

# Study on the Relationship between Flow Experience and Happiness of Tourists

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## Abstract

In this study, tourists in Xinghu Scenic Area of Zhaoqing, China are taken as the research subjects to construct a flow experience-happiness research model. A total of 215 valid questionnaires were collected through field and online social media. SPSS software was used to analyze the original data. This paper discusses the relationship between them and draws the conclusion that flow experience has a positive effect on tourists' happiness. The results of this study can guide tourism destination managers to pay attention to the important role of tourists' psychological flow experience.

## Keywords

Flow Experience; Happiness; Subjective Well-being.

## 1. Introduction

Pine and Gimore first proposed a vision of the new economic era in 1998: the Experience economy. They argue that we are living in an advanced new economy that is largely service-based and will provide consumers with a strong emotional experience. Tourism activities are always inseparable from exploring the unknown, having exciting adventures and gaining new experiences. In this sense, tourism was and is a perfect example of the "experience economy", a special "holiday experience industry". Tourists' inner feelings, excitement and satisfaction with a particular destination are sometimes even more important than the standards of tourism services. Tourists are no longer satisfied with passive or ordinary entertainment, they want to participate in some unusual activities, eager to have a unique holiday experience, they change from passive observers to active participants.

Flow experience is the best psychological experience recognized by renowned psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow experience is a very important concept in the theory of consumption experience, which refers to a state of consciousness in which an individual filters out irrelevant feelings when deeply immersed in an activity so as to obtain the best experience. It can help people find fun and happiness, and stimulate people's creativity and potential. It is produced when people enjoy the moment, rather than being urged to do something [1], Such as surfing, biking, hand-brewing coffee, tea and wine tasting, Even looking at an ordinary poster and engaging your aesthetic skills and imagination can lead to a flow experience and an endless stream of enjoyment that leads to feelings of happiness [2]. It reflects the internal feeling that people get when they are absorbed in an activity throughout their body, accompanied by a strong sense of pleasure and time distortion. Flow exists as a state of consciousness that can be experienced when people are deeply involved in pleasurable activities. In this state, individuals can achieve a high level of "self-worth realization". Based on the above phenomena, this study intends to hypothesize and verify that tourists' flow experience in China Zhaoqing Xinghu Scenic Area will have a significant positive impact on tourists' happiness. The significance of this study is to guide tourism destination managers to pay attention to the important role of tourists' psychological flow experience, consider tourists' internal needs from their standpoint

when developing tourism products and planning tourism experience, and design products to meet tourists' psychological needs through reasonable allocation of resources.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Derivation

### 2.1. Literature Review

Csikszentmihalyi put forward the concept of flow and the general conditions and characteristics of flow based on the phenomenon that painters, athletes and musicians become successful in participating in certain activities [3]. Flow Experience refers to a state of deep immersion. In this state, participants are fully focused on a skilled and challenging activity to achieve a state of no distractions or even self-absorption so as to obtain positive perception. Flow experience does not exist independently from the basic experience. It is not only the continuation and sublimation of a certain experience, but also the different combinations of various experiences. The key to determine whether the flow state is reached is whether the consumer is fully invested in the situation and is attracted into the state of selflessness by the situation. It is the product of interaction between people and the environment that abstracts out of four dimensions, it is a state of high psychological satisfaction [4]. In this state, a person becomes so investment activity, that was completely captivated by that, you are completely immersed in what you are doing, you have lost the concept of time, to the point of time perception, paradoxically, when we are so focused on the task of hand and lost the direction, we will be one hundred percent of the energy and benefit, and even their presence, It is often referred to as the best experience or enjoyment. This kind of optimal experience seems to be the state that tourists hope to find when experiencing tourism activities. Therefore, some scholars try to introduce the theory of flow experience into the study of tourism experience. It is precisely because post-modern tourism is squeezed by network technology and life pressure, deep psychological satisfaction and experience become a strong emotional resonance of tourists, and flow experience has become the key to the high-quality development of tourism destinations [5]. Kuo (2015) et al. verified the existence of flow experience in tourists' travel experience, and found that there was a relationship between tourists' flow experience and travel experience satisfaction and destination loyalty [6]. Among the characteristics of tourists' flow experience, this study selects the two most representative dimensions of "self-challenge" and "cathexis" as the measurement indicators.

