

ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY
AND LEISURE

ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY AND LEISURE

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ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY AND LEISURE VOLUME 13

ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY AND LEISURE

EDITED BY

JOSEPH S. CHEN

Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2017

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78743-488-2 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78743-487-5 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78743-538-4 (Epub)

ISSN: 1745-3542 (Series)



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AIMS AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Advances in Hospitality and Leisure (AHL), published annually since 2004, attempts to promote seminal and innovative research outputs pertaining to hospitality, leisure, tourism, and lifestyle. Specifically, this journal encourages researchers to investigate new research issues and problems that are critical but have been largely ignored while providing a forum that will disseminate singular thoughts advancing empirical undertakings both theoretically and methodologically.

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FULL PAPERS

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THE EMOTIONAL TRAVELER: HAPPINESS AND ENGAGEMENT AS PREDICTORS OF BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS AMONG TOURISTS IN NORTHERN NORWAY

Joar Vittersø, Nina K. Prebensen, Audun Hetland and
Tove Dahl

ABSTRACT

Recent theories on emotion suggest that a limited set of core feelings are the cornerstone of subjective experiences. The article proposes to bring this perspective more deeply into the study of tourist experiences and behavioral intentions. It argues that two distinct categories of positive feelings are of particular importance when analyzing the experiences of travelers. The first category reflects feelings such as happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction. The second category reflects feelings such as engagement, interest, and absorption. With questionnaire data from 505 visitors to two popular sites in Northern Norway, the current study investigated the degree to which visitors' on-site feelings of happiness and engagement predict intentions to revisit to, or recommend to others, the destination. Results showed that engagement, but not happiness, predicted the visitors' intention to revisit. Engagement further predicted intentions to recommend the site to others. Feelings of on-site happiness also predicted recommendation intentions. The implications of the

theoretical perspective and empirical results presented in the article are discussed.

Keywords: Tourist experience; positive emotions; feelings; eudaimonia; hedonia; behavioral intentions; Norway

INTRODUCTION

Feelings are the centerpiece of subjective experiences (Denton, 2005; Lambie & Marcel, 2002; Panksepp & Biven, 2012). Even though researchers have noticed the importance of the emotional dimension of tourist experience, and quite a few studies have been done to explore the influence of emotions on tourist attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Lee, 2014; White & Scandale, 2005), yet the concept of different feeling states and their subsequent effects are somewhat understudied in the tourism literature.

Emotions are delineated to explain individual's reactions to events; they are suitable to acknowledge tourists' experiences (Mitas, Yarnal, Adams, & Ram, 2012; Mitas, Yarnal, & Chick, 2012) and to predict future intentions to repeat the journey (Bigné & Andreu, 2004; Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005). Consequently, even if the literature reveals a clear interest in tourist experiences, the focus seems not primarily to be on experiences defined as feeling states. Hence, the first goal of the present study is conceptual – devoted to clarify some of the relations between experiences and emotional feelings. The second goal is empirical – to offer data on the association between emotional feelings and behavioral intentions.

The Concept of Experiences

Despite the importance placed on experiences in the research on travelling (Holbrook, 2000; Larsen, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Uriely, 2005), a common understanding of the concept “tourist experience” remains to be established. For example, a recent literature review summarized more than 20 different approaches to tourist experiences (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011). The approaches reviewed in Vespestad and Lindberg's study spanned a variety of meanings, from considering tourist experiences to be a meeting between consumption and production, to the idea that tourist experiences reflect the dislocation of the self from everyday life toward the extraordinary.

True enough, the term “experience” may have different meanings in the scientific literature, like when it refers to knowledge or skills that an individual accumulates over time. Nonetheless, in the sense of subjective or conscious

experience, the term is typically given a more restricted meaning. Recent progress in the study of emotions (Damasio, 2010; Humphrey, 2002; Panksepp & Biven, 2012) makes it likely to believe that our conscious experiences are rooted in ancient subcortical regions of mammalian brains, and that they can be classified according to a limited set of basic neurological feeling systems. We don't yet know how many distinct feeling systems exist and the issue continues to be debated – see for example Russell, Rosenberg, and Lewis (2011) and other contributions in this special section of the Emotion Review. But it seems fair to assume that humans have somewhere between five and ten basic emotional systems, sometimes referred to as basic feeling systems or basic affective systems.

