Tore Pedersen

Affective Forecasting in Travel Mode Choice
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“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.”

Robert Frost

“Nothing in life is quite as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it.”

Daniel Kahneman
To my family, and to my eastern brethren.
Abstract

Affective forecasting is the process of predicting future emotions in response to future events. The overall aim of this thesis was to apply the framework of affective forecasting to investigate how car users predict their satisfaction with public transport services. Paper I, Study 1 revealed a satisfaction gap between users and non-users of public transport. Non-users reported lower satisfaction than users in terms of overall satisfaction and in two quality factors resulting from a factor analysis of a major survey on satisfaction with public transport. The hypothesis that non-users were biased in their satisfaction reports was subsequently investigated in Paper I, Study 2. A field experiment in that study revealed that car users suffer from an impact bias in their predictions about future satisfaction with public transport due to being more satisfied with the services after a trial period than they initially predicted they would be. To address the question of whether a focusing illusion is the psychological mechanism responsible for the impact bias, two experiments containing critical incidents were conducted in Paper II. These experiments investigated whether car users exaggerate the impact that specific incidents have on their future satisfaction with public transport. The negative critical incident generated lower predicted satisfaction with public transport, both for car users with a stated intention to change their current travel mode (in Paper II, Study 1) and for car users with no stated intention to change their travel mode (in Paper II, Study 2). These results support the hypothesis that the impact bias in car users’ predictions about future satisfaction with public transport is caused by a focusing illusion. Paper III showed that car users misremember their satisfaction with public transport as a result of their recollections of satisfaction with public transport being lower than their on-line experienced satisfaction. Additionally, the desire to repeat the experience (that is, the car users’ current experience)
use of public transport) is explained by remembered satisfaction, not by on-line experienced satisfaction. Paper IV investigated whether a defocusing technique would counteract the focusing illusion by introducing a broader context, thereby generating higher predicted satisfaction. A generic defocusing technique, conducted in Paper IV, Study 1, did not generate higher predicted satisfaction, whereas the self-relevant defocusing technique conducted in Paper IV, Study 2 did generate higher predicted satisfaction with public transport. Additionally, it was found in Paper IV, Study 1 and Study 2 that car-use habit accounts for the level of predicted satisfaction regardless of the defocusing; the stronger the car-use habit, the lower the predicted satisfaction.

The conclusions from this thesis are that non-users of public transport rate the services lower than users do, and that non-users become more satisfied when using the services than they predicted. These mispredictions are a result of over-focusing on a limited range of aspects in public transport (that is, a focusing illusion). The car users’ desire to repeat the public transport experience is influenced by their inaccurate memories of the services and not by their actual experiences. However, defocusing techniques may help car users make more accurate predictions about future satisfaction with public transport; this could facilitate a mode switch from using the car to using public transport services more often. Switching to a more sustainable transport mode could be beneficial for the individual and for society.

Keywords: Affective Forecasting; Satisfaction; Focusing Illusion; Defocusing; Public Transport
This doctoral thesis is based on the four following research papers, which are referred to throughout the text using Roman numerals:


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Contributions in the appended papers

**Paper I**
Main author. Shared planning, writing and data analyses.

**Paper II**
Main author. Collected data. Shared planning, writing and data analyses.

**Paper III**
Main author. Shared planning, writing and data analyses.

**Paper IV**
Main author. Collected data. Shared planning, writing and data analyses.
Acknowledgements

Participants and collaborators. Firstly, I would like to thank everyone who participated in the studies. I would also like to thank BEST for carrying out public transport satisfaction surveys, and the City of Lund and Skånetrafiken for organising trial passenger projects aimed at habitual car users. I am especially thankful to the project coordinator Ylva S. Åqvist for her valuable collaboration.

Supervisors. I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Margareta Friman and Associate Professor Per Kristensson, for providing me with excellent supervision and generous support and for inviting me on the journey of research into affective forecasting in the context of public transport. I am also grateful to Professor Tommy Gärling at the University of Gothenburg, who has been an important source of inspiration and has generously shared his expertise in this field.

