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We're One, But We're Not The Same...

The Impact of Individual's Travel Desires on Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

It is not surprising that leisure travel can make people happy (Nawijn, 2011). Emerging research has also begun to reveal the importance of the benefits to travel, beyond that of a simple vacation getaway (Chen, Huang & Petrick, 2016; Chen & Petrick, 2013; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Durko & Petrick, 2013). Beyond the hedonic benefits travel may provide individuals, global benefits ranging from increases in health (Chen & Petrick, 2013), job satisfaction (Kuhnel & Sonnetag, 2011), relationships improvement (Durko & Petrick, 2015) and life satisfaction (Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Gilbert & Abdullah 2004) have been noted in recent research studies.

Although vacations have many positive outcomes, it should not be assumed that every vacation improves life satisfaction, nor that all participants are satisfied equally with the vacation. This research seeks to explore several travel characteristics and how each contributes to vacation satisfaction and satisfaction with life. Specifically, this study explores the vacation characteristics of travel frequency, trip length and the percent of time an individual spends doing what they desire to do on a vacation, to explore the effect each variable has on the individual's vacation and life satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Often considered an indicator of happiness, satisfaction with life (SwL) is a measure of perceived or subjective quality of life, considering both internal and external circumstances contributing to the individual's current state of satisfaction. In the tourism and leisure literature, several researchers have examined the worth vacations and leisure activities contribute to SwL (Durko & Petrick, 2013; Sirgy, et al., 2011; Ragheb & Griffith 1982). It has also been shown that greater frequency of travel correlates to an increase in satisfaction with life (Neal, et al., 2007; Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004).

Lounsbury and Hoopes (1985) acknowledged a need for measuring vacation satisfaction to determine the psychological and individual benefits a vacation might provide. Their work included the notion that vacation satisfaction was a result of the actual experience, to include where the vacation was and how long it lasted. However, they furthered expanded on this by considering an individual's satisfaction with job, family and spouse as causal factors or antecedents of vacation satisfaction. Nawijn (2011) tracked the effect of vacation satisfaction on satisfaction with life, and offered the implication that "if one wants to boost their happiness by means of vacationing, one has to take many holidays in order to enjoy many short-lived periods of increased happiness."

The current research seeks to further understand if frequency of vacations and length of each vacation have differing impacts on satisfaction with life. This is of interest, as the trend for travel is that of shorter, more frequent trips as adults build vacations around busy work and family demands (Durko & Petrick, 2015). Globally, 39% of people prefer to stockpile days for a

single long vacation. Yet, sixty percent of Americans spend their vacation time on several short breaks, versus 23% who take one long holiday. Recognizing this trend, this study further considered vacation length as an impact on vacation satisfaction and satisfaction with life.

Past research has also shown that differing travel party companions (Newman and Newman, 2008; Presser, 2000) and traveling with children (Nickerson and Jurowski, 2001) can have an effect on the evaluations people make regarding their satisfaction with a vacation. A comprehensive tourism literature review by Durko and Petrick (2013) revealed travel may contribute to positive increases in adult and family relationships, which in turn can contribute to increases in satisfaction with life. It is postulated in the current study that both vacation and life satisfaction could be altered based on travel party companion(s).

Vacation satisfaction has been shown to be the result of the actual experience, to include where the vacation was and how long it lasted (Lounsbury and Hoopes, 1985). Research has also shown that travel party companions may also have an effect on the evaluations people make regarding their satisfaction with a vacation (Newman and Newman, 2008; Presser, 2000). It is postulated in the current research that vacation and satisfaction with life could be altered based on travel party companion(s). To measure this, the current study investigates vacation satisfaction and overall satisfaction of life based on three scenarios; travel with and without one's partner and with one's children.

Research has further shown significant differences in the way vacation time is utilized to achieve vacation satisfaction (Thorton, Shaw and Williams, 1997). It has been found that adults traveling with children spend significantly more time nearby their accommodations, using hotel pools, and playing sports, which are all activities the children wanted to participate in (Thornton, et al., 1997). They further found that parties traveling with children revealed vacation satisfaction of their children was more important than their own.

Research has revealed that all members of the travel party should consider activities of interest to them to be able to better control their vacation satisfaction (Chen, et al., 2016). As suggested by the desires congruency model, satisfaction is partially dependent on one's experience being congruent with their desires (Spreng & Oldshavsky, 1993). The current research follows this model by investigating the potential benefits and consequences of time spent participating in activities the individual desired to, rather than activities that benefit others or the entire travel party. Travel with differing individuals (i.e., travel with and without a significant other and with/without children), may reveal differing amounts of time spent on activities of interest to an individual, which may lead to difference in vacation and life satisfaction.

METHODS

This study employed the use of an online panel survey, utilizing criterion sampling. The initial respondent criteria requested all participants were at least 25 years old, had traveled in the past 2 years, and were in a current relationship. The survey also stipulated a household income of at least \$25,000, resulting in a total response of 435 participants. The sample was only slightly female dominated (51.3%), with average age of respondents 46.1 years, and median income range of \$50,000 to \$74,999. Respondents had been involved with their current partner for an

average of 17.7 years. When asked to classify their current relationship status, the overwhelming majority were married (76.1%) while 3.4 percent recognized their relationship as a registered domestic partnership or civil union, and the rest were dating or engaged and either living together (11.5%) or not living together (9.0%).

