

Reluctance to use Public Transport: Effects of a Defocusing Technique on Car Users Predicted Satisfaction with Public Transport

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Car users' predictions and recall of satisfaction with public transport differ from their actual experiences (Pedersen, Friman & Kristensson, in press; Pedersen, Friman & Kristensson, submitted). The focusing illusion (Schkade & Kahneman, 1998), may be the mechanism that causes car users to focus on negative aspects of public transport and consequently to predict lower satisfaction with public transport (Pedersen, Kristensson & Friman, 2011). Defocusing techniques can correct for mispredictions caused by the focusing illusion (e.g., Wilson et al., 2000). Defocusing makes people become aware of other aspects of life, thereby aiding them in making more accurate predictions about the emotional impact of future events. The present study investigates the effects of defocusing on car users' predictions about satisfaction with public transport. Sixty car users were randomly assigned to either a defocusing manipulation or to a control group. Participants in the manipulation group were asked to list up to ten of their own daily activities and to report the time spent on each activity. Then, they predicted how satisfied they would become with public transport if they were to use the service on a daily basis. The manipulation was hypothesized to increase the car users' predicted satisfaction with public transport, by introducing a broader context and making them become aware of things in life that would remain the same even if they were to use public transport. The control group only predicted their satisfaction with public transport. Results show that the defocusing technique generated higher predicted satisfaction with

public transport, as compared to the control group, with regard to several quality attributes. An important implication that pertains to environmental psychology is that car users' evaluations of public transport should not be used as decision-material for future planning, as these evaluations may be biased and inaccurate. One may instead benefit from approaching car users in novel ways, and may potentially overcome their reluctance to use public transport by not focusing informational campaigns solely on the qualities of the public transport services per se, but simply by introducing a broader context of things in life that will remain unchanged, even if a switch in travel mode is undertaken.

References

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