Knowledge about the way in which biological structures regulate experiences is useful to the social sciences. Within the domain of subjective experiences, such knowledge feeds the important, although tedious, work of making a sensible and commonly agreed accepted taxonomy of the emotions that humans feel in their everyday lives. This is, of course, highly relevant in studies of tourist experiences as well. As pointed out by leading philosophers of science, conceptual improvements are probably the most important kind of progress science can make (Kagan, 2007; Mayr, 1982; Thagard, 2012).

Happiness and Engagement

The current study submits to the idea that happiness and engagement are prototypical examples of two important categories of positive emotions. In the emotion literature these categories are known under different names; some refer to them as liking and wanting (Berridge, 2003), as consumatory and appetitive (Burgdorf & Panksepp, 2006), as positive affect related to post- and pre-goal attainment (Davidson, 1998), or as hedonic and eudaimonic feeling states, as proposed in the functional well-being approach (FWA; Vittersø, 2013, 2016).

In the FWA, the argument of distinguishing two forms of positive feelings borrows strongly from the idea that the most fundamental task of all biological organism is to regulate both stability and change (e.g., Law & Staudinger, 2016; Piaget, 1981). Given the big difference between the process of maintaining stability and that of facilitating change, it is considered unlikely that evolution has equipped humans with only one mechanism to assist in the management of these fundamental principles. Hence, in order to account for the experiential part of regulating stability and change, the FWA proposes to distinguish between happiness (or hedonic) and engagement (or eudaimonic) as basic categories of positive feelings.

Hedonic feelings, such as happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction, are involved in the maintenance of stability. They operate by signaling to the organism that a need has been fulfilled or that a goal has been accomplished. Hedonic feelings are also frequently experienced during behavior that is familiar or easily

managed. Following Piaget (1981), such behaviors operate in a mode of assimilation.

Eudaimonic feelings, such as interest, immersion, and engagement, are typically felt during the pursuit of important goals and in attempts to overcome obstacles. Such efforts cover a broad range of activities and include the struggle to learn a difficult skill and explore unknown territories. In the framework of Piaget, such behaviors operate in a mode of accommodation (Vittersø, Søholt, Hetland, Thorsen, & Røysamb, 2010). According to Panksepp, the eudaimonic feelings (or feelings produced by the SEEKING system in his vocabulary) allow animals “to search for, find, and acquire all of the resources that are needed for survival. Arousal of this SEEKING system produces all kinds of approach behaviors, but it also feels good in a special way. It is not the kind of pleasure we experience while eating a fine meal, or the satisfaction we feel afterwards. Rather it provides the kind of excited, euphoric anticipation that occurs when we look forward to eating the meal” (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 95).

The distinction between happiness/hedonic and engagement/eudaimonic can be recognized in several taxonomies of tourist experiences. For example, Otto and Ritchie (1996) developed an experience quality scale, in which hedonics and involvement comprised two of the four factors of subjective experiences. In this context, involvement is a part of the hedonic feeling category.

After reviewing a series of attempts of defining and measuring tourist experiences, Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012) proposed that the phenomenon could be conceptualized by seven dimensions: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, novelty, and involvement. Hedonism and involvement in the Kim et al.’s terminology correspond roughly to happiness and engagement in the taxonomy proposed by the FWA.

Behavioral Intention

Studies of vacationer’s motivation to revisit or recommend a destination are of growing importance (Assaker, Vinzi, & O’Connor, 2011; Chen & Chen, 2010; Kim et al., 2012; Mohammad, 2014; Wu, Li, & Li, 2014). Initially dominated by the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005) new models and refined understandings are currently developing in tourism research. For example, Yoon and Uysal (2005) pointed out that not only attitudes, norms, and perceived control (which are the basic elements of planned behavior), but also travel experiences and service quality are important predictors for intentions to revisit a site. Assaker and coworkers found that novelty seeking was (negatively) associated with travelers’ intention to revisit over and above the contribution from satisfaction (Assaker et al., 2011), and Wu et al. (2014) report that satisfaction, emotional value, and destination

image were the strongest predictors of revisit intention in their study of 424 visitors to a theme park in Taiwan.

Within the framework of tourist experiences, Jang and Feng (2007) have further initiated a line of research in which novelty seeking and destination satisfaction were important motivators of revisit intentions. Based on survey data from overseas visitors to Canada, Jang and Feng observed that satisfaction was a significant predictor of intentions to revisit the destination within the next 12 months, but not of revisit intentions within the next 3 to 5 years. By contrast, novelty seeking was a significant antecedent of the revisit intentions within the next 3 years, but not of either the 12-month time span or the 5-year span. Although other researchers have failed to replicate this result (Bigné, Sanchez, & Andreu, 2009), the notion that revisit intentions may be driven by different dimensions of a tourist experience is an important one. Research findings further reveal that perceived attractiveness, rather than overall satisfaction, is the most important indicator of intention to revisit a destination (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006), delineating the imperative of acknowledging the feeling of happiness versus engagement and their subsequent effects on evaluations versus future intentions.

