



# Effects of traveller's mood and personality on ratings of satisfaction with daily trip stages



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## ABSTRACT

Travel satisfaction refers to people's evaluation of transport services and their experience during travel. This topic has recently become of increasing interest within the transportation research community. Previous studies on travel satisfaction have typically tried to understand the effects of trip-related objective attributes such as travel mode, travel time and travel cost on people's travel satisfaction. The interpretation of these results may be biased if studies ignore people's psychological dispositions such as mood and personality traits because these factors likely influence satisfaction ratings. The effects of travel attributes may then be confounded with omitted, but likely correlated, effects of personality and mood. The aim of this study is to examine whether personality and mood are systematically related to travel satisfaction. More specifically, the direct and indirect effects of personality and mood on ratings of travel satisfaction of each trip stage are investigated using path analysis. Results show that mood directly influences travel satisfaction, while the effects of personality are both direct and indirect. It implies that studies of travel satisfaction that have ignored these factors may have reported biased effects of travel attributes on travel satisfaction.

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## 1. Introduction

Although the study of customer satisfaction has a long history in fields such as housing, tourism, psychology, business, economics and marketing (e.g., Churchill and Surprenant, 1982; Fornell, 1992; Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Wirtz, 2001; Xiong et al., 2014; Mouwen, 2015; Pitt et al., 2014), in transportation research, the concept of travel satisfaction has only recently started to attract attention (e.g., Stradling et al., 2007; Ettema et al., 2011; Abou-Zeid et al., 2012; Friman et al., 2013; Susilo and Cats, 2014; Aydin et al., 2015). Travel satisfaction refers to people's evaluation of transport services and their experience during travel.

A substantial share of travel satisfaction research has been concerned with the contribution of travel satisfaction to subjective well-being, a concept that expresses people's cognitive and emotional evaluations of their lives (Diener et al., 2003). As an potentially important factor contributing to subjective well-being, the significance of travel satisfaction in the assessment of overall subjective well-being or quality of life has been examined in several

studies over the last couple of years (e.g., Abou-Zeid, 2009; Cantwell et al., 2009; Bergstad et al., 2011; Ettema et al., 2012; Abou-Zeid and Ben-Akiva, 2013; De Vos et al., 2013; Olsson et al., 2013; Reardon and Abdallah, 2013; Abou-Zeid and Fujii, 2016). These and other studies have generally concluded that travel satisfaction plays a significant, but modest role in explaining quality of life. While there might be an effect of travel satisfaction on subjective well-being, overall well-being may also influence ratings of travel satisfaction (Abou-Zeid, 2009).

In addition to research on the relationship between travel satisfaction and subjective well-being, travel satisfaction has also played an important role in measuring the subjective evaluation of transport performance. These studies are similar to the dominant stream of satisfaction research in housing, tourism and marketing. The aim is to examine the relationship between housing, service or product attributes and consumer satisfaction. The findings of these studies are useful to improve transportation systems and technologies (Abou-Zeid et al., 2008). The analysis of travel satisfaction provides management of transport companies and planning authorities direct feedback about their service provision. Results may signal aspects of the transportation system and service delivery that meet customer expectations and/or management targets, and aspects that should be improved.

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Therefore, understanding the causes and correlates of travel satisfaction is important not only for transport companies to improve transport services, but also for governments and policy makers to incorporate well-being into their public policies, for example to encourage the widespread use of active and public transportation (Bergstad et al., 2011; St-Louis et al., 2014).

The analyses reported in this paper are primarily motivated to improve the state of practice in the application of travel satisfaction research to assess transport systems and delivery. Most prior studies have assumed that objective trip attributes influence peoples' travel satisfaction (Abou-Zeid, 2009; Duarte et al., 2009a, 2009b; St-Louis et al., 2014; Susilo and Cats, 2014; De Vos et al., 2015a, 2015b; Hussain et al., 2015). Analysis of the relationship between these objective attributes and travel satisfaction allows drawing conclusions with respect to the relative contributions of the various attributes (trip characteristics, vehicle attributes, etc.) to trip or travel satisfaction. The direct analysis of satisfaction scores provides useful information about because it relates to the various attributes of transport delivery. To draw valid conclusions, this approach implicitly assumes that the variation in travel satisfaction ratings is only systematically influenced by the attributes of the trip and vehicle. However, research in fields other than transportation has suggested that personality traits and moods may also influence satisfaction and subjective well-being (e.g., DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Diener et al., 2003). It thus seems relevant to investigate to what extent the effects of personality and mood bias the results of the effects of objective trip attributes on travel satisfaction.

