



Understanding the relationship between travel satisfaction and subjective well-being considering the role of personality traits: A structural equation model



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ABSTRACT

Using a structural equation model, this article examines to what extent subjective well-being or life satisfaction is influenced by travel satisfaction. To avoid confounding, satisfaction with other life domains, personal characteristics and personality traits are included in the model. In addition, the reverse effect of well-being on travel satisfaction is considered. To collect the data needed to estimate the model, a survey was designed and administered face-to-face in January 2015 in Xi'an, China using a random sampling procedure. After controlling for personality traits and significant socio-demographic variables, results indicate that travel satisfaction has a relatively small impact on subjective well-being. The reverse relationship is considerably stronger.

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1. Introduction

Since long, subjective well-being, a concept closely related to life satisfaction, happiness and fulfilment has been a topic of research in social and psychological sciences. Subjective well-being expresses people's cognitive and emotional evaluations of their lives. These evaluations include people's emotional reactions to events, their moods, judgments of life satisfaction and fulfilment, and satisfaction with different domains of life such as marriage and work (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Thus, subjective well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that covers many life domains. The concept has been measured using a variety of different scales (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Diener & Suh, 1997). As an alternative to the concept of utility, subjective well-being has been proposed as a measure of individuals' benefits in a number of different life domains (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999).

People's satisfaction with different domains of their life thus influences subjective well-being. The effect of satisfaction in a specific domain on overall subjective well-being has been typically explained on the basis of the bottom-up spill over theory of subjective well-being (Sirgy, 2001). This theory posits that affect related to a consumption experience contributes to affecting satisfaction in specific life domains, which in turn influences satisfaction with life at large (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011). Many scholars advocated this bottom-up approach. For example, Mohan-Neill (1995) predicted life satisfaction using variables such as work satisfaction and satisfaction with personal relationships. The results indicated that satisfaction with personal relationships is more predictive of life satisfaction than work satisfaction, although both were significant predictors of life satisfaction. Similarly, Oishi, Diener, Suh, and Lucas (1999) found that value orientation moderates the effects of

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domain satisfaction on overall life satisfaction. Dasgupta and Majumdar (2000), using the bottom-up approach, found that satisfaction with material possessions, family life, self-development, and local government administration have a significant effect on life satisfaction of Calcutta residents. As a final example, Grzeskowiak, Sirgy, Lee, and Claiborne (2006) concluded that satisfaction with housing influences satisfaction in various other life domains, which in turn affects satisfaction with life. In the context of travel, the spill over theory would imply that high travel satisfaction would contribute to high subjective well-being.

In principle, there may also be an effect of overall well-being on travel satisfaction, which would indicate a top-down approach in the study of subjective well-being in the sense that their overall perspective on life may affect how people feel about specific life domains (see, for example, Diener, 1984; Headey, Veenhoven, & Wearing, 1991). Few studies, however, have examined this top-down relationship using empirical data. Abou-Zeid and Ben-Akiva (2011) estimated the effects of overall well-being on commute satisfaction using a structural equations model and found that people who have a high level of overall well-being are likely more satisfied with their commute.

Thus, these studies suggest that an understanding of how domain-specific satisfaction contributes to overall well-being and how overall well-being influences domain satisfaction has been a pertinent topic of research in social sciences and marketing research for many decades. However, the studies in these fields of study have not considered travel satisfaction, even though travel is an important daily consumption and experience. Knowledge about the interrelationship between subjective well-being and travel satisfaction has only recently accrued since the study of travel satisfaction has appeared on the agenda of travel behaviour researchers. Since the last seven years, transportation researchers have examined determinants and effects of travel behaviour (see, for example, Abenoza, Cats, & Susilo, 2017; De Vos, Mokhtarian, Schwanen, Van Acker, & Witlox, 2016; Yang, Zhao, Wang, Liu, & Li, 2015). The interest in the topic is fast expanding.

Although the rapidly growing number of studies in travel behaviour research on travel satisfaction has substantially increased our knowledge about travel satisfaction, limitations of prior research leave open sufficient room for additional research. In this project, we focus our attention on the following relatively unexplored aspects of travel satisfaction in travel behaviour research. First, few studies examined the interrelationships between travel satisfaction and overall well-being by simultaneously considering the relationship between satisfaction with other life domains and overall subjective well-being. The existing partial conceptualisation and analysis may introduce bias in the results, particularly when domains other than travel influence subjective well-being and satisfactions with various life domains are correlated. Thus, in this study, we adopt this more general approach.

Second, prior travel behaviour research has predominantly adopted a hedonic view of well-being. According to this view, researchers have equated well-being with hedonic pleasure based on the contention that people's goal of life is maximizing their amount of pleasure. However, travel and activities during trip also allow people to achieve purpose and meaning of life. This so-called eudemonic well-being has been under-researched in travel behaviour analysis. Thus, rather than focusing on a specific view of well-being, different views were entertained in this study.

Third, personality traits may influence the degree of experienced travel satisfaction and responses to travel satisfaction scales. Diener and Lucas (1999) argued that the strong influence of personality is seen as one of the most replicable and most surprising findings in subjective well-being research. In fact, the correlation between subjective well-being and personality such as extraversion and neuroticism is stronger than correlations with any demographic predictor (Lucas & Fujita, 2000; Steel, Schnnidt, & Shultz, 2008; Richard & Diener, 2009). Personality may capture structural response patterns of individuals. However, personality traits have been largely ignored in studies of travel satisfaction. Thus, in the current study, we included personality scales in the measurement and analysis to allow for personality traits effects moderating the relationships.

Thus, this study examines the mutual dependency between travel satisfaction and subjective well-being relative to satisfaction with other life domains, while controlling for personality traits and selected socio-demographic variables. To analyse the direct and indirect relationships between these constructs, a structural equation model is estimated. Our study differs from previous research in the following manners. First, travel satisfaction is measured as a domain of life satisfaction, while most other studies scales focused on travel contexts. Secondly, both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being are considered, while most other studies adopted a specific, particularly hedonic, view of well-being. Thirdly, the structural equation model developed in our study analysis controls for personality. Finally, this is one of very few academic studies on travel satisfaction in China.

The paper is structured as follows. It starts with a review of the literature on subjective well-being, focusing on definitions, measurement and results. Section 3 then outlines the conceptual framework. Next, Section 4 describes the data collection and measurement scales. The results of the primary analysis of the data, involving exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, are discussed in Section 5. Section 6 discusses the major results of the structural equation model. Section 7 concludes the paper with a short discussion of major conclusions drawn from this study.

2. Literature review

The aim of this review is twofold. First, we will summarize the findings of research that examined the relationship between travel satisfaction and subjective well-being. This summary serves to position our study in the context of previous research and support our arguments about its contribution to the state of the art. Second, we will review previous travel satisfaction research in terms of the measurement of central concepts such as travel satisfaction, subjective well-being and

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