The Purpose of the Study

The aim of the present study is to investigate two categories of positive tourist experiences and their relationship to behavioral intention. From a FWA, the two positive experiences to be analyzed are happiness and engagement. The destinations under investigation are two popular tourist sites in northern Norway. As such, the experiences at the two different destinations may function as a control variable. Although we expect some degree of overlap between the two types of positive experiences, we infer that they will behave differently as predictors of behavioral intentions. In a similar way, we will test for demographic differences. Based on the above review, we theorize that compared with happiness, engagement will be a more important motivator for intention to return to a site. However, due to lack of prior empirical research on the topic, we approach these issues in the form of research questions rather than as theoretically deduced hypotheses.

Research question 1. How are on-site reports of happiness related to travelers' motivation to recommend a destination to friends and family (1a)?; how is happiness related to intention to revisit the destination (1b)?

Research question 2. How are on-site reports of engagement related to travelers' motivation to recommend a destination to friends and family (2a)?; how is engagement related to intention to revisit the destination (2b)?

Research question 3. How are destination experiences related to the intention to recommend a site to friends and family (3a)?; how are destination experiences related to motivation to revisit the site they are currently at (3b)?

METHOD

Study Population

Data for the present study were collected in July 2010 at the Norwegian coast liner “Hurtigruten” and at the “Nordkapp Hall” situated at Nordkapp (the North Cape), considered to be the northernmost point of the Western European continent. These are the two destinations in Northern Norway that attract the largest tourist groups, and together, they enabled us to gather a convenience sample with a broad spectrum of visitors from onboard the Hurtigruten ships and at the Nordkapp site. After giving their consent, a total of 505 participants (250 at Hurtigruten and 255 at Nordkapp) completed a questionnaire regarding their experiences about their destination. Ten participants of ages 15 years or younger were excluded from the analyses, yielding a completed sample with $N = 495$. Age for the remaining sample ranged from 17 to 88 years ($M = 51.13$, $SD = 17.34$). A total of 248 women (50.1%) and 206 men (41.6%) took part in the study. Forty-one participants (8.3%) did not report gender and 47 (9.5%) did not report age. Missing values for the remaining study variables are reported in Table 1. Participants from 21 nations were

Table 1. Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations (SD) for the Study Variables.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Destination	1.00						
2. Age	-.45***	1.00					
3. Gender ($F=0$)	.06	-.01	1.00				
4. Happiness	-.05	-.03	-.18***	1.00			
5. Engagement	-.14**	.11	-.09	.25***	1.00		
6. Recommend	-.18***	.17***	-.13**	.34***	.35***	1.00	
7. Revisit	-.25***	.01	-.07	.12*	.21***	.42***	1.00
N	495	448	454	395	350	479	475
Mean	0.51	51.13	0.45	4.67	3.59	4.97	3.12
SD	0.50	17.34	0.50	1.27	1.74	1.33	1.92
Skew	-0.02	-0.29	0.19	-1.22	-0.70	-1.53	-0.10

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Destination is scored 0 for Hurtigruten and 1 for Nordkapp; Gender is scored 0 for female and 1 for male.

represented in the sample, but the questionnaire was offered only in Norwegian (26.3%), English (26.5%), and German 47.1%).

Design

Participants were asked to picture their best experience on the voyage with Hurtigruten or during their stay at Nordkapp and describe it in a few words. The participants were then asked to rate their emotional experience during this episode. Participants were next asked to repeat the procedure with their worst experience in mind. After the participants provided information about their perception of service, quality of natural landscape, and a few other tourist resources, they were asked to anticipate the likelihood of returning to the destination and the likelihood that they would recommend the destination to friends.

Measures

Emotions

The emotion items were introduced by asking the participant how they would describe their best experience on Hurtigruten/Nordkapp. The next part of the introduction then read: "During my best experience I felt" A set of seven discrete emotions followed, and from this list we analyzed happiness and engagement. Responses were given on a 7-point numerical rating scale, with the end points labeled 1 = Not at all, and 7 = Very intense.

