



# Changes in emotions and their interactions with personality in a vacation context



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Addresses specific emotions rather than generalized dimensions of emotion.
- Accounts for the variability of emotions felt throughout a vacation.
- Documenting the role of personality in emotional outcomes of vacationing.
- Emotions high in both positivity and arousal exhibited an inverted U-shape curve during vacation.
- Personality determined the baseline levels of fear and sadness and moderated change in disgust.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine changes in specific positive and negative emotions during a vacation, as well as their interactions with personality. Using a questionnaire and diary, 39 American and Dutch vacationers' emotions high in both positivity and arousal exhibited an inverted U-shape curve, suggesting that they felt better during the second section rather than the end of their vacation. None of the negative emotions exhibited significant changes over time. When the impacts of personality on specific emotions were addressed, personality was found to determine the baseline levels of fear and sadness and moderate change in disgust across individuals' vacations. The results suggest that tourism managers and researchers must acknowledge and address the change of emotions tourists experience during a vacation and the role of personality in influencing that change.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism researchers have traditionally assessed the utilitarian attributes of tourism products and services (Gursoy, Spangenberg, & Rutherford, 2006) despite the fact that tourism experiences include a strong affective (i.e., emotional) component (Coughlan & Pearce, 2010; Duman & Mattila, 2005; Gnoth, 1997). Certain tourists are pushed by their emotional desire to travel, others expect to "have a great time" when traveling, and the remaining few are pulled by the perceived emotional benefits of visiting a destination (Goossens, 2000; Mitás, Yarnal, Adams, & Ram, 2012a). In addition, individuals' positive or negative emotions have been found to vary throughout the tourism experience (Nawijn, 2011) and be related to

level of satisfaction (Bigné & Andreu, 2004). Missing from existing tourism research is a focus on the *specific* emotions (e.g., joy, interest, disgust, sadness) felt by tourists.

Emotions generally have been conceptualized as positive or negative affect (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Nawijn, 2011; Phillips & Baumgartner, 2002; Yik & Russell, 2001). This generalized approach is problematic as emotions have different sets of appraisals; the important distinctions between specific emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, and awe disappear; and specific emotions are known to lead to distinct outcomes (Fredrickson, 2000; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Roseman, Antoniou, & Jose, 1996).

Nearly all of the previous emotion research in a tourism context has captured tourists' emotions at one moment in time, which ignores the variability of emotions during the tourism experience. Being able to identify tourists' emotions at a given time as well as being able to measure evolving stages of emotions throughout the course of an experience are very important in the study of tourists' experiences (Coughlan & Pearce, 2010; Dube & Morgan, 1998).

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Because different emotions can have different behavioral and cognitive consequences, it is also important to differentiate between specific emotions when predicting people's behaviors (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Shaver, Judith, Donald, & Cary, 1987). For example, when a flight is cancelled both angry and sad tourists may feel that they were mistreated in some way. However, the sad tourists may become inactive and withdrawn while the angry tourists may fight with or demand action from the airline. Hence, it is necessary to take into account differences across emotions of the same valence (Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999).

Not only is it important to recognize the specificity, variability, and different consequences of tourists' emotions, researchers should also account for the influence of personality (Gutiérrez, Jiménez, Hernández, & Puente, 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004; Yik & Russell, 2001). Personality, often defined as the enduring patterns of thought, feeling and behavior, has been studied predominantly from a trait theory framework in leisure and tourism contexts (Kleiber, Walker, & Mannell, 2011). Five traits—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism—have been linked to destination preferences as well as travel group composition (Frew & Shaw, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Nickerson & Ellis, 1991). A big-picture view of emotion research reveals personality to be one of the strongest predictors of relative levels of positive and negative emotions in individuals over the long term (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to examine changes in specific positive and negative emotions during one type of tourism experience, a vacation, and their interactions with personality. By studying change of specific emotions over the course of a vacation and the impact of personality on change patterns, our study adds to the current literature on tourists' emotions by (a) addressing specific emotions rather than generalized dimensions of emotion, (b) accounting for the variability of emotions felt throughout a vacation, and (c) documenting the role of personality in emotional outcomes of vacationing. Our study also represents a departure from previous research on tourists' emotions, which have used a cross-sectional approach (e.g., Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Bigné & Andreu, 2004).