In the field of psychology, researchers believe that happiness is a concept of subjective well-being and psychological well-being [7], Happiness is a positive state that people feel. This feeling is described as a state of relaxation, pleasure, and contentment [8]. It is of great significance to explore "how to make people happier and more satisfied" from the perspective of tourism, so that people can have a higher degree of experience and gain a higher sense of happiness in tourism. The benefits of travel experience are somewhat similar to happiness, From the perspective of psychology, based on the theory of motivation, tourism is regarded as the pursuit of obtaining certain physical and psychological goals. It can explain why people participate in tourism activities, understand what tourists want from recreation activities and how to benefit from recreation activities. Taking tourists as the research object and discussing happiness from the perspective of tourism science, there is the concept of "tourist happiness" [9]. This kind of happiness is the category of subjective well-being, Filep and Deery believe that tourists' happiness refers to the state in which tourists experience positive emotions such as interest, happiness, satisfaction and love, participate in holiday activities and gain meaning [10]. In the era of experience economy, tourists' travel experience is increasingly rich, their consumption concept is increasingly mature, and their demand for experience is increasingly rising. They are no longer satisfied with popular tourism, but more eager to pursue personalized, experiential, emotional and leisure travel experience in order to obtain higher travel experience and

happiness. Vada et al(2020) believe that tourists' happiness refers to the external and internal stimuli experienced by tourists in the tourism environment. When they feel satisfied, they will generate a stable psychological state of a series of positive emotions after internal soul reflection [11]. The flow experience is a positive feeling experienced by individuals, which can give people a sense of fullness, excitement and happiness. The concept of Changshuang experience can be used to better understand tourists' recreation experience. in the subjective well-being of tourists, this study selects the three most representative dimensions of "self-affirmation", "spiritual joy" and "meaning of life" as the measurement indicators.

## 2.2. Hypothesis Derivation

Diener and Ryan(2009) found that flow experience can promote the generation of positive emotions and proposed that flow experience can produce subjective happiness, The deeper the tourists enter the flow experience, the greater the possibility of happiness [12]. Seon et al. (2021) found that senior citizens who participated in fashion modeling classes entered flow experiences during performances and generated subjective well-being, which increased the confidence in fashion and appearance satisfaction of the elderly participants [13]. Another study has shown that flow experience can explain 20% of the variation in workplace happiness, and there is a significant and positive relationship between flow experience and happiness in the workplace [14]. Based on the above derivation, this study takes tourists in Xinghu Scenic Area of China as the research object, and plans to verify the relationship between tourists' flow experience and subjective well-being, especially the relationship between each dimension of flow experience and each dimension of subjective well-being. Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is as follows:

- H1a: tourists "self-challenge" had a positive effect on "self-affirmation".
- H1b: tourists "self-challenge" had a positive effect on "spiritual joy".
- H1c: tourists "self-challenge" has a positive effect on "meaning of life".
- H2a: tourists "cathexis " has a positive effect on "self-affirmation".
- H2b: tourists "cathexis " has a positive effect on "spiritual joy".
- H2c: tourists "cathexis " has a positive effect on "meaning of life".

## 3. Research Methods

This study compiled a questionnaire based on the literature review. The questionnaire was designed with Likert seven-point scale. Data collection was carried out by combining online social media and field questionnaire distribution. Questionnaires were distributed between November 2, 2021, and March 2, 2022, A total of 300 questionnaires were sent out and 244 were recovered. After deducting the 29 unreasonable and inconsistent questionnaires, the total number of valid questionnaires was 215, and the effective questionnaire rate was about 71.67%. In terms of gender statistics, male respondents accounted for 35.3% and female respondents accounted for 64.7%. In terms of age, the largest number of respondents were 18 to 25 years old, accounting for 85.6%, while the smallest number was below 18 years old, accounting for 1.9%. In terms of education, the largest number of respondents had a college degree, accounting for 80.9 percent, while the smallest number was under high school, accounting for 0.9 percent.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis of Questionnaire

In terms of questionnaire validity, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of each dimension of flow experience and happiness is 0.924 and 0.908 respectively. This indicates that the questionnaire has good reliability. In terms of validity, the KMO of the scale reached 0.966, and the P value of

Bartlett spherical detection result was 0.000 less than 0.05, which reached the significant level, indicating that the items of the scale in this study had good discrimination.

## 4.2. Regression Analysis

The researchers used multiple linear regression to analyze the regression relationship between flow experience and various dimensions of happiness, and the results are shown in Table 1. First of all, all regression equations are significantly valid. Secondly, in the regression coefficient analysis, the regression coefficient between self-challenge and self-affirmation is 0.195. The regression coefficient of cathexis on self-affirmation was 0.765. The regression coefficient of self-challenge on spiritual joy was 0.458. The regression coefficient of cathexis on spiritual joy was 0.462. The regression coefficient of self-challenge on the meaning of life is 0.325, and the regression coefficient of cathexis on the meaning of life is 0.669. Therefore, all hypotheses in this study are valid.

