for many years. One day, my parents told me that I was holding them the wrong way and showed me the proper way. There was no dramatic reaction that would constitute excitement on my part—I did not attempt to debate with my parents, nor did I try to justify myself with previous successes. I only felt that I didn’t want to follow the fresh idea because I had gotten used to my way—it was a matter of habit. Even when my parents demonstrated the benefits of holding them the proper way, I disregarded these benefits. In this case, there was an absence of excitement. This absence directly contributed to slow adoption of the fresh idea. I slowly shifted to holding chopsticks the correct way over years of constant reminders from my parents. This experience refutes the major assumption of the PT that “nothing is more exciting than fresh ideas”, therefore offering a possible explanation for slow adoption. It suggests that slow adoption should not be surprising, because not all fresh ideas are exciting.

In the AOK of the arts, fresh ideas come in waves of different artistic movements, such as Postmodernism or Romanticism. The art pieces created by these movements are often used to convey messages and social commentary about their time. Therefore, it is possible that slow adoption of fresh ideas in the arts is related to historical context.

When analyzing the Romantic era of the arts, an interesting duality appears of the definition of a “fresh idea”. Romanticism was partly a reaction to the Scientific Revolution, glorifying a return to nature and rejecting the chaos of scientific discovery (Sparknotes). The fresh idea in Romanticism is promoting a return to nature, which can be interpreted as an old idea due to the word “return”. This means the idea differed from the dominant view of the AOK at the time when it was conceived but aligned with the dominant view of the AOK at a certain time before. So, is it a fresh idea or an old idea?

If the idea of returning to glorifying nature is interpreted as an old idea, then this is another way to refute the assumption made by the PT, this time focusing on the word “nothing”. There is something more exciting than fresh ideas in some cases—old ideas. Additionally, the Romantic ideas were adopted relatively quickly, which can be seen in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein* contains vibrant imagery of nature and its glory, warning of the dangers of human creativity (Shelley). The book quickly became one of the most successful works in history. This brings another response to the PT—AOKs are slow to adopt fresh ideas because old ideas can be even more exciting and appealing.

If the idea of returning to glorifying nature is interpreted as a fresh idea, then it appears to be an example of the AOK quickly adopting a fresh idea. While this is true within the artists of the Romantic movement, it was less apparent in some of its audience. This is important to consider since the audience is also a prominent part of the AOK of arts. Romanticism was a reaction against the harsh conditions of industrialism and its terrible working conditions, impact on nature, and social shifts. However, these industries continued their development without improving in these areas for many years (Szwydky), revealing another possible response to the PT—AOKs are slow to adopt fresh ideas because the fresh ideas will negatively impact certain people.

Another possibility for slow adoption is the time it takes for the AOK to adapt to the new idea. A personal experience of mine with music helps to illustrate this idea. I competed as a violin soloist in a competition and received feedback from the adjudicator. Her comments were helpful and provided new suggestions—fresh ideas—for me to improve my playing. I felt her comments were valuable and agreed with them, but I couldn’t adopt them immediately. I was excited by the fresh ideas and wanted to improve my playing by adopting them, but I lacked the skill to immediately adopt it. I needed multiple hours to practice, slowly inspecting the smallest details and learning to apply the adjudicator’s advice to my playing. Only after weeks of practice did I truly adopt the fresh ideas the adjudicator had offered. This experience indicates AOKs may need time to adopt a fresh idea even if there is widespread agreement over the idea.

           Often, fresh ideas are adopted slowly by AOKs because of resistance from people who believe in the old ideas. There can be many reasons for their resistance, but a common one is that these people view the success and prevalence of their old ideas as an indication that change is not necessary, even if fresh ideas have benefits. Of course, there are also a significant number of cases where the slow adoption of new ideas was due to other reasons, such as an AOK’s inability to swiftly adopt a new idea, or the time it takes for people to debate the new idea. People may also be opposed to adopting a fresh idea because of the negative impact on their life. An implication of the slow process of adopting fresh ideas could be slow progress in developments such as economic theory and artistic representation. This would ultimately have a negative impact on society, as more time is necessary to improve in these areas or respond to matters that need immediate solutions. Furthermore, it becomes difficult for supporters of fresh ideas to be heard as most of the AOKs stick to their old ideas. Old ideas can also be more exciting than fresh ideas, incentivizing AOKs to sometimes return to or continue with their old ideas instead of adopting the fresh idea. An implication of the slow process of adoption is the fresh idea is likely to be scrutinized for flaws, which can be beneficial.

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