## 2. Literature review

Emotions are short-lived, subjective feelings that occur in the foreground of consciousness, demand immediate attention, and motivate behavior (Frijda, 2007). From a practical standpoint, emotions could be defined as a complex set of interactions among subjective and objective factors, mediated by neural systems, which can give rise to affective experiences such as feelings of pleasure and arousal (Bigné & Andreu, 2004; Dube & Menon, 2000). It is important to differentiate between emotion, mood, and affect. Generally speaking, affect denotes a valenced feeling state and emotion and mood serve as specific examples of affective states (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Emotions, compared to moods, are more intense and associated with specific objects or events. Individuals are usually aware of their emotions, while their moods are more general and subtle, and often work beneath their consciousness (Goossens, 2000). Since emotions are direct, intense reactions to events that happen in an individual's environment (Beedie, Terry, & Lane, 2005), emotions are most useful in understanding tourists' experiences (Mitas et al., 2012a; Mitas, Yarnal, & Chick, 2012b).

### 2.1. Categorization of emotions

Researchers have categorized human emotions by emphasizing a limited number of specific, basic emotions (Zelenski & Larsen,

2000) or focusing on broad and general dimensions of human emotions (Russell, 1980). Building on the second approach to the categorization of emotions, Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) proposed a positive–negative emotions dichotomy. They ascribed emotions such as joy, interest, and hope to positive emotions, and disgust, sadness, and embarrassment to negative emotions. Tourism researchers have used the positive–negative emotions dichotomy as it exemplifies the positive effects vacationing has on tourists' emotions. Others have based their research on the dimensions of pleasure and arousal (Russell, 1980), which represent a rotation of the more common positive–negative emotions model. Specifically, pleasure reflects the degree to which the individual feels good with the surrounding environment, whereas arousal denotes the degree to which the person feels emotionally activated or stimulated (Bitner, 1992).

Regardless of which approach researchers use to study emotions, they must account for the fact that emotions of the same valence differ in their impacts on people's perceptions and behaviors. Schifferstein and Desmet (2010) have argued that positive emotions of the same valence could yield different outcomes. The example they present is that someone who is fascinated is expected to focus on various product aspects, while someone who is joyful is more likely to be open and playful. Therefore, detailed insight on specific positive and negative emotions is essential to understanding tourists' experiences.

### 2.2. Measuring emotions in tourism

According to Bigné and colleagues (Bigné & Andreu, 2004; Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005), emotions are linked to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and willingness to pay more. Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) and Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, and Yu (2011) addressed relationships between vacationing and domains of life satisfaction. They found that holiday taking groups experience less negative feelings and have a higher life satisfaction in general. However, other researchers have noted that emotional responses to vacations are not always positive. Vingerhoets, van Huijgevoort, and van Heck (2002) found that tourists often complain about headaches, muscle pain, fatigue, and other negative feelings prior to and/or during the first few days of a vacation.

When measuring overall positive and negative emotions, tourism researchers have adopted one of two approaches. Mitas et al. (2012a) averaged the strength of specific positive/negative emotions to calculate total positive/negative emotions scores. Their approach assumed that every emotion carried the same weight. Pearce (1981) added up the frequencies of positive/negative experiences, which did not account for the specific emotions represented. Veenhoven (1984) proposed using an alternative approach—"Affect Balance." With this approach the average negative emotions score is subtracted from the average positive emotions score. Nawijn (2010, 2011) used this approach when developing the "holiday happiness curve," an inverted U-shape pattern in vacationers' affect balance overtime during vacation. And, Nawijn, Mitas, Lin, and Kerstetter (2013) linked length of stay to the shape of the holiday happiness curve. Notably, none of these approaches account for how *specific* emotions change *during* a vacation.

The dynamic contributions of each specific emotion to an overall emotional dimension index remain unknown. We suggest that confusion concerning the structure of emotions has hampered the full interpretation and use of emotions in tourism research. Specific emotions could serve as an ideal proxy for interpreting the delicate and complex experience tourists go through during a vacation. Thus, we need to understand the dynamics of specific emotions before collapsing them into abstract dimensions. Schmitt (1999)

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