Behavioral Intentions

We enquired whether the participants would recommend visiting the site to their friends, and if they would like to visit the site again in the following manner: (a) "How likely is it that you will recommend your friends to travel [with Hurtigruten/to Nordkapp]"; and (b) "How likely is it that you, yourself, will come back to [Hurtigruten/Nordkapp]." Responses were given on a 7-point numerical rating scale, with the end points labeled 0 = Very unlikely and 6 = Very likely.

Data Analysis

Two main strategies were used to examine the research questions. First, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations (i.e., the Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients) between all study variables were conducted. For this purpose the software program IBM SPSS (version 21) was used, and missing data were treated with the default option of the program, which is

listwise deletion. Second, a path model was suggested and analyzed by means of using Full-Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) as provided by the software package Mplus version 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015). Missing data were treated with the default option of the program, which is full-information maximum likelihood.

RESULTS

Differences between the Two Sites

Table 1 shows that visitors on board Hurtigruten experienced more engagement than visitors at Nordkapp, $r(348) = -.14$, $p = .010$, but no difference was observed for happiness, $r(402) = -.06$, $p = .199$. The correlations are negative because Hurtigruten is scored 0 and Nordkapp is scored 1 on the destination dummy variable. Compared to the visitors on Nordkapp, the travelers with Hurtigruten were more prone to recommend their site to friends, $r(477) = -.18$, $p < .00$; and were more eager to return to their destination, $r(473) = -.25$, $p < .001$.

Path Model

To further explore the relations between our study variables, a path model was articulated, and standardized regression coefficients (betas) were estimated as depicted in Fig. 1. The model was saturated; thus, no test of goodness-of-fit estimates was available. The variables in the model were regressed on all variables located to their left. In the interest of increasing readability, only significant paths are presented in the figure. The model was able to explain 23% of the variance in the recommend variable and 14% of the variance in the revisit variable $p < .001$.

Engagement was an important predictor of both recommending the site to friends ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$) and the wish to revisit ($\beta = .17$, $p = .002$). Happiness, on the other hand, only predicted recommendation ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and not revisiting ($\beta = .06$, $p = .242$). A happy feeling may, in other words, stimulate a visitor to recommend a place to others, but not motivate him or her to revisit.

Compared with visiting Nordkapp, traveling with Hurtigruten slightly increased the feeling of engagement, but the effect did not reach conventional standards of significance ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .058$). Destination did however predict intention to revisit ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), indicating that revisits to Hurtigruten are more likely than revisits to Nordkapp. When it came to recommendations,

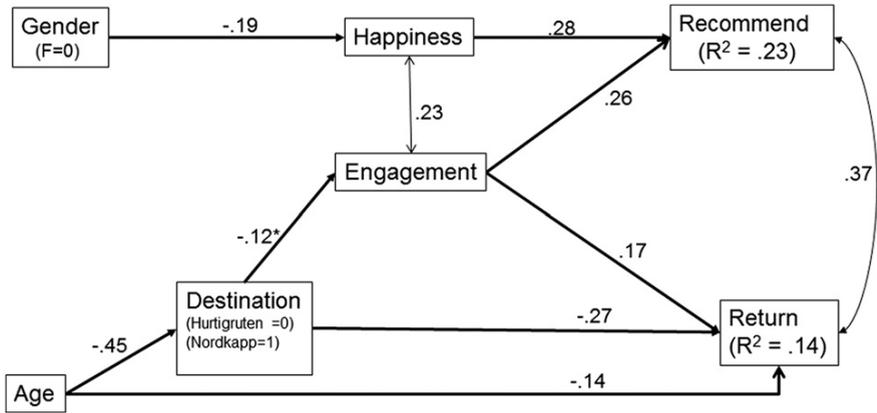


Fig. 1. The Path Model with Standardized Regression Weights (Betas) for Significant Paths ($p < .05$). $*p = .058$.

there was no significant difference between the two destinations ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .086$).

Another important result from the model concerns gender and age. Female travelers were happier than their male counterparts ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$), but they were not more engaged ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .069$). As one might expect, age was related to revisit intentions ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .008$). As a traveler becomes older, the self-reported likelihood of a revisit to a site diminishes.

