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*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.uow.edu.au/buspapers](https://ro.uow.edu.au/buspapers)
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 & Matthews, 2000, McCabe & 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

This journal article is available at Research Online: https://ro.uow.edu.au/buspapers/1583
The changing importance of vacations: Proposing a theoretical explanation for the changing contribution of vacations to people’s quality of life

Melanie Randlea, Ye Zhangb, Sara Dolnicarc,⁎

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
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 (β = −0.29, t = −2.23, p < .05), financial difficulties (β = −0.36, t = −2.74, p < .01) or unemployment (β = −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 (β = −0.38, t = −4.58, p < .001), have insufficient time for leisure activities (β = −0.24, t = −3.41, p = .001) or have a disability (β = −0.24, t = −2.23, p < .05).
Where vacations do help overcome challenges, there is an argument that policy makers should make them available. Future research, policy makers can exacerbate problems related to having limited spending money or feeling stressed about work. It may be that, in some cases, public prospects, as holidays positively view vacations as a way to improve their health; unemployed people may view vacations as a way of improving their employment vacation importance, possibly because vacations can increase function as a solution to, or a distraction from, overcoming a challenge. As shown in Fig. 1, major health issues and unemployment disadvantaged groups already struggling with significant life challenges (Diekmann & McCabe, 2011; Network, 2010). Where such programs are not available, or available only to a limited few (which in 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


