

Subjective Well-Being in Tourism Research

Nguyen Hoang Tien¹, Dinh Ba Hung Anh², Pham Bich Ngoc³, Tran Thi Thuy Trang^{4*}, Le Doan Minh Duc⁵

¹Saigon International University, Vietnam

²Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, Vietnam

³Vietnam Institute of Economics, Vietnam

⁴Van Lang University, Vietnam

⁵University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*thuytrangvn81@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The “Economics of happiness” is increasingly an interest topic and subject of concern in the modern society, both in theories and practices of contemporary economics and management science. Especially, when it comes to the issue of subjective well-being, the evidence is reflected in growing number of articles published in the mainstream and reputable journals. The study in this paper uses qualitative research through the synthesis and evaluation of published articles on the issue of subjective well-being in the field of tourism to provide guidance and orientation for future research. Specifically, we focus our evaluation on the three main areas strictly related to subjective well-being: theoretical framework of subjective well-being; factors affecting subjective well-being; finally, limitations of current research to discover new directions for further research.

Keywords (Times New Roman, bold, 9)

Subjective Well-being; Tourism; Happiness.

Introduction

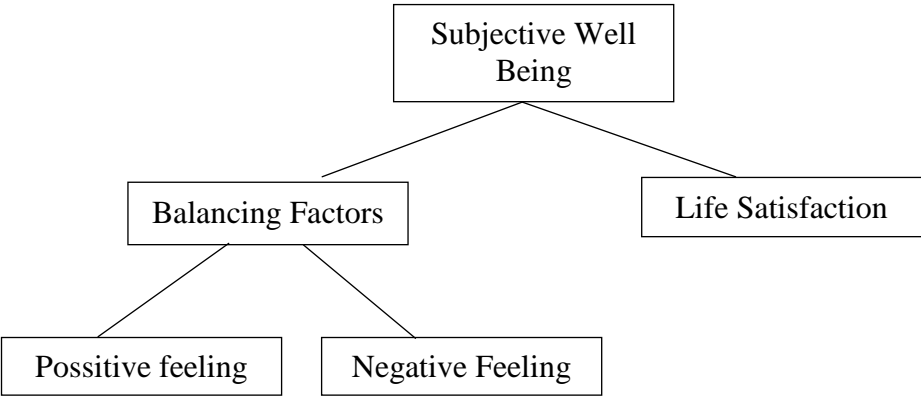
World tourism industry continues to grow strongly and has a great influence on socio-economic life globally. Tourism has become one of the main pillars of international trade, an important and rising source of income for both developed and developing countries. Therefore, for a long time so far in the business and management literature, there were many research activities with different approaches striving to clarify the behavior of tourists in order to attract them more to come to visit and to and return to tourism destinations in order to explore local potential of services (Su et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2018; Mitas & Kroesen, 2019).

In recent years, the number of studies examining subjective well-being (or subjective happiness) in tourism has been increasing (Dolan et al., 2008). Several studies have shown that visitor's subjective well-being affects the intention of behavior (Ja Kim et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2015) and subjective well-being is a positive function of

satisfaction with travel and tourism experiences (Chen et al, 2016).

Concepts and Models of Subjective Well-being

The definition of subjective well-being (subjective happiness) was first mentioned through Campbell's (1976) study of subjective factors within the sequence of personal experiences. In another study, concepts including health, comfort, wealth, virtue, and appearance were identified by Kammann (1983) as factors affecting individual well-being. Thus, the subjective happiness in tourism research is understood in many different directions according to different theoretical backgrounds. If based on the three theoretical backgrounds of desire theory, hedonistic theory and authentic happiness theory (Parfit, 1984; Haybron, 2008), the definition of Diener (1984) and model of the subjective happiness (Figure 1) are considered appropriate, that explains why it is widely used in the field of tourism.