DISCUSSIONS

According to the passionate traveler Robert Byron, the best moments of travel “are born of beauty and strangeness in equal parts” (Byron, 1933/2011, p. 17). Although we do not necessarily share the idea that beauty and strangeness need to come in equal halves, the current study has argued in favor of a duality of the tourist experience. In our terminology the distinction is not referred to as beauty and strangeness but as happiness (or hedonic) and engagement (or eudaimonic) feelings. Our data are from two popular destinations in Norway, the coastal steamer *Hurtigruten*, and *Nordkapp*. A path analysis showed that participants who described their best visiting moment as happy also tended to recommend the site to friends and family. However, the happy feelings did not predict intentions to revisit the site. The experience of engagement, on the other hand, was a significant predictor of both intentions to recommend and intentions to revisit. Traveling with *Hurtigruten* appeared as more engaging than visiting *Nordkapp*, but no difference in happiness appeared between the two destinations. We further observed that females reported more happiness than did males when describing their best moments of the visit, but no gender difference for engagement was observed.

To find that engagement is a better motivator than happiness when it comes to the intention of revisiting a tourist destination is noteworthy – particularly when contrasted with the other main result from our study that tourists who experience high levels of on-site happiness are prepared to recommend the site to their friends and family. This result may suggest that the distinction between wanting to recommend and wanting to revisit a site is influenced by different experiential processes. The characteristics of a happy feeling such as easiness and familiarity may fit better with what we believe *other* people will appreciate for their travels.

As for determining whether or not to repeat a similar trip for oneself, the priorities may be different. Perhaps it is not the pleasantness as such, but rather the feeling of being involved and absorbed that drives the motivation to come back to a site.

Another contribution from the present study relates to the use of very few indicators to measure the core of a tourist experience. Other studies reported in

the literature typically draw on instruments with 30 items or more, whereas we used only two. Given the growing concern for the length of inventory in modern survey research, the low item demand in our design offers is an obvious benefit for research on tourism. Many of the original survey instruments in the field are simply too long and too demanding for modern people. Indeed, not only research on tourism, but social science in general will be forced to find new ways of reducing the work load of research participants (Tambs & Røysamb, 2014).

If few items are to be used in investigations of tourist experience, care must be taken to select adequate items. With reference to recent developments in theories of emotion and subjective experiences, the present study was able to identify two central indicators of a tourist experience, and by means of these two items we were able to predict 20% and 5% of the variance in the recommend and the revisit variables, respectively. Contrast this effect size with that of, for example, the results presented by Assaker et al. (2011). In that study, the one-item satisfaction indicator was on average able to account for only 1% of the variance in their revisit variables.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study asked travelers about their best experiences while visiting a particular destination. Although such peak experiences are regarded as a good indicator of an experience as a whole (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Kahneman, 1999; Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1996) other ways of framing the measures of experiences may turn out as even more efficient. For example, Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, and Diener (2003) studied the experiences of college students on a spring break and found that remembered experience predicted the desire to repeat the experience

Our sample represented different nationalities and not all of the participants had the language of the questionnaire as their mother tongue. Some irregularities may thus embed in our data that might bias the results in one direction or another. Moreover, the nature of our two destinations may have idiosyncratic elements that make generalizations difficult. However, by utilizing tourists' perceived experiences at the two different destinations, they function as control variables in the present work.

Intention to recommend to revisit is of course not the same as actually recommending or revisiting. Care should thus be taken when concluding from self-reported intentions to actual behavior. Although reflecting a weakness, other studies suggest that the discrepancy between intentions and actual behavior need not be very large. For example, in a meta-analysis by van den Putte (1991) the mean correlation between behavioral intention and actual behavior was found to be .62 (cited in Assaker et al., 2011, p. 890).

CONCLUSIONS

Theoretical Implications

Based on self-reports from visitors at two very popular tourist destinations in Norway, the present research shows that the distinction between two core elements of a visitor experience may be of importance for the understanding and prediction of tourist motivation. We found that experiencing destination engagement was important for the visitors' intention to revisit the site. Feeling engaged was also predictive of intentions to recommend the site to others. By contrast, on-site happiness was only associated with intentions to recommend the destination to others, and not with motivation for revisits. Besides offering a theoretical explanation for this particular finding, the study also presented a more general conceptual argument. That argument is that emotional theories offer knowledge about the basic elements of an experience, and these insights are relevant for tourist experience research. Finally, theoretical expertise enables the development of better, shorter, and more efficient instruments for measuring tourist experiences.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, understanding the difference between happiness and engagement in the moment and over time can be used to increase recommendations to others through experiences that increase happiness. That can be done, for example, by helping people meet their experience goals and including in the experience elements that are easy and/or familiar to the guests. To increase revisits, on the other hand, experiences that increase engagement are key. That can be achieved by, for example, facilitating exploration of things travelers know little or nothing about from before, discovery or mastery of something new, and/or activity that takes effort in order to overcome an obstacle or attain an important goal.

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