Satisfaction with life was measured with the five-item Pavot and Diener (2008) scale anchored by (1) strongly disagree and (7) strongly agree. Vacation Satisfaction was measured with a four-item seven-point semantic differential scale to determine respondent's overall vacation satisfaction (Huang and Hsu, 2010; Tian-Cole and Crompton 2003). The four item seven point semantic differential scale asked respondents to evaluate their overall vacation satisfaction when traveling with their significant other, on their own, or with their children.

Additionally, to measure how time was spent on vacation, respondents were asked to note the percent of time (from 0 to 100%) they did what they preferred to do on all vacations with and without their significant other and with their children.

FINDINGS:

To determine how well vacation frequency, trip length and percent of time spent pursuing one's desired vacation activities predicted vacation and life satisfaction among the three groups of interest (travel with significant other, without, and with kids), regression analyses were conducted.

Between all groups, significant positive influences on vacation and life satisfaction were only noted with an increasing amount of time spent on activities of one's interest. When traveling with a significant other, respondents ($n=355$) indicated they were able to do what they preferred to do 65% of the time during the vacation. Frequency of trips over a two year period, ($\mu=4.68$), and the average length of each vacation together ($\mu=5.23$ days) did not reflect significant influences on vacation nor life satisfaction among this group.

When predicting vacation satisfaction of travel with one's significant other, the overall model with all three predictors was significant ($R^2=.087$, $p<.001$), indicating that certain aspects of vacations with one's significant other may lead to positive vacation satisfaction outcomes. Of most importance to the vacation satisfaction of this group was the amount of time spent on one's own activities, thus indicating the more time an individual spent on their desired activities, rather than the activities of their accompanying significant other, the greater their overall vacation satisfaction ($\beta=.298$, $p<.001$). Interestingly, while not a significant predictor, how many trips the dyad took together over 2 years ($\beta=-.026$, $p=.619$) and the average days spent on each vacation together ($\beta=-.021$, $p=.683$) had a slightly negative influence on vacation satisfaction.

Similarly, the percent of time dedicated to pursuing one's own desired activities during a vacation was the only significant and positive predictor of satisfaction with life ($\beta=.141$, $p=.008$) post vacation for travel with one's significant other. Again, while not a significant predictor of satisfaction with life, the number of vacation taken had a slightly negative effect on the respondents satisfaction with life ($\beta=-.032$, $p=.552$). The average number of days spent together on vacation was also not a significant predictor of satisfaction with life ($\beta=.060$, $p=.261$).

These results appear to indicate the longer the vacation and more time spent together with a significant other may negatively affect one's overall vacation satisfaction while having no affect on their life satisfaction. Yet, the amount of time each individual spent on activities of their own interest was a good predictor of vacation and life satisfaction for those traveling with their significant others.

When traveling without one's significant other and without kids, respondents (n=189) indicated they were able to do what they preferred to do an average of 75% of the time during their vacation. These respondents averaged 3.35 trips without their significant other over a 2 year span, of which each averaged 4.14 vacation days.

When predicting vacation satisfaction of travel without one's significant other, the overall model with all three predictors was significant ($R^2=.157$, $p<.001$), indicating that aspects of vacations without one's significant other may lead to positive vacation satisfaction outcomes. Similar to travel with one's significant other, the vacation satisfaction of this group was the amount of time spent on one's own activities. This indicates the more time an individual spent on their desired activities, the greater their overall vacation satisfaction ($\beta=.361$, $p<.001$). The number of trips taken without their significant other over 2 years ($\beta=.119$, $p=.081$) and the average days spent on each vacation without their significant other ($\beta=.097$, $p=.153$) did not have a significant influence on vacation satisfaction.

Conversely, the overall model of satisfaction with life for this group was not significant ($R^2=.028$, $p=.148$), potentially indicating that vacations without one's significant other may be temporarily satisfying, yet don't increase overall satisfaction with life once the vacation is over. While not significant, the amount of vacations taken without one's significant other had a slightly negative impact on their overall satisfaction with life ($\beta=-.101$, $p=.166$), as did the amount of time dedicated to pursuing one's own interests during the vacation ($\beta=-.112$, $p=.125$). Additionally, the average number of days spent on vacations without a significant other was not a predictor of satisfaction with life ($\beta=.032$, $p=.461$).

Lastly, those who had traveled with their children over the past 2 years (n=249) indicated that during these vacations, they were only able to participate in activities they preferred to do an average of 45% of the time. These respondents averaged 3.98 trips with their children over a 2 year span, of which each averaged 4.29 vacation days.