(Source: Diener,1984)

Figure 1. Model of Subjective Well-being

According to the model of Diener (1984), subjective happiness is influenced by positive factors, negative factors and affected by life satisfaction. More specifically, satisfaction in life refers to aspects of cognitive judgment about the whole of life (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004). A positive influence indicates emotional comfort, or in other words, it indicates that life is going the way that person wants (Diener, 2006). Negative effects include unpleasant mood and emotions, which represent a negative reaction when a person responds to life, health, events, or circumstances (Diener, 2006). However, the overall level of happiness is conceptualized as the degree to which positive emotions prevail over negative emotions (Kammann & Flett, 1983).

Theories of Subjective Well-being

Parfit (1984) suggested that the theory of self-evaluation of happiness consists of three sub-theories: hedonistic theory, desire theory, objective list theory. These three theories partly overlap with each other. In all of these theories, happiness and pleasure are at least part of what makes our lives go better for us. They are made according to objective list theory, and based on desire theory, hedonistic theory is a part of the truth. However, an important new approach has entered the scene. Haybron (2008) distinguish five basic approaches: hedonistic theory, desire theory, authentic happiness theory, eudemonistic theory and objective list theory.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of theories related to issue of subjective well-being

Theories	Understand subjective well-being (happiness)	Theoretical gap	Author/time
<i>Hedonistic theory</i>	Happiness is pleasure, meaning one's subjective perception of joy and unhappiness and is the key to assessing happiness	The individual difference in the level of joy is so great and the lack of horizontal comparisons among individuals makes it difficult to compare the level of horizontal happiness.	Sumner (1996); Feldman (2004); Liang & Hui (2016)
<i>Desire theory</i>	It is one's true satisfaction with that person's expectations.	A person's expectations are very generous and may not even have anything relate with happiness. It is difficult to conclude that a person's satisfaction with	Darwall (2002)

		expectations is happiness	
<i>Authentic happiness theory</i>	Happiness is based on a full awareness of one's own living conditions and complete autonomy. And includes 3 scales: hedonism, life satisfaction and emotional state	Widely used in tourism research. But lack of emotional measurement in life satisfaction. The point of time and the length of time period have a great impact on the measurement results of subjective happiness	Sumner (1996); Kahneman (1999); Ehrhardt, Saris & Veenhoven (2000); Haybron (2000, 2003, 2005, 2007);
<i>Eudemonistic theory</i>	Happiness comes from the perfection and self-awareness of people, not only for their moral character, but also for their ability to live.	Paying too much attention to individuals is difficult to reflect the happiness of a group and the whole society. At the same time, there is a lack of unified measurement tools	Ryff (1989); Nussbaum (1993); Haybron (2008); Ruini & Ryff (2016);
<i>Objective list theory</i>	Think that happiness comes from a variety of lists such as self-assessment of knowledge, health, happiness, family, wealth and social relationships.	Without a consistent philosophical background, avoid the most important question: what is happiness	Murphy (2001); Haybron (2008);

(Source: Liang, 2019)

As the statistics show, each theory has its own gaps and evaluates happiness in different directions. For objective list theory, there is no strong philosophical background, so the definition of subjective happiness depends on the research question and the value of the research. Because in empirical research, the different definitions of subjective well-being are highly correlated in measurement results. Eudemonistic theory emphasizes that achieving the highest goal is perfection and final state of happiness. However, this theory concerns too much about individuals and inconsistent measurement.

Most studies of subjective well-being in tourism use the concept of subjective well-being in desire theory, hedonistic theory and authentic happiness theory. In particular, authentic happiness theory still consider subjective experience and individual differences in hedonistic theory, desire theory (Sumner, 1996). According to Liang (2019), subjective happiness

is measured through the type of scale: hedonism and life satisfaction. In particular, the scale of life satisfaction is widely used in tourism research, it reflects the results of individual assessments of quality of life. Life satisfaction is relatively stable over a period of time and is not susceptible to interference from external factors. Hedonism is a state of positive emotions (joys) and negative emotions (unhappiness) of individuals.

