



Travel satisfaction revisited. On the pivotal role of travel satisfaction in conceptualising a travel behaviour process



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ABSTRACT

Over the past years a substantial amount of studies has indicated that travel satisfaction is affected by a wide range of elements such as trip duration, travel mode choice and travel-related attitudes. However, what is less explored is that this travel satisfaction is not only an outcome of travel-related preferences and choices, but that travel satisfaction can also be a predictor of travel-related components. In this conceptual paper we tend to fill the gaps in the existing – albeit rather fragmented – literature concerning travel satisfaction. We provide an overview of the elements explaining travel satisfaction, and possible outcomes of travel satisfaction, with a focus on (i) subjective well-being, (ii) travel mode choice, (iii) travel-related attitudes, and (iv) the residential location. Furthermore, we suggest a continuous cyclical process including the four above mentioned elements in which travel satisfaction plays an essential role; a process which can result in the formation of travel habits.

1. Introduction

Over the past years, a growing body of studies have analysed how satisfied people are with and while travelling. Although previous studies often use the term travel satisfaction to refer to both satisfaction with one specific trip and satisfaction with travel in general, we think it is important to make a distinction between what we refer to as trip satisfaction and satisfaction with daily travel. Trip satisfaction refers to the experienced emotions – or people's mood – during a trip and a cognitive evaluation of this trip; while satisfaction with daily travel refers to how satisfied people are with their daily travel patterns, possibly split up according to different types of trips (e.g., commute trips, leisure trips). The Satisfaction with Travel Scale (STS) is a domain-specific scale developed to measure how people perceive their travel, which can both be applied to one specific trip or to travel in general (De Vos et al., 2015; Ettema et al., 2011; Friman et al., 2013).

Most studies analysing travel satisfaction focus on elements explaining variations in how satisfied people are with their travel. The effect of trip characteristics – such as trip duration and travel mode choice – on travel satisfaction has been analysed quite frequently (De Vos et al., 2016; Ettema et al., 2011; Mao et al., 2016; Morris and Guerra, 2015a, 2015b; Olsson et al., 2013; St-Louis et al., 2014). Less common, however, are studies focussing on the effects of travel-related attitudes and preferences on how satisfied people are with their trips and travel in general (De Vos et al., 2016; St-Louis et al., 2014; Ye and Titheridge, 2017). Furthermore, it is also possible that long-term (subjective) well-being, such as people's overall satisfaction with life (i.e., life satisfaction), affects satisfaction with travel (De Vos, 2017).

Previous studies on travel satisfaction have given us some interesting insights into which elements are important predictors of how people perceive their trips. However, travel satisfaction should not be regarded as an endpoint resulting from certain travel

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behaviour choices and/or the liking to travel in a certain way. As people will mostly try to maximise their happiness and satisfaction, trip satisfaction can possibly affect people's attitudes towards the chosen travel mode and can – as a result – influence future mode choices (De Vos et al., 2017). Some studies also suggest that travel, and satisfaction with this travel, can have an impact on long-term well-being (Bergstad et al., 2011; De Vos, 2017; De Vos et al., 2013; Ettema et al., 2010).

In this paper we will analyse how travel satisfaction both affects – and is affected by – (i) long-term well-being, (ii) travel mode choice, (iii) travel-related attitudes/preferences and (iv) the residential location. Resulting from these relations, we put forward a continuous process in which travel satisfaction plays a pivotal role; a process which can result in possible formation of travel habits. This paper is organised as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of existing studies on travel satisfaction, with a focus on the bidirectional links of travel satisfaction with well-being, mode choice, attitudes/preferences and the residential location. In Section 3 we present a travel-related process in which travel satisfaction plays a key role. Section 4 discusses this process and indicates how this process can result in possible habit formation.

2. Previous studies on travel satisfaction

Studies, mainly since 2010, have indicated that travel satisfaction – both satisfaction with a specific trip and satisfaction with travel in general – is affected by a wide range of elements (including mode choice, trip duration and travel-related attitudes). However, these studies are often rather fragmented and deficient as they mostly focus on only one or two aspects influencing travel satisfaction and do not account for a series of bidirectional relationships. In the following sections we explain how travel satisfaction has bidirectional relationships with long-term well-being, travel mode choice, travel-related attitudes and the residential location.