The overall model for vacation satisfaction of travel with children, with all three predictors was significant ($R^2=.160$, $p<.001$), indicating that aspects of vacations with children may lead to positive vacation satisfaction outcomes. As with the previous models, the amount of time an individual spent on their desired activities had the greatest impact on overall vacation satisfaction ($\beta=.357$, $p<.001$). The number of trips taken with children over 2 years ($\beta=.106$, $p=.071$) and the average days spent on each vacation ($\beta=.100$, $p=.473$) did not have a significant influence on vacation satisfaction.

The overall model predicating satisfaction with life for those who traveled with their child(ren) was also significant ($R^2=.065$, $p=.001$), suggesting that aspects of travel with children may

contribute to increases in satisfaction with life. While not significant, the amount of vacations taken with children had a slightly negative impact on their overall satisfaction with life ($\beta = -.085$, $p = .171$), as did the average number of vacation days ($\beta = -.077$, $p = .218$). As with previous models, the amount of time dedicated to pursuing one's own interests during the vacation ($\beta = .225$, $p < .001$) significantly and positively contributed to increases in satisfaction with life.

CONCLUSION

Time dedicated to an individual's desired activities while on vacation was the only significant predictor of vacation satisfaction between all groups, and satisfaction with life for those traveling with their significant other and when traveling with children. These findings support the premise of the desires congruency model and suggest that doing what one desires is important to evaluations of satisfaction.

When traveling with a significant other, frequency of travel, while not significant, did have a slight negative impact on both measures. Additionally, as the number of days spent on vacation together increased, vacation satisfaction decreased. These findings may indicate that the frequency of vacations and time spent on vacation is not the most important predictor of satisfaction with vacation or life. Instead, this research showed the quality of the vacation; specifically the activities enjoyed by each individual were the most important predictor of satisfaction.

While it may seem obvious, travel with a significant other requires compromise, at times participating in travel for the appeasement of the other. This may suggest during the travel planning stage that both individuals participate to coordinate vacation activities each person desires. It may also be suggested that adults don't necessarily need lengthy nor frequent travel together to enjoy the benefits vacations may bring to their life. With limited vacation time for working adults, shorter vacations may be key to increased satisfaction with life, when desired activities are included and enjoyed by each person during the trip. This finding also suggests that couples with similar interests are more likely to be satisfied with their vacations and lives.

For those vacationing with children, adults took part in activities they enjoyed only 45% percent of the total vacation time, by far the least amount of the three types of travel. Other time was likely dedicated to children's activities. When travelling with children, the longer the trip and more frequent the vacation, the lower the respondent's satisfaction with life. Research by Gram (2005) included differences in children's and parents' overall motives for travel. Children were more likely to want fun and activities from a holiday, while parents were more inclined to hope for a relaxing vacation for all. Parents indicated a need for vacations to provide "togetherness," while still leaving room for rest. It is possible that parents vacation for the happiness of their children, yet return to daily life no more satisfied themselves.

It may be assumed that during vacations with children, adults often sacrifice their own needs and preferences for the enjoyment of the child(ren). It may thus be important during travel planning to include vacation activities that also enhance the adult's vacation satisfaction levels to help ensure satisfaction with the vacation and overall life satisfaction needs are being met. Research by Lehto et al. (2009) found that a family vacation was deemed successful if all parties were

satisfied with the overall aspects of the vacation. Therefore, seeking vacations which include selfish time for all parties could increase satisfaction with life for everyone.

Many cruise lines, destinations and resorts offer activities for children to allow parents time on their own while the child is enrolled in these activities. Hotels are offering connecting rooms for families with children, allowing children their own room with kid friendly activities, while the parents enjoy a quiet and relaxing room next door. This recognizes the need for family time as well as adult time during vacations in hopes of keeping adults and children satisfied with their vacation stay. It's possible that a negative stigma may be associated with those who travel with children, yet spend time away from them during the vacation, as only 45% of time was dedicated to an individual's desired activities during these trips. The findings from this study may provide the needed benefit parents require to understand vacation time spent away from children should not be viewed in a negative light, but rather a positive step toward increasing the individual's overall satisfaction with life and vacation evaluation.

When traveling without one's significant other, respondents revealed they were able to partake in activities they enjoyed and preferred 75% percent of the time, which may contribute to the significant positive impact on vacation satisfaction. Existing research has found a need for individuality within relationships, allowing each member of the dyad certain freedoms to pursue their individual activities (Amato, 2007). Conversely, results indicated more vacations without a significant other had a negative impact on the respondent's satisfaction with life. It is possible that the non-traveling partner forms resentment and/or mistrust in the relationship for not being included, which the traveling partner is met with once they return home. While research has shown individuals need personal time and space for healthy relationships (Amato, 2007), it may be necessary for couples to recognize these needs might be detrimental to a healthy relationship.

In conclusion, this study uniquely looked at differences in the formation of vacation and life satisfaction for vacations with and without one's significant other and with their children. Since much of the variance was not explained in the regression models, future research should examine other variables that help to predict both vacation and life satisfaction with an addition of relationship satisfaction. While much more research is necessary to more fully understand how vacation and life satisfaction are formed, the results provide preliminary evidence of the importance of having members of a travel party do the things that they desire while on a vacation.

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