Factors Affecting Subjective Well-being

When assessing subjective happiness in the field of tourism, the research is always eager to find out the factors that influence the feeling of happiness with the desire to find the causes or reasons for subjective happiness as it is constantly fluctuating depending on the studied subjects. Table 2 presents an open collection of factors that affect tourists' subjective well-being received from the experiences with performed services.

Table 2. Factors affecting subjective well-being

Impact factors	Authors
Satisfaction	Diener and Biswas-Diener (2003), Oliver (2010), Su et al. (2015), Neal et al (2007)
Emotion	Diener and Biswas-Diener (2003), Huang et al (2019), Su et al (2018), Huang et al (2019)
Income	Dolan (2008)
Personal characteristics	Dolan (2008)
Social development characteristics	Dolan (2008)
Time consuming	Dolan (2008), Sweet and Kanaroglou (2016)
Trustiness	Dolan (2008)
Attitude	Dolan (2008)
Relationship	Dolan (2008)
Environment	Dolan (2008) Sweet and Kanaroglou (2016)
Motivation	Kim et al. (2015)
Personal value	Kim et al. (2015)
Travel experience	Sweet and Kanaroglou (2016)
Service quality	Su et al. (2018)
Psychological needs	Huang et al. (2019)
Innovation Diffusion	Ja Kim et al. (2020)

(Source: Own synthesis)

Factors affecting subjective happiness are to be assessed through the perception of the research subjects. The objects of study can be tourists, local people, tourism companies' staff, but most often they are tourists. These impact factors can be divided into three groups: (1) derived from *internal objects of study*: Satisfaction (1.1), Emotions (1.2), Beliefs (1.3), Attitude (1.4), Personal Characteristics (1.5), Income (1.6), Psychological Needs (1.7), Personal Values (1.8), Time Used (1.9); (2) derived from *tourism services*: Satisfaction (2.1), Service Quality (2.2), Travel Experience (2.3); Innovation Diffusion (2.4); (3) from the *environment around the object of study*: Social Development Characteristics

(3.1), Environment (3.2), Relationship (3.3). Obviously, factors that directly affect the research subjects are more interested and investigated. The factors related to tourism services are still too understudied to evaluate so that fewer factors were discovered. Based on the definition of subjective happiness, it is also easy to explain why the Satisfaction and Emotions (including positive and negative emotions) are impacting factors that have been studied extensively in the history of tourism research. In particular, in recent years, the trend of applying technology to tourism products or services has also created new factors affecting subjective well-being, including the Innovation Diffusion discovered by Ja Kim et al. (2020).

Limitation and Future Research

Certainly, when conducting empirical research on the issue of subjective well-being of travelers, researchers always learn about and evaluate previous research limits or take advice on

further research from previous studies. Table 3 is useful for researchers to be able to address those limitations or to inherit the direction that past studies have driven in order to optimize the methods and the results that the study is conducting and achieving.

Table 3. Limitations and future research direction of the past studies in subjective well-being

Authors (year)	Limitation	Future Research
Ja Kim et al (2020)	The sample was collected in Korea so caution should be exercised when applying the findings of the study beyond this country. We focused on using virtual reality (VR) content and not on the devices being used	Further study should be conducted to determine whether the findings apply across all types of VR devices. Researchers should consider incorporating other theories of human behavior into an extended VR technology acceptance model to better elucidate VR technology adoption by tourists. Future research should consider different samples to capture non-users' attitudes towards digital experiences.
Mirehie & Gibson (2020)	Some problems associated with non-probability sampling	Opening to further investigation about growing focus on the relationship between sport and tourism and wellbeing
Pyke, Pyke & Watuwa (2019)	Response of participants may have been influenced by the prior intuition of participants that guess to know about research intent	Recommendations for future research include comparing the results of this study to other First Nation communities across cultures and countries, thereby providing further implications for social tourism knowledge, policy, and practice. Future research may wish to replicate this study in a similar community over a longer period of time
Wang et al (2019)	The destinations in Taiwan and most of the respondents to the study were Taiwanese.	Future studies can explore the traveler's experience with destination attraction in a multicultural environment.
Houge & Hodge (2019)		Future research employing longitudinal designs might include studies that experimentally examine the efficacy. Evaluate these conceptual frameworks of how adventure recreation experiences enhance eudemonic subjective well-being via basic psychological need satisfaction and nature contact across a diverse range of adventure experiences
Mayer et al (2019)	Factors linked to the individual temperaments of the participants were not identified during the trip.	Analyzing contexts in which groups of travelers do not have previously established relationships could also lead to new discoveries and insights

