Travel dissatisfaction does not make people unhappy. But unhappy people are (more likely to be) dissatisfied with travel.

A better understanding of travel satisfaction is much wanted for optimizing travel services and to guide transport policy. Travel satisfaction is usually explained by objective factors such as cost and time. The PhD-research of Yanan Gao explores a new avenue: explaining travel satisfaction by looking not only at objective factors, but also at subjective factors, like personality, mood and age. One of the things she found, based on her survey among 1445 respondents, is that men are more likely to be happy with daily travel than women.

Gao performed her research in the metropolitan city Xi’an, which ranks 13th in population size among Chinese cities. 1445 randomly selected respondents were questioned in detail about their daily travel and every individual part of it, about their satisfaction with it but also about their personal characteristics like mood, age, gender and attitude, which are all subjective factors.

In general this research shows that personality traits and mood do influence travel satisfaction. It is recommended that these and other subjective factors should be included in new studies on this subject, to avoid biased results. Also this part of the research showed that older people are more satisfied with their travel experience than young people.

Gao also compared different types of existing models for travel satisfaction research. She found that models that include the discrepancy between the expected and experienced service, perform better than models that don’t. In general travel satisfaction research is done with models of the latter category, therefore Gao built her own model, incorporating the mentioned discrepancy and subjective factors. She put her data in the model, with some surprising results. She found that men tend to have higher travel satisfaction than women, which contradicts research literature on this topic. Also it turned that out people from families owning less than two cars are more likely to be satisfied.

Another part of the research was to study how travelers translate the different episodes of daily travel to their final satisfaction rating. Gao found no support for the popular peak-end rule, which assumes that the last episode influences the rating most. Instead she found the first trip episode to have a high influence, and the trip episode with the lowest rating to dominate the overall rating.

Gao also used her data also to look at the relationship between travel satisfaction and general well-being. She found that the degree in which people are satisfied with their daily travel does not influence how happy they are with their lives. However, it appears that people who are not satisfied with their life, tend to be more negative about daily travel.

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