Examining the potential relationship benefits of leisure travel taken with and without one's significant other and children

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The primary goal of the study was to investigate the effect vacation satisfaction has on relationship satisfaction and commitment levels.

Objectives

The objectives of the research were to compare and contrast vacation and relationship satisfaction levels between three groups; (1) those who travelled with their significant other, (2) those who travelled without their significant other, and (3) those who travelled with children, to demonstrate the impact travel partners have on overall vacation satisfaction. The main objectives of this research were to develop an initial understanding of the potential benefits travel may contribute to relationship satisfaction, and to determine the impact vacation satisfaction may have on variables related to relationship commitment.

The objectives to this study were guided by the following hypotheses:

- H1a: Vacation Satisfaction will have a direct correlation with Relationship Satisfaction.
- H1b: Relationship Satisfaction will have a direct correlation with Satisfaction with Life.
- H1c: Vacation Satisfaction will have a positive correlation with Satisfaction with Life as mediated by Relationship Satisfaction.
- H2a: Relationship Commitment will be significantly and positively influenced by Investment Size.
- H2b: Relationship Commitment will be significantly and positively influenced by Relationship Satisfaction.
- H2c: Relationship Commitment will be significantly and negatively influenced by Quality of Alternatives.
- H3a: Perceived Relationship Satisfaction will be predicted by satisfaction with vacations taken; a) with a significant other, b) without a significant other, and c) with significant other and kids.

- H3b: Perceived Commitment to Relationship will be predicted by satisfaction with vacations taken; a) with a significant other, b) without a significant other, and c) with significant other and kids.

Methodology

This study applied quantitative research methods to understand the proposed hypotheses and conceptual models. The study primarily incorporated latent variables of the Investment Model (satisfaction, investment, alternatives and commitment) to understand antecedents to relationship commitment and satisfaction. A self-administered survey was selected as the primary data collection method which has been deemed an appropriate method by previous research in similar areas (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer and Tourangeau, 2013).

Specifically, this study employed the use of an online panel survey utilizing criterion sampling to collect data. The criterion used to select the sample included: only those in a relationship, those who had taken a leisure vacation in the past two years, had a household income greater than \$25,000, and were 25 or older, resulting in a total response of 435 participants. The study was delimited to this criteria to respectively help increase the likelihood that respondents were in relationships, had taken recent vacations, had enough income to travel sufficiently, and were old enough to be on their own financially. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was chosen to test the majority of hypotheses. Hypothesis testing was completed through confirmatory factor analysis of the conceptual model to address H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b, and H2c. To test H3a and H3b, this study used linear regression to determine if vacation satisfaction and relationship commitment levels would significantly differ for those with differing travel parties, specifically those traveling (1) with a significant other, (2) without a significant other, and (3) traveling with children.

Results

It was found that vacation satisfaction was a positive and significant predictor of

relationship satisfaction, explaining 20 percent of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, it was found that relationship satisfaction was a significant and positive predictor of satisfaction with life, explaining 40 percent of the variance.

The study found satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investment size accounted for 56 percent of the variance explained for relationship commitment. This is similar to previous studies which have shown an average of 61 percent variance explained (Le and Agnew, 2003). While in line with previous studies and the underlying premise of the Investment Model, this study also found relationship satisfaction (H2b) and quality of alternatives (H2c) to be significant predictors of relationship commitment. However, contrary to Rusbult's (1993) Investment Model, the current study found investments (H2a) were not a significant predictor of relationship commitment.

In the current study, of the travel partner types considered (with/without one's significant other and with/without children), vacation satisfaction was only a significant and positive predictor of relationship satisfaction when traveling with a significant other ($\beta=0.401$, $p=0.007$). While not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, travel with a significant other and child(ren) was a positive predictor of relationship satisfaction ($\beta=0.221$, $p=0.069$).

Theoretical conclusions

Several theoretical conclusions were surmised from this research. First, a conceptual model was hypothesized and support was found to show relationship satisfaction served as a mediator between vacation and life satisfactions. It also suggested vacation satisfaction had a direct and positive correlation with relationship satisfaction, which in turn had a direct and positive correlation with satisfaction with life. Previous literature had used a general "leisure activities" concept to explain this phenomena. Applying vacation as a specific leisure activity provided a more specific antecedent to relationship satisfaction.

Second, in line with previous studies and the underlying premise of the Investment Model, this study also found relationship satisfaction (H2b) and quality of alternatives (H2c) to be significant predictors of relationship commitment. However, contrary to Rusbult's (1993) Investment Model, the current study found investments (H2a) were not a significant predictor of relationship commitment. Theoretically these findings could reflect differences in respondent demographics, a shift in the value importance of investments, and/or the need to measure investments through different means.