Colleagues. I would like to thank my colleagues at the Service and Market Oriented Transport Research group (SAMOT), the Consumer Psychology Research group (CPR), the Service Research Center (CTF), and the Department of Psychology, all at Karlstad University in Sweden. I am also grateful to my inspirational colleagues and the stimulating work environment at the National Institute of Occupational Health, Norway (NIOH).

Supporters. I am thankful for the support of my employers, the present and former directors of NIOH, Dr Pål Molander and Dr Trygve Eklund, respectively, and to VINNOVA for their grants to SAMOT.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Bente, and my sons Bastian, Joachim and Theodor, for exceptional patience and understanding, and for making it possible for me to do a substantial lot of work at our home.
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Introduction

Over the last few decades, car usage in Western Europe has grown substantially (OECD, 2001), with passenger kilometres per capita increasing by as much as 90 percent and people using their private cars more often than they intended (Gifford & Steg, 2007; Jakobsson, 2004). Extensive car usage as a means of transportation has numerous positive effects for individual users. Cars make it easier for individuals and families to meet their needs and obligations (such as working, shopping and social arrangements), and car users are, generally speaking, satisfied with the independence and flexibility that their car provides in relation to their need to travel (Steg, 2003; 2005).

On the other hand, car use has several negative effects for society as a whole. General pollution, noise and congestion in cities and main arteries during peak hours are all growing problems. There is general agreement among politicians and researchers that there should be a call to reduce car use in order to eliminate some of these negative effects (Steg, 2003). The environmental impact of car use is significant (Van Wee, 2007), particularly in urban regions where it represents a threat to urban life (Gifford & Steg, 2007), and there is no immediate sign that the increase in car usage will stop (Sperling & Gordon, 2009). Therefore, it is important to explore new approaches to understanding the psychological mechanisms related to travel mode choice. Previous research has suggested that intervention is not likely to change car users’ travel behaviour (e.g., Shannon et al., 2006). For example, longer travelling times are often identified as a major obstacle to increasing public transport use. However, a minority of car users have stated that they would be willing to switch to public transport if services were improved, which would include reduced travelling times, increased service frequencies and lower fares (Curtis & Headicar, 1997; Eriksson, Friman & Gärling, 2008; Kingham, Dickingson & Copsey, 2001).

Although service organisations appear to be putting a lot of effort into continuously improving their services, one difficulty could still be the general inability to accurately predict the impact of future events on future emotions.
(Ayton, Pott & Elwakili, 2007; Buehler & McFarland 2000; Schkade & Kahneman, 1998; Ubel, Loewenstein & Jepson, 2005; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003; Wilson, Wheatley, Meyers, Gilbert, & Axsom, 2000). In other words, car users may not be able to predict their future satisfaction with public transport services.

Of course, it would be advantageous if people were able to make choices and decisions, based on rational judgements, that would definitely lead to a desirable outcome. This is not the case, however, as many everyday judgements may be systematically biased (Gilovich & Griffin, 2002). Furthermore, many marketing techniques are outmoded and do not provide managers with the information they need (Burke, 1996). Therefore, attempts to encourage car users to switch to public transport are likely to fail if they are based on the assumption that car users employ strict rational judgements when contemplating a switch of travel mode.

This thesis suggests that the reluctance of car users to switch their transport mode is based on biased predictions about their future satisfaction with public transport. This implies that car users with a strong car-use habit tend to misjudge the extent to which alternative means of transportation would satisfy their travel needs. If this is the case, knowledge about the psychological mechanisms responsible for these mispredictions is likely to help authorities and companies to plan and implement future policies and marketing campaigns. Therefore, it is important to investigate how these potentially adverse mechanisms can be corrected by means of specific techniques. In terms of the context of public transport, policies and campaigns that aim to increase public transport usage can be more goal-oriented and pragmatic with regard to counteracting the adverse effect of these psychological mechanisms.

This thesis aims to understand car users’ evaluations of public transport; specifically, how car users predict, experience and remember their satisfaction with public transport. The four included studies focus on discrepancies between car users’ predictions and their actual experiences, how these mispredictions can be explained psychologically, and how they influence the
desire to repeat the experience. Another important area of focus is how to help car users overcome their mispredictions, thereby helping them make better and more accurate predictions.