**Table 1.** Multiple linear regression analysis table of flow experience on happiness

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B coefficient	t	P	F	R	R square
self-affirmation	self-challenge	0.195	3.164	0.002	461.556	0.902	0.813
	cathexis	0.765	12.744	0.000			
spiritual joy	self-challenge	0.458	6.714	0.000	331.89	0.871	0.758
	cathexis	0.462	6.959	0.000			
meaning of life	self-challenge	0.325	3.662	0.000	233.400	0.829	0.688
	cathexis	0.669	7.749	0.000			

## 4.3. Structural Model Analysis

Through structural equation analysis, the results show that the data converges smoothly, and all the path coefficients are significantly related. This study has a model fit of  $\chi^2/df=3.247$ , NFI=0.944, RFI=0.902, IFI=0.944, TLI=0.930, CFI=0.944. The results show that the overall fit of the model is good. Structural equation analysis further verifies the hypothesis of the relationship between the dimensions of flow experience and the dimensions of happiness.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

#### 5.1.1. Tourists "Self-Challenge" Positively Affects the Three Dimensions of Happiness

First of all, the results showed that tourists self - challenge significantly positive influence on the self - affirmation, that is, hypothesis H1a is verified. In other words, tourists will be driven to realize themselves by trying to challenge themselves and actively participating in tourism experience activities. For example, spending physical effort to climb to the peak, you will see a different landscape. This is because, at the beginning of self-challenge, tourists have set corresponding tasks and goals in their heart, and can achieve them through certain efforts and skills. Therefore, when the tasks and goals set in advance are achieved, they will get a sense of self-realization.

Secondly, the study also confirms that tourist self-challenge has a positive effect on spiritual joy, which verifies hypothesis H1b. In the self-challenge, through efforts and certain skills, when the task is successfully completed and the set goal is achieved, tourists will certainly get a sense of

accomplishment and the joy of harvesting the results. The more difficult the challenge, the greater the pleasure of achieving the goal.

Thirdly, tourists' self-challenge has a positive impact on "meaning of life", that is, hypothesis H1c is confirmed. It shows that tourists can feel the meaning and value of life in this process through self-challenge and efforts to achieve goals. This feeling can generate a lot of positive emotions, which in turn generate feelings of satisfaction and worth. On the contrary, when the degree of self-challenge is lower, the tourists' sense of life meaning will be lower. This conclusion can explain the "boredom" caused by the lack of experience in tourism.

### **5.1.2. Cathexis Positively Influences the Three Dimensions of Happiness**

Statistical results show that tourists' "cathexis" has a positive influence on tourists' "self-affirmation", that is, hypothesis H2a is confirmed. That is, the more preoccupied tourists are, the easier they are to get a sense of self-affirmation. Cathexis means that the tourist gives all his attention to something, and in this process sees his true self without distraction.

Tourists' cathexis positively affects tourists' spiritual joy, which verifies hypothesis H2b. It shows that the more the tourists are engaged, the more they will feel the sense of spiritual pleasure. When tourists are focused on a certain task, they will temporarily forget the troubles around them, even forget the passage of time, and enter a sense of spiritual pleasure. Therefore, when people finish traveling, they can always feel full of energy.

Cathexis has a positive impact on tourists' meaning of life, indicating that hypothesis H2c is valid. It shows that the more preoccupied tourists are, the more they feel the meaning of life. When tourists forget their worries and pressures and concentrate on enjoying the experience of tourism, they can find more beautiful scenery and feel the better side of life. Therefore, tourists can feel the meaning of life, cherish the meaning of life more and do more valuable things after the tour. Research has confirmed that the core connotation of flow experience and happiness is consistent, that is, tourists can achieve the desired goal, obtain higher positive emotions, and get a sense of meaning and achievement through self-challenge and concentration.

## **5.2. Management Implications**

This study has confirmed that both self-challenge and Cathexis have a positive impact on happiness. This study has confirmed that both self-challenge and Cathexis have a positive impact on happiness. Because tourists entering flow experience is beneficial to their psychological recovery, and improve people's creativity and stimulate people's potential, so that people can obtain sustainable power in the amusement. First of all, tourism destination managers must pay attention to the "self-challenge" of tourists. That is to increase the tourist self-challenge experience project in the scenic spot products, in order to increase the sense of participation and experience of tourists, and obtain better spiritual benefits. Secondly, scenic spot managers also need to provide opportunities to enhance tourists' Cathexis, such as developing immersive tourism experience, tourism performing arts activities and tourism stress reduction projects to improve their focus and plug into the situation, so that tourists can focus on a certain object to achieve self-forgetting state and achieve happiness.

## **6. Study Limitations and Recommendations for Subsequent Studies**

In this study, flow experience is introduced into the tourism activities of tourists in popular scenic spots, which is a challenge in itself. Because of the nature of tourism activities in popular scenic spots, this study can only select the two dimensions of flow experience that are closest to tourism activities in popular scenic spots to construct and verify the relationship between flow experience and happiness. However, the other seven dimensions of flow experience are not included in this study, but it is still a beginning. Therefore, in the future research, it is



suggested to build the relationship between the nine characteristics of flow experience and happiness and try to verify it.

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