2.1. A bidirectional relationship between travel satisfaction and long-term well-being

Travel satisfaction can be regarded as a part of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) (De Vos et al., 2013; Ettema et al., 2010). According to Diener et al. (1999), this SWB consist of four elements: the presence of positive feelings, the absence of negative feelings, domain satisfaction and overall satisfaction with life. The experience of positive and negative feelings pertains to the short term and is often referred to as a person's mood, or emotional well-being. Domain satisfaction can be referred to as a medium-term satisfaction with certain domains in life (e.g., job satisfaction, satisfaction with social relationships). Life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation of how good one's life is over a longer period of time. In terms of travel, trip satisfaction refers to the presence (or absence) of positive (or negative) feelings during a particular trip, possibly in combination with a cognitive evaluation of that trip. Trip satisfaction can therefore be regarded as a part of short-term SWB. Satisfaction with daily travel can be regarded as (medium-term) domain satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is related with both the experience of negative/positive emotions and satisfaction in certain domains in life. Individuals who have high levels of emotional well-being (i.e., who experience more frequent positive emotions and less frequent negative emotions) are often successful in – and satisfied with – multiple life domains. Experiencing positive emotions also stimulates elements positively affecting life satisfaction, such as original thinking, fostering skills and behaviour, and liking of self and others (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a). Furthermore, domain satisfaction has a direct, positive effect on life satisfaction (e.g., Schimmack, 2008). Besides these bottom-up effects from short-term and medium-term satisfaction on long-term life satisfaction, it is also possible that top-down effects exist in which people with high levels of life satisfaction experience more frequent positive emotions compared to people with lower levels of life satisfaction. These top-down effects from life satisfaction on emotional well-being can happen both directly and indirectly through domain satisfaction (e.g., Diener, 1984; Feist et al., 1995; Headey et al., 1991).

From a travel point of view, this suggests that both trip satisfaction and satisfaction with daily travel can affect life satisfaction (e.g., Bergstad et al., 2011; De Vos et al., 2013; Ettema et al., 2010). The effect of trip satisfaction on life satisfaction will probably also be indirect, through satisfaction with daily travel, as multiple positively or negatively perceived trips of the same kind might affect satisfaction with daily travel. On the other hand, it is also possible that people evaluating their life positively will have a higher probability of being satisfied with their trips and being more pleased with their travel in general, compared to people with a lower life satisfaction (De Vos, 2017). Hence, a bidirectional relationship seems to occur where travel satisfaction results in a certain level of life satisfaction, while this level of long-term well-being affects the perception of travel (Fig. 1).

Travel will not only affect long-term well-being directly by the experience of emotions during trips or a global evaluation of a person's travel pattern. Since out-of-home activity participation has a clear impact on life satisfaction (Abou-Zeid and Ben-Akiva, 2012; Diener, 2000; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005a), travel – enabling participation in these activities – has an important indirect effect on satisfaction with life. In the worst case scenario of social exclusion, a lack of travel options makes it impossible to engage in rewarding activities, negatively affecting quality of life (e.g., Lucas, 2012). Also, observed spill-over effects of travel on the activity at the destination of the trip are possible (Bergstad et al. 2011; De Vos, 2017; De Vos et al. 2013; Ettema et al. 2010). The (perceived) quality of the trip can affect the ease with which people perform their activity at the destination of that trip. A stressful and/or tiring commute trip, for instance, might negatively impact performance at work and satisfaction with work (Friman et al., 2017; Legrain et al., 2015; Loong et al., 2017), and can therefore reduce the well-being enhancing effect of the work activity. On the other hand, travel time can give travellers the opportunity to mentally prepare for the activity ahead, facilitating the performance of that activity (Jain and Lyons, 2008; Ory and Mokhtarian, 2005).

Out-of-home activity participation does not only affect satisfaction with life, it can also help people to achieve personal growth and realise the best in oneself. This type of well-being is referred to as eudaimonic well-being and is more than satisfaction of certain needs; it emphasises on the meaning of life and 'flourishing'. Eudaimonic well-being is related with life satisfaction. Although most

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