		for understanding behaviors and influences that may lead to variations in subjective well-being in the course of a trip. New research in this area should be dedicated to improving the methods of daily assessments of well-being in the context of travel.
Huang et al (2019)	The data does not represent the total population and limits the generality of the results	Investigate why behavioral intent does not come about by the impact of positive emotions Diversify patterns across different cultures to gain a better understanding of the positive effects.
Vinzenz et al (2018)	The investigation of negative emotions, included in a decision-making process, was not part of this study, because the behavioral decision was already determined.	Future research may investigate the cultural influence in further detail.
Holm et al (2017)		As a basis for developing theoretical models between subjective happiness and risky activity. Or the perception of tourists' risks affecting their psychological and long-term emotional state.
Su et al (2016)	Current research tests the hypothesis with domestic Chinese hotel customers using convenient samples	Examination of survey relationships using more general random sampling techniques as well as more geographically and ethnically diverse populations should be considered. Some types of premise might consider for example: company reputation, service fairness.
Vogt et al (2016)	This research are that case studies are not generalizable to other places	Future research could examine more directly how specific tourism development decisions alter subjective well-being
Kim et al (2015)	This study is limited to hiking tourists on the trails in Jeju, South Korea. At present, the study does not hypothesize about the indirect effects of subjective well-being shown in the model proposal.	Future research should consider the relationship between subjective well-being and intention to return.

(Source: Own elaboration)

In recent years, the feeling of individual happiness has been a topic of interest in tourism research. The individuals studied are mostly tourists (Su et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Mayer

et al., 2019) and a few of studies also consider citizens at destinations (Pyke et al, 2019). There are many areas of tourism for carrying out research on individual happiness or subjective

well-being such as: destination tourism (Kim et al., 2015; Su et al., 2016), adventure tourism (Holm et al., 2017), sport tourism (Mirehie & Gibson, 2020), social tourism (Pyke et al, 2019), technology tourism (Ja Kim et al., 2020)

We can realize that the main limitation of empirical studies in the recent period is the research context. Each study was limited to a specific range of time and space (Huang et al., 2019; Su et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015). From there, the results of the study may occur in the context of the study without similarities. Therefore, the next advice for researchers may be to focus the study on subjective well-being in tourism with multiple contexts or objects to compare or contrast to make the results more representative. In particular, many guiding studies should evaluate the role of culture or investigate the influence of culture on subjective well-being (Huang et al., 2019; Vinzenz et al, 2018). At the same time, studies also suggest new factors that affect subjective well-being such as corporate reputation, service equity (Su et al., 2016), or new

relationships such as intention to return and word of mouth (Kim et al., 2015) and both research methods (Su et al., 2016) and the application of new theoretical foundations in the next research (Ja Kim et al, 2020).

In summary, this study has achieved some results from the review of theoretical foundations of subjective happiness to provide a correct understanding of subjective happiness. At the same time, this study has assessed previous empirical studies to consider the influencing factors that determine the cause of individual subjective well-being in terms of both positive and negative impacts. Furthermore, the limitations and directions identified from previous studies will serve as a guidance and help better conduct experimental research in tourism in the future. However, this study can only evaluate a handful of empirical studies that have been selected by the authors, which are not necessarily complete, representative and do not reveal all aspects of subjective well-being in tourism.

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