

2019

The changing importance of vacations: Proposing a theoretical explanation for the changing contribution of vacations to people's quality of life

Melanie J. Randle

University of Wollongong, mrandle@uow.edu.au

Ye Zhang

Florida Atlantic University

Sara Dolnicar

University of Queensland, s.dolnicar@uq.edu.au

Publication Details

Randle, M., Zhang, Y. & Dolnicar, S. (2019). The changing importance of vacations: Proposing a theoretical explanation for the changing contribution of vacations to people's quality of life. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 77 154-157.

The changing importance of vacations: Proposing a theoretical explanation for the changing contribution of vacations to people's quality of life

Abstract

Vacations are assumed to be important to everyone because they improve quality of life through personal growth, self-fulfilment (McCabe & Johnson, 2013), improved mental health (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004) and physical health (Chen & Petrick, 2013), leading to higher work performance (De Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2013) and greater leisure life satisfaction (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999). Vacations also benefit vulnerable groups, such as people with health issues and disabilities, and low-income families (Gump and Matthews, 2000, McCabe and Johnson, 2013, Pritchard et al., 2011). Contradicting the assumption that vacations are important to everyone, some empirical evidence suggests people differ substantially in the extent to which vacations contribute to their quality of life (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012). This contradiction is the basis for the core question we address in this study: How can we theoretically explain fluctuations in the weights people assign to different quality of life domains? Answering this question responds to the call by Dolnicar et al. (2012, p. 75) for research into "life events which lead to adjustments of quality of life domain weightings".

Disciplines

Business

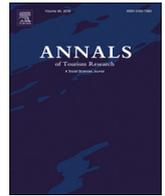
Publication Details

Randle, M., Zhang, Y. & Dolnicar, S. (2019). The changing importance of vacations: Proposing a theoretical explanation for the changing contribution of vacations to people's quality of life. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 77 154-157.



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Annals of Tourism Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/annals

Research Note

The changing importance of vacations: Proposing a theoretical explanation for the changing contribution of vacations to people's quality of life

Melanie Randle^a, Ye Zhang^b, Sara Dolnicar^{c,*}^a School of Management, Operations and Marketing, Faculty of Business, University of Wollongong, Northfields Ave, Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia^b College of Business, Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton, FL 33431, USA^c UQ Business School, The University of Queensland, Blair Drive, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Associate Editor: Scott McCabe

Vacations are assumed to be important to everyone because they improve quality of life through personal growth, self-fulfilment (McCabe & Johnson, 2013), improved mental health (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004) and physical health (Chen & Petrick, 2013), leading to higher work performance (De Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2013) and greater leisure life satisfaction (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999). Vacations also benefit vulnerable groups, such as people with health issues and disabilities, and low-income families (Gump & Matthews, 2000; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011).

Contradicting the assumption that vacations are important to everyone, some empirical evidence suggests people differ substantially in the extent to which vacations contribute to their quality of life (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012). This contradiction is the basis for the core question we address in this study: How can we theoretically explain fluctuations in the weights people assign to different quality of life domains? Answering this question responds to the call by Dolnicar et al. (2012, p. 75) for research into “life events which lead to adjustments of quality of life domain weightings”.

We use data collected in a larger study of quality of life involving a self-completion survey administered by an online research panel. The sample is approximately representative of the adult Australian population for age, gender and state of residence (ABS, 2016, see Table 1 in the Supplementary materials). Respondents ranked eight domains according to perceived importance for quality of life: health, money, family, leisure, people, vacations, work and spiritual life. Respondents also answered questions about challenges they faced in the past 12 months, including challenges related to health (having a disability, having a major health issue that does/does not affect quality of life), caring responsibilities (caring for a child or someone else with a disability, caring for someone with a major health issue that does/does not affect quality of life), family (having relationship problems, challenging times with family), financial difficulties (difficulty making ends meet, limited buying power), work (being unemployed, employed and concerned/not concerned about losing a job, feeling stressed about work) and leisure time (insufficient time for leisure activities).