The following section presents an overview of the research into affective forecasting, as well as a brief overview of satisfaction research. Previous research on affective forecasting has employed the emotions of happiness (Ayton et al. 2007; Wilson et al., 2000), pleasure (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003), satisfaction (Schkade & Kahneman, 1998) or quality of life (Ubel et al., 2001; 2005). The present thesis, however, which focuses on consumers’ responses to consumption-events, has employed Oliver’s (2010) concept of satisfaction. This concept refers to satisfaction as “the consumer’s fulfillment response” (Oliver, 2010, p. 8) and, consequently, as “a judgment that a product or service provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment” (Oliver, 2010, p. 8). Thus, a judgement about satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) resides on the displeasure-pleasure axis in the affect circumplex without considering its specific level of arousal (Oliver, 2010, p. 319). The following subsection provides an explanation of the impact biases of affective forecasting as well as an introduction to the focusing illusion as an explanation for these biases. This is followed by a section on defocusing techniques that explains how the adverse effects of the focusing illusion can be counteracted, to a certain extent. The section after that deals with the relationship between predictions, experiences and memories of satisfaction with public transport, as well as how these different satisfaction evaluations influence the desire to repeat the travel by public transport. Whereas predictions about future satisfaction with public transport are explicit and observable, the desire to repeat the experience may be understood as implicit forecasts that must be inferred from the car users’ current choices (Kahneman & Thaler, 2006) of public transport use. The final section summarises and discusses the empirical studies.
Affective Forecasting

This thesis aims to apply the framework of affective forecasting to investigate car users’ predictions regarding their future satisfaction with public transport. It compares predictions to actual experiences and investigates how car users’ recollections of previously experienced satisfaction with public transport influence their desire to repeat the experience of travelling by public transport. The thesis also seeks to disclose the psychological mechanisms that are most likely responsible for the car users’ potential satisfaction-mispredictions, as well as how the use of specific techniques can counteract mispredictions about satisfaction with public transport services.

The process of predicting future emotions, such as satisfaction, pleasure or happiness (or dissatisfaction, displeasure or unhappiness, respectively) in response to future events is known as affective forecasting (e.g., Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). This thesis employs the concept of satisfaction in the sense of a judgement about the level of pleasure (or displeasure) derived from consumption of services. People generally want to be able to predict not only whether they will be satisfied or dissatisfied with the decisions they make, but also how satisfied or dissatisfied they will be. They believe that satisfaction with various parts of their lives or with various purchases makes them happy, which enhances their subjective well-being. Previous research into affective forecasting has focused on various emotions (such as satisfaction, happiness, joy, disgust, anger, fear) and overall evaluations (for example, quality of life, well-being). This thesis deals with how car users predict their future satisfaction, how they experience and remember their satisfaction, and how these various satisfaction evaluations influence current and future choices with regard to the use of public transport services.

Satisfaction/dissatisfaction is a state that results from comparisons between initial expectations and perceived service or product performance. Satisfaction/dissatisfaction is characterised as having both affective and
cognitive components, which means that it contains both a specific emotion and a cognitive appraisal of this emotion (Oliver, 2010). Furthermore, experiencing satisfaction/dissatisfaction may entail varying degrees of arousal; in the case of a pleasurable experience, for example, these could range from contentment to elation. Confirmation of expectations will either lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction, depending on what is expected. Disconfirmation of expectations, however, will lead to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, depending on whether the level of positive or negative expectations is high or low (Oliver, 2010).

Previous research into satisfaction (e.g., Bolton & Drew, 1991; Fornell, 1992; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991) has underlined the importance of distinguishing between overall satisfaction and encounter satisfaction. Encounter satisfaction refers to satisfaction with single transactions or encounters with a product or service (e.g., Oliver, 1980; Oliver & Desarbo, 1988), whereas overall satisfaction (e.g., Bolton & Drew, 1991; Fornell, 1992; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991) refers to satisfying or dissatisfying encounters with a product or service over time. In both cases, satisfaction is either defined as an overall judgment of satisfaction or decomposed into satisfaction with performance or quality attributes.

