

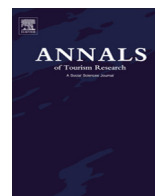


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An existential conceptualization of the vacation cycle



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ABSTRACT

Utilizing the notions of existential authenticity and normal anxiety, we propose the five-phase model of vacation cycle and elucidate mechanisms behind vacation and fade-out effects. Departing from a purely philosophical view on existential authenticity, we focus on its understanding via the existential psychology lenses, arguing that existential authenticity is a relative, dynamic, and four-dimensional concept. Supported by the current empirical evidences and theoretical advancements in existential psychology, this study posits that, accompanied by anxiety fluctuations, authenticity varies during a vacation across four dimensions of human existence: *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt*, *Eigenwelt*, and *Uberwelt*. We suggest that these changes are associated with vacation (when evoked by liminality and awe) and fade-out effects (when prompted by the lack of existential courage and anxiety tranquilization).

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Sometimes, you find yourself in the middle of nowhere, and sometimes, in the middle of nowhere, you find yourself.

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Introduction

It is a well-documented phenomenon that during a holiday, tourists experience a boost in physical well-being and overall happiness (*vacation effect*); however, these desirable outcomes rapidly vanish as vacationers return to their routine environments (*fade-out effect*). A number of theories are utilized to explain why tourists go through this cycle (hereby referred to as a *vacation cycle*). At a physical level, the resource gain theory suggests that during a holiday, tourists recover valuable resources such as health and skills while daily life consumes these resources (Fritz & Sonnetag, 2006). The attention restoration theory implies that the home environment does not possess the restorative qualities of the vacation setting, and thus tourists become more susceptible to stress (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Lehto, 2013). Further, set-point, occasion-specific, cognitive, and affective theories of happiness attempt to explain a sudden decrease in overall well-being after a vacation (Chen, Lehto, & Cai, 2013). Nawijn, Marchand, Veenhoven, and Vingerhoets (2010) as well as Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) allude to the social comparison and need theories to show that post-trip decrease in happiness is due to the routine environment no longer being able to fulfill the need for wandering and favorable social comparison.

While offering plausible justifications of the vacation cycle, the above mentioned studies appear to establish their explanations based on the proposition that stimulation received by tourists during a holiday is only temporally accessible and, upon their return, individuals are re-introduced to the routine life demands, which exhaust the vacation effect. In our view, such rationalizations tend to be limited for two reasons. First, they assume that tourists are not satisfied with their daily lives, and a vacation is the only outlet where they can recover and feel truly happy. Second, they do not illuminate the exact mechanisms and processes behind the vacation cycle beyond the obvious work–play dichotomy. Additionally, such theories tend to “de-humanize” tourists by considering their actions and attitudes as pre-determined by prior events and knowledge, leaving little space to embrace uniquely human problematics such as the issues of creativity, free will, and, most importantly, intrinsic human desire to self-actualize (Frankl, 2006).

For these reasons, in this paper, we offer an alternative perspective, which is humanistic, on the vacation cycle. Specifically, we employ the concept of existential authenticity, which is a state of being in which one is true to oneself (Heidegger, 1996; Sartre, 1966; Wang, 1999), and other central concepts of existential philosophy to explain the mechanisms behind the vacation and fade-out effects. Departing from a purely philosophical take on the concepts, we drew on the theoretical insights and empirical evidences from existential and humanistic psychology to better understand tourism experience within the global experience of human existence. When discussing optimal human functioning and well-being, a growing number of studies in tourism draw on the advances in positive psychology (Chen et al., 2013). This paper is unique in a sense that we draw scholarly attention to an alternative perspective – humanistic and existential psychology. Thus, rather than reducing human existence to a number of dimensions, we attempt to comprehensively explore the complex phenomenon of a human being on vacation.

Unlike previous research on existential authenticity that considered this notion mostly in light of general discussion of authenticity in tourism or from a purely philosophical perspective, in this paper, we view existential authenticity primarily as a psychological phenomenon. In addition, unlike the static perspective on existential authenticity, we argue that it is dynamic, relative, and multi-dimensional. We do so not to simply attempt to extend the current understanding of existential authenticity in tourism, but to integrate it to a number of established concepts in existential psychology to gain a deeper insight into the processes behind the vacation cycle. The paper is structured in the following way: first, we review the literature on the vacation cycle and the current developments in conceptualization of existential authenticity in tourism; then, we introduce the key concepts of existential psychology; finally, utilizing these notions, we attempt to explain vacation and fade-out effects.

Vacation cycle

Benefits of holiday taking have been a popular area of scholarship in psychology and tourism research. Numerous studies documented positive impacts of vacation on tourists' work productivity

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