We test the association of life challenges with vacation importance using an ordinal logistic regression (STATA 14.2). Pooled results (Table 2, Supplementary materials) indicate satisfactory model fit ($F(15, 245,028) = 4.85, p < .001$). Fig. 1 depicts the results: bars to the right indicate greater importance of vacations, bars to the left indicate lower importance of vacations. Shaded bars indicate significant differences.

Results point to variation in vacation importance depending on life challenges. People with serious health issues (but not serious

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mrandle@uow.edu.au (M. Randle), yezhang@fau.edu (Y. Zhang), s.dolnicar@uq.edu.au (S. Dolnicar).

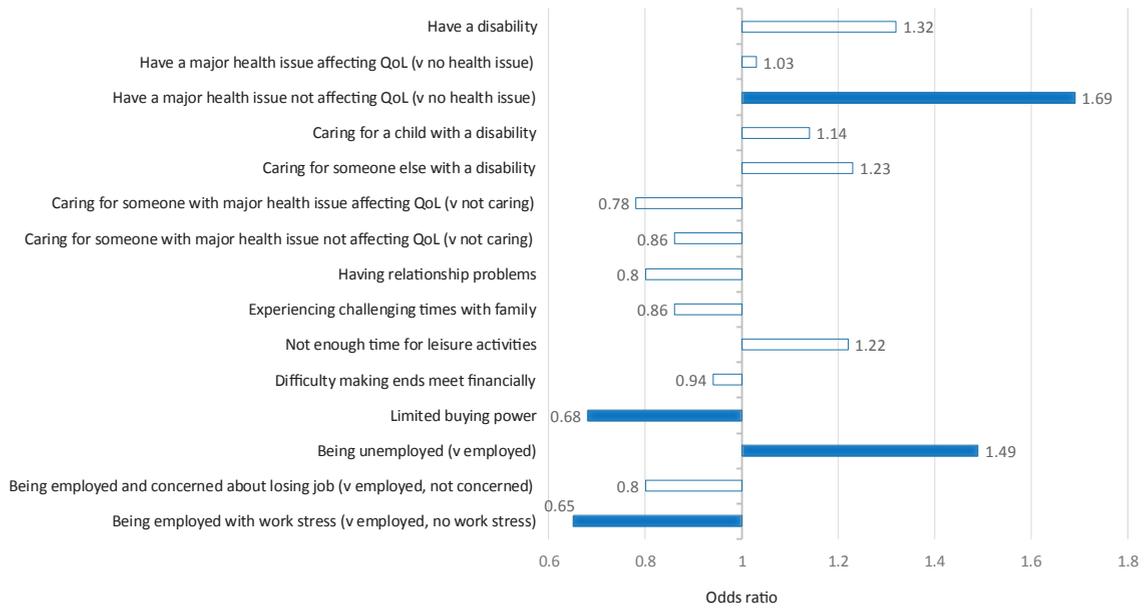


Fig. 1. Life challenges and importance of vacations.

enough to affect quality of life), perceive vacations as 1.69 times more important than people without ($t = 2.9, p < .01$). Unemployed people perceive vacations as 1.49 times more important ($t = 2.54, p < .05$). Limited buying power ($OR = 0.68, t = -2.23, p < .05$) and being employed but experiencing work stress ($OR = 0.65, t = -3, p < .01$) reduce the importance of vacations.

Looking at actual vacations taken in the past 12 months, pooled results from a multivariate robust regression across 20 imputed data sets (see Table 3, Supplementary materials) indicate that life challenges explain 4.4% of the variance in *weekend vacations* ($F(15, 538,352) = 4.5, p < .001$). The shaded blue bars in Fig. 2 show that people take fewer weekend breaks when experiencing family challenges ($\beta = -0.29, t = -2.23, p < .05$), financial difficulties ($\beta = -0.36, t = -2.74, p < .01$) or unemployment ($\beta = -0.32, t = -2.5, p < .05$). Life challenges explain 10.3% of the variance in *weeklong vacations* ($F(15, 347,408) = 9.42, p < .001$). The shaded red bars in Fig. 2 show that people take fewer weeklong vacations if they experience financial difficulties ($\beta = -0.38, t = -4.58, p < .001$), have insufficient time for leisure activities ($\beta = -0.24, t = -3.41, p = .001$) or have a disability ($\beta = -0.24, t = -2.9, p < .01$).