To the best of our knowledge, previous studies have not systematically investigated the interrelationships between travel satisfaction, trip attributes, mood and personality. Rather, only the relationships between two of these concepts has caught some attention (e.g., Ory and Mokhtarian, 2005; Steel et al., 2008; Morris and Guerra, 2015). Consequently, if travel satisfaction would be strongly correlated with personality traits and moods, the estimated effects of trip attributes on travel satisfaction may be misleading, implying that potentially wrong conclusions may have been drawn and inadequate policy or management decisions may have been made. It is important, therefore, to assess the strength and nature of the effects of personality traits and mood on travel satisfaction before strong conclusions on the performance of travel services can be drawn.

In this study, therefore, we analyse the effects of trip attributes on travel satisfaction simultaneously considering the effects of the mood and personality in order to examine whether there are significant direct and indirect effects from mood and personality on travel satisfaction. A path model is estimated to analyse these effects.

The paper is structured as follows. The second section outlines the hypotheses and the conceptual model. Section 3 describes the data collection and measurement of the constructs and variables used in the analysis. Section 4 discusses the major results of the path analysis. Section 5 concludes the paper with a short summary of major conclusions drawn from this study and a discussion of potential limitations and how these may be addressed in future research.

## 2. Theoretical hypotheses and conceptual model

### 2.1. Trip attributes and travel satisfaction

For evaluating the validity of reported travel satisfaction, a systematic review of the literature suggests that travel satisfaction has been typically conceptualised as a function of trip attributes such as travel time and cost. Some research suggests that travel satisfaction varies among travel modes and urban areas (e.g., Susilo and Cats, 2014). Recent studies indicate that people who use active

travel modes, like walking or cycling, experience and evaluate their trips more positively compared to people who use other means, like public transport and cars (e.g., Ettema et al., 2011; Olsson et al., 2013; Friman et al., 2013). A few studies have examined mode-related attributes especially for public transport services, for example real-time traveller information (Brakewood et al., 2014), crowding (Tirachini et al., 2013), reliability (Li et al., 2010) and multi-tasking when using public transport (Ettema et al., 2012; Rasouli and Timmermans, 2014).

Few studies focus on the number of stages or mode transfers as potentially critical factors in the commuting experience. Daily trips including commuter and leisure trips may have more than one stage, and thus involve transfer(s). Previous studies mainly considered the main trip stage of multi-staged trips, therefore neglecting the effects of complexity and transfers of a multi-stage trip on travellers' satisfaction. Only a few studies focused on the satisfaction of different trip stages (e.g., Susilo and Cats, 2014; Suzuki et al., 2014). Moreover, as the trip mode is a key determinant of travel satisfaction, trip stages using different trip modes should be analysed separately. This study is therefore based on measurements of travel satisfaction for different trip stages and examines the relationship between trip stage travel satisfaction and the attributes of different stages, and the effects of personality, moods and socio-demographic variables on trip stage satisfaction.

Hence, given trip stage attributes as determinants of trip stage satisfaction and the previous empirical support for trip-related attributes' effects on travel satisfaction, we hypothesize that trip attributes of each trip stage affect travellers' travel satisfaction at the trip stage level.

**Hypothesis 1.** Trip attributes of each trip stage are related to travel satisfaction of the trip stages.

### 2.2. Mood and travel satisfaction

As satisfaction can be broadly viewed as a global retrospective judgement, it is constructed only when asked. Therefore, satisfaction ratings are influenced not only by the objective attributes, but potentially also by respondent's mood and memory (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). Mood is a generic emotional state of the respondent that tends to last for a certain duration. A positive mood may, *ceteris paribus*, result in higher satisfaction ratings than a negative mood. Schwarz and Clore (1983) found that satisfaction judgements were influenced by moods such as enjoyment and stress. The relevant mood at the time of judgement such as enjoyment, relaxation, stress, and other moods may affect the satisfaction ratings. Compared to the large amount of literature on the objective correlates of travel satisfaction, the literature on subjective correlates, such as mood and emotions, is relatively small. Abou-Zeid (2009) addressed context effects on travel satisfaction ratings, which included the effect of mood. She thought that if the respondent is surveyed on a day with coincident situations such as bad weather, bad day at work, heavy congestion etc., the ratings of their travel satisfaction may change. Although research on the relationship between mood and travel satisfaction is still in its nascent stages, preliminary results support that mood is related to travel satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 2.** Mood is related to travel satisfaction.

### 2.3. Trip attributes and mood

In general, good or bad moods may be triggered by specific incidents and events in different life domains. Friman (2004) found that different types of critical incidents elicited affective responses.

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