Practical application of the dissertation

Several studies have recently focused on the benefits of travel, to include relationship (Durko and Petrick, 2013), educative (Stone and Petrick, 2013) and health and wellness (Chen and Petrick, 2013) benefits for adults and couples. As found by Chen and Petrick, (2013), the more consumers know about the benefits of travel, the more likely and frequently they are to travel for those benefits. Petrick and Huether (2013) suggested that the travel industry should learn from the red wine and dark chocolate industries, which utilized knowledge of their inherent benefits to escalate the sales of their products. Thus, once touted as a guilty pleasure (like red wine and chocolate), travel could be promoted beyond just being pleasurable; to include the benefits it has for not only an individual, but for the couple and family.

It is therefore suggested that those in the fields of counselling, therapy and psychology consider the benefits of travel when prescribing measures to increase couple's relationship satisfaction levels. Vacations taken together as a couple may be offered as a means to strengthen relationship satisfaction and satisfaction with life. Several programs currently exist in which counselling and travel are intertwined in hopes of producing favourable outcomes for relationships. As mentioned above, this finding should be used by tourism management to "prescribe" travel as a means for enhancing couples' relationships. A recent survey revealed by US Travel (2014) revealed

that almost four in ten (38%) respondents said that the romance in their relationships improved after a vacation. Armed with this information and the findings from this study, it may be suggested that destinations and attractions market special couples weekend getaways as not only a chance to escape daily stressors, but with the added benefit that vacations are "good for your relationship."

It was further revealed that for travel without one's significant other, respondents said they were able to partake in activities they enjoyed and preferred 80 percent of the time, while it was much lower for those traveling with a partner (65%) or with a partner and children (52.5%). This suggests that there may be other positive benefits of travel beyond relationship satisfaction, which might make these trips beneficial to the person's self-satisfaction or perceptions of worth.

For those vacationing with children, adults only took part in activities they enjoyed 52.5 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 or activities of others accompanying the family on the vacation. It can be assumed that during vacations with children, adults often sacrifice their own needs and preferences for the enjoyment of the child(ren). However, as vacation satisfaction was shown to positively contribute to relationship satisfaction it is important to include vacation activities that also enhance the adult's vacation satisfaction levels to help ensure satisfaction with the significant other is achieved throughout and after the vacation.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

Chapter I presented an introduction to the research and provided a brief overview of the state of the industry in relation to this research. It also introduced the Investment Model as a guiding theoretical framework, and detailed the purpose, objectives, hypotheses, and operational definitions used within the research, delimitations and limitations.

Abstract of chapter two

This chapter reviewed existing research on relationship and vacation satisfaction, as well as the antecedents of satisfaction with life and relationship commitment. The purpose was to present the variables that will be utilized to understand the hypotheses presented in the following chapter. It also presented the scales that will be implemented to understand the research as well as justification for each scale.

Abstract of chapter three

This chapter presented justification for use of the Investment Model as the guiding theoretical framework for understanding the determinants of relationship commitment. A conceptual model suggesting vacation and relationship satisfaction as antecedents to satisfaction with life was also introduced. Existing literature was presented as justification in the development of the conceptual model, as well as to support the use of the Investment Model to determine relationship commitment with the added construct of vacation satisfaction.

Existing research has shown vacation benefits for romantic relationships; however the focus has overwhelmingly been for married couples participating in joint leisure activities. The current research thus sought to understand the effect traveling with and without one's significant other may have on relationship satisfaction and commitment for varying relationship types.

Abstract of chapter four

This chapter presented the methods used to investigate the established hypotheses for this study. The research design was presented as well as justification for the data collection method, specifically an online panel survey. Next, the development of the survey was discussed as were pilot test procedures for the survey. A brief review of the data collection process was included followed by a summary of the statistical methods used for data analysis.

Abstract of chapter five

This chapter is comprised of detailed descriptive statistics of the sample to attempt

to show the generalizability of the respondents. This section is also designed to verify the data is clean by addressing any practical issues, such as outliers, and normality assumptions prior to formal analysis.

Abstract of chapter six

This chapter details the analysis procedures and findings of the study's stated hypotheses. Hypotheses H1a and H1b were explored through CFA for model fit and the final model was examined with SEM to understand the relationships postulated in the conceptual model. To test Hypothesis H1c, Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure for evaluating mediating effects was used to investigate the relationship between vacation satisfaction and satisfaction with life, as mediated by relationship satisfaction. Hypotheses related to Vacation Satisfaction's role on the Investment Model (H2a-H2c) were examined through CFA to determine the measurement model was an acceptable fit to analyse with SEM. To determine the role vacations taken with differing travel partners may have on relationships (H3a-H3b), regression and paired t-tests were used to test differences between those who travelled with and without their significant other and children.

Abstract of chapter seven

The main purpose of this research was ternary; (1) to investigate the role vacation satisfaction had on relationship and life satisfaction (2) to examine the impact vacation satisfaction had on commitment as measured through the constructs of the Investment Model and (3) to understand if satisfaction is reflective of tripographics or the individual's demographics. The main purpose of this chapter was to summarize the research and present practical and academic implications based on the findings. Theoretical and practical implications were provided along with suggestions for future research to further the current findings.

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