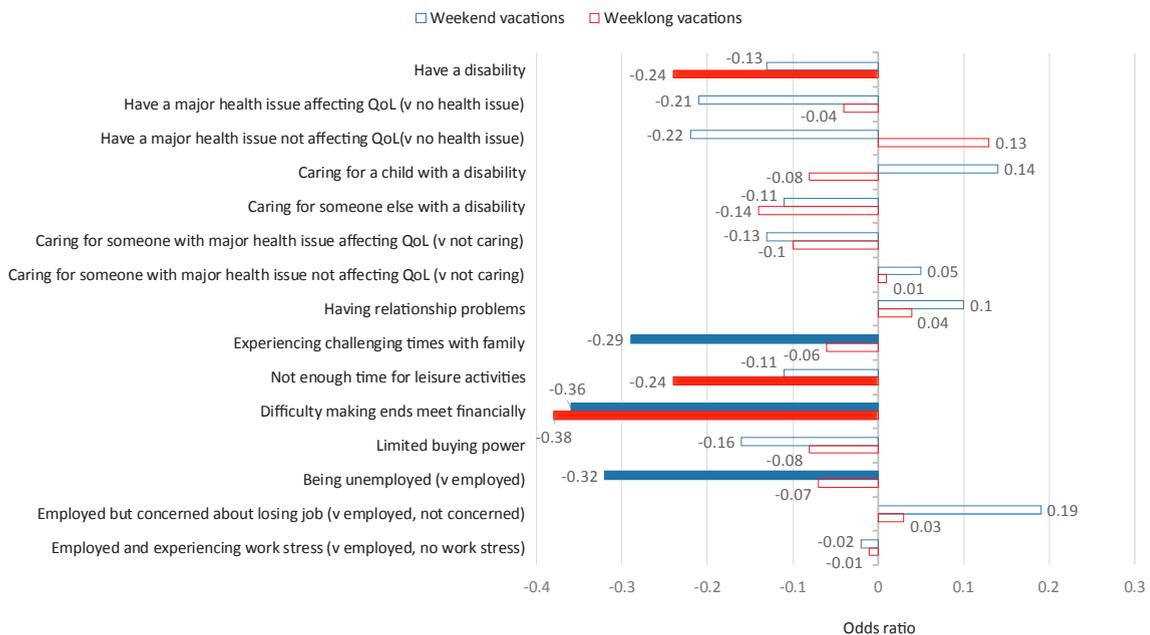


Fig. 2. Life challenges and vacations taken in past 12 months.