Research into satisfaction is generally conducted by asking customers to report their degree of satisfaction with a product or service. Public transport is a service that aims to meet people's travel needs. However, people often base their choices regarding future behaviour on their former predictions about how different outcomes will make them feel (Loewenstein, O'Donoghue, & Rabin, 2003; Mellers, Schwartz, & Ritov, 1999; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Whereas people's predictions about future satisfaction are explicitly observable, their implicit affective forecasts (Kahneman & Thaler, 2006), and therefore their desire to repeat the experience, may be inferred from their choices. Research into affective forecasting has revealed that predictions about future satisfaction in response to future events are biased, in that they generally exaggerate the effects of future events on future satisfaction. Therefore, it has been established
that people mispredict the impact of future events on their future satisfaction when making affective forecasts (Schkade & Kahneman, 1998; Ubel & al., 2001; Ubel, Loewenstein & Jepson, 2005; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003; Wilson et al., 2000).

Mispredictions in affective forecasting (Ayton et al., 2007; Buehler & McFarland, 2000; Schkade & Kahneman 1998; Wilson et al., 2000; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005) are generally caused by an impact bias, whereby people overestimate the impact of future events on their future satisfaction. This impact bias is broken down into mispredictions about (a) the strength or intensity of future emotions (e.g., Buehler & McFarland, 2001), and (b) the duration of the emotions after the event is over (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2000).

There have been many instances of misprediction about the intensity or duration of emotions in response to specific situations or future events. For instance, people living in California are no happier than people living in other regions, even though people tend to predict they will be (Schkade & Kahneman, 1998). Receiving desirable grades or being granted tenure does not make the recipients as intensely elated as predicted (Buehler & McFarland, 2001), while the obvious joy that supporters experience when their football team wins a game does not last as long as they predict (Wilson et al., 2000).

In terms of satisfaction with public transport, it is possible that car users predict that their satisfaction with day-to-day travel will decrease when forced or persuaded to switch to public transport services. Furthermore, the impact that car users predict a switch in travel mode will have on their travel satisfaction may be greater than is actually the case. If car users misperceive the quality of travel associated with different modes of transport, they will be likely to make suboptimal decisions about deciding between their cars and public transport.
The focusing illusion is known to generate biases in affective forecasting by causing people to base their predictions on a few salient features that they perceive as being related to the future situation (Ayton et al., 2007; Schkade & Kahneman, 1998; Ubel et al., 2001; Ubel, Loewenstein & Jepson, 2005; Wilson et al., 2000). When people base their predictions about emotions and satisfaction on a few salient features, they may overlook other features that will also elicit emotions, and perhaps even other types of emotions. This causes people to focus unduly on a few salient features and disregard other features in the future event; the result of this may be satisfaction/dissatisfaction that is experienced less strongly and for a shorter duration than initially predicted.

Previous research has studied the focusing illusion; for instance, in relation to how an individual’s general well-being and happiness would be affected by events such as winning the lottery (Ayton et al., 2007), becoming permanently injured or disabled (Ayton et al., 2007; Ubel et al., 2001; 2005), seeing one’s football team win or lose a match (Wilson et al., 2000), receiving favourable or unfavourable exam grades (Buehler & McFarland, 2001), or moving to a region with a more favourable climate (Schkade & Kahneman, 1998).

The general results from studies of transient (temporary) events, such as winning or losing a football game or receiving favourable or unfavourable grades, show that focusing illusions cause people to tend to overestimate the intensity and duration of future satisfaction or dissatisfaction (e.g., Buehler & McFarland, 2001; Wilson et al., 2000). However, in terms of predicting the emotional impact of future non-transient (permanent) events, such as becoming permanently disabled, the results are somewhat inconclusive. It has not been conclusively established whether the focusing illusion is the mechanism responsible for mispredictions in this domain, or whether failure to appreciate the process of adaptation may also serve as an explanation for the biases (Ayton et al., 2007; Ubel et al., 2005). A permanent change in travel mode may
represent one instance of a future non-transient event because it implies a more or less permanent change in behaviour. Thus, further research is called for in order to explore the effects and consequences of the focusing illusion (Ayton et al., 2007).