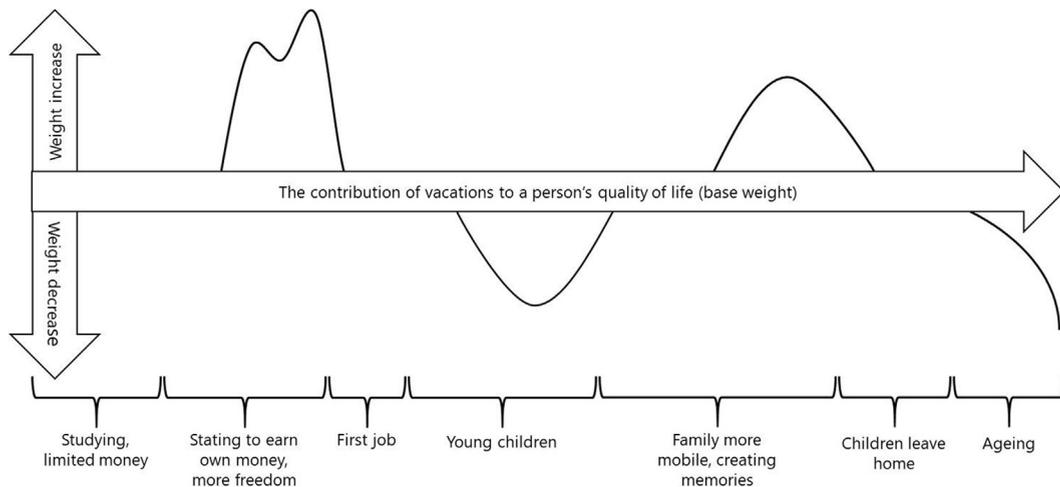


Fig. 3. Proposed theory: The changing importance of vacations according to life challenges.

$t = -2.94, p < .01$).

Stated importance of vacations and actual vacations taken do not always align: people who are unemployed and people with serious health issues rate vacations as more important, but do not take more vacations. They may be facing barriers preventing them from taking as many vacations as they would like. People with financial difficulties express average vacation importance, but take fewer weekend *and* weeklong vacations. Here, limited finances may inhibit non-essential activities without affecting the importance attached to them. People with disabilities express average vacation importance, but take fewer weeklong vacations. Again, this may be due to barriers, such as lack of suitable travel destinations and accommodations.

The hypothesis that the contribution of vacations to quality of life fluctuates depending on other life challenges is consistent with hierarchy of needs theories which postulate that higher-order needs (like vacations) are pursued only when lower-order needs (like health or work) are satisfied (Maslow, 1954; Sirgy, 1986). Vacation importance is relative to the impact of other life challenges which may 'spill over' into other life domains (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 2004; Sirgy, Lee, & Rahtz, 2007). Vacations can be viewed either as a means, or a barrier, to achieving a higher-level need.

How can these empirical results help theoretically explain fluctuations in the contribution of vacations to quality of life? Multiple domains contribute to people's quality of life (see Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). People assign different weights to each domain, suggesting the existence of a *base weight* specific to each person that remains relatively stable over time (Dolnicar et al., 2012). Fig. 3 illustrates our *hypothesis* that vacation importance fluctuates over one's lifetime. The base weight contribution of vacations to quality of life is the horizontal arrow. Our empirical results suggest that life challenges lead to an adjustment of the weight vacations contributes to quality of life (curved line in Fig. 3). For example, the realities of raising a young family may temporarily reduce the weight of vacations (middle of Fig. 3). Similarly, the impact of ageing on health and social participation (Galenkamp & Deeg, 2016) may gradually reduce the weight of vacations as people approach the end of their life (right of Fig. 3). If vacations help overcome a challenge, or contribute to key priorities of the time, the weight vacations contributes to quality of life increases. People with more permanent challenges, such as having a disability, may experience a major disruption when first encountering this challenge, leading to a temporary adjustment of quality of life domain weightings. Once a permanent challenge settles to become a normal part of life, we hypothesize, original weightings are restored.

Results of this study raise another point for discussion and potential future research: if there is heterogeneity in vacation importance, should taxpayer-funded programs make vacations available to everyone? Increasingly, organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union view vacations as an entitlement, a human (Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2012) or a social right (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015), and this has public policy implications. Many societies have, to varying degrees, embraced social tourism programs which use taxpayers' money to fund vacations for specific groups who would be unable to afford them otherwise (Diekmann & McCabe, 2011; Network, 2010). Where such programs are not available, or available only to a limited few (which in reality, and especially in times of economic austerity, is often the case), promoting tourism as a 'right' may actually marginalize disadvantaged groups already struggling with significant life challenges (Sedgley et al., 2012). Our results suggest that vacations can function as a solution to, or a distraction from, overcoming a challenge. As shown in Fig. 1, major health issues and unemployment *increase* vacation importance, possibly because vacations can offer relief from these problems: people facing health problems may view vacations as a way to improve their health; unemployed people may view vacations as a way of improving their employment prospects, as holidays positively affect job searching behaviour (Kakoudakis, McCabe, & Story, 2017). Limited buying power and work stress *reduce* vacation importance, possibly because vacations cannot solve the problem at hand. Rather, vacations may exacerbate problems related to having limited spending money or feeling stressed about work. It may be that, in some cases, public policy makers can offer more benefit to people by assisting them with the particular challenge at hand, rather than offering vacations. Where vacations do help overcome challenges, there is an argument that policy makers should make them available. Future research,

perhaps in the form of a choice modelling study – whereby people facing specific challenges choose from different types of government assistance of the same financial value – would provide a definitive answer to this question.

This study is significant because it provides evidence that vacations are *not* important to everyone, and because it proposes a theoretical explanation of why and how the importance of quality of life domains fluctuates over time. A longitudinal study measuring the weights people assign to all life domains could test our theory and permit causal conclusions.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Australian Research Council (ARC) for supporting this research through the Linkage Scheme project LP150100476 and UQ Business School for travel funding to enable Ye Zhang to visit the University of Queensland.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.11.010>.

References

- ABS. (2016). 2016 Census Community Profiles. http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/communityprofile/036?opendocument (Accessed 14 October, 2018).
- Chen, C. C., & Petrick, J. F. (2013). Health and wellness benefits of travel experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(6), 709–719.
- De Bloom, J., Geurts, S. A., & Kompier, M. A. (2013). Vacation (after-)effects on employee health and well-being, and the role of vacation activities, experiences and sleep. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(2), 613–633.
- Diekmann, A., & McCabe, S. (2011). Systems of social tourism in the European Union. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14(5), 417–430.
- Dolnicar, S., Yanamandram, V., & Cliff, K. (2012). The contribution of vacations to quality of life. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(1), 59–83.
- European Network for Accessible Tourism. (2010). Calypso widens Europe's travel horizons. <http://www.accessibletourism.org/?i=enat.en.reports.969> (Accessed 5 June, 2018).
- Galenkamp, H., & Deeg, D. J. H. (2016). Increasing social participation of older people. *European Journal of Ageing*, 13(2), 87–90.
- Gilbert, D., & Abdullah, J. (2004). Holidaytaking and the sense of well-being. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(1), 103–121.
- Gump, B. B., & Matthews, K. A. (2000). Are vacations good for your health? *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 62(5), 608–612.
- Kakoudakis, K. I., McCabe, S., & Story, V. (2017). Social tourism and self-efficacy. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 65(1), 108–121.
- Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper and Row.
- McCabe, S., & Diekmann, A. (2015). The rights to tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 40(2), 194–204.
- McCabe, S., & Johnson, S. (2013). The happiness factor in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 41(1), 42–65.
- Neal, J. D., Sirgy, M. J., & Uysal, M. (1999). The role of satisfaction with leisure travel/tourism services and experience in satisfaction with leisure life and overall life. *Journal of Business Research*, 44(3), 153–163.
- Neal, J., Sirgy, M. J., & Uysal, M. (2004). Measuring the effect of tourism services on travelers' quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, 69(3), 243–277.
- Pritchard, A., Morgan, N., & Ateljevic, I. (2011). Hopeful tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(3), 941–963.
- Sedgley, D., Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2012). Tourism poverty in affluent societies. *Tourism Management*, 33(4), 951–960.
- Sirgy, M. J. (1986). A quality-of-life theory derived from Maslow's developmental perspective. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 45(3), 329–342.
- Sirgy, M. J., Lee, D.-J., & Rahtz, D. (2007). Research on consumer well-being. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 27(4), 341–349.
- Uysal, M., Sirgy, M. J., Woo, E., & Kim, H. L. (2016). Quality of life and well-being research in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 53(1), 244–261.