To date, the focusing illusion has not been studied in relation to people who contemplate future behavioural changes, such as car users’ predictions about their future travel satisfaction with other transport modes. It is important to ask whether the focusing illusion hinders car users from making correct predictions about future satisfaction with public transport. A switch of travel mode is not likely to have a dramatic affect on an individual’s life in the same way as becoming permanently disabled would. However, it is likely to have a more substantial effect than, for instance, the transient outcome of a football game. Even if an improved public transport system were to be offered, car users would probably still have to make sacrifices, especially initially, due to the known difficulties of changing an acquired car-use habit (Fujii & Gärling, 2005).

Counteracting the Focusing Illusion: Defocusing Techniques

As the previous section has explained, the focusing illusion (Schkade and Kahneman, 1998; Wilson et al., 2000) generates an impact bias that results in exaggerated evaluations about the emotional impact of future events (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). This is because people tend to focus on a range of features related to the focal event that is too narrow, and not consider that the focal event is embedded in a broader and richer context that will also require attention and elicit emotions (Ayton et al. 2007; Wilson et al., 2000). Therefore, it is likely that the emotional impact of the focal event (when it is eventually experienced) will be moderated by all the things in life that do not change even if the focal event comes into play.

However, defocusing techniques make it possible to counteract the adverse effects of the focusing illusion by drawing people’s attention away from the undue focus on a narrow range of features. These techniques introduce a
broader context, which makes people consider all the things in their life that will not change, even if the focal event comes into play.

For instance, when individuals predict how happy (or unhappy) they will be when their favourite football team wins (or loses) an important match, they are likely to overestimate and exaggerate their future level of happiness (Wilson et al., 2000). However, if an individual is asked to reflect on his or her future daily activities and to estimate how much time he or she spends on each of these activities, that person becomes aware of the fact that their daily lives consists of much more than one particular football match and that they may not actually be thinking so much about the results of the football match as they initially thought they would. By making people consider the broader context of life, in which there are many things that require attention and elicit emotions, this defocusing exercise leads to predictions that are less exaggerated and, therefore, to more accurate levels of future happiness related to the outcome of the football match (Wilson et al., 2000).

Similarly, attempts to predict the level of happiness of a person who wins a substantial amount of money in the lottery or a person who has become paraplegic (Ayton et al., 2007) are likely to suggest that the person winning the lottery will become immensely happy and that the person who has become paraplegic will be immensely unhappy. In fact, lottery winners and paraplegics are generally no more or less happy than other people. However, descriptions about the daily and ordinary activities in the lives of the persons in question would make the predictors aware of the elements that make up the daily lives of both lottery winners and paraplegics. In such cases, those making the predictions would be likely to predict levels of happiness that are more in line with the ratings made by people who have actual experiences related to lotteries or paraplegia (Ayton et al. 2007).
The Desire to Repeat the Experience

It is often taken for granted that people are able to make choices that reflect their true preferences (Kahneman & Sugden, 2005). This is based on the rationale that people accurately remember how they felt during past experiences. However, the desire to repeat an experience can be influenced by former (prior) predictions about future emotions related to actual behaviour, but even more so by the memory of how the person felt during these past experiences (Wirtz, Kruger, Napa Scollon & Diener, 2003). Therefore, the desire to repeat an experience is not actually influenced by the emotions accompanying the actual, in situ experience, but rather by the memory of those emotions. In fact, people’s memories of experiences are a source that motivates their current and future behaviour (Levine, Lench & Safer, 2009), although these recollections are largely susceptible to biases due to different levels of accessibility to the semantic and episodic memory (Robinson & Clore, 2002). This makes it difficult to gain access to the emotions that accompanied previously experienced events. For instance, an individual who tries to recall his or her previous experiences related to the burden of financial dispositions (Hoelzl, Pollai & Kamleitner, 2009), or the satisfaction with a holiday from the previous year (Wirtz et al., 2003), may find it difficult to access his or her past emotions. Instead of recalling how the holiday actually was, the individual construes how it “must have been”, based on his or her semantic memory of holidays in general (Robinson & Clore, 2002). Additionally, the peak-and-end rule (Kahneman, 2000), which attenuates and facilitates recall of the feelings experienced during the most intense moment or the final moment of an event, distorts the subjective overall experience of the event as a whole and causes people to misremember the event. Thus, when deciding on current behaviour or making their future choices, such as whether to travel by public transport, people are largely susceptible to being influenced by biases. These biased forecasts may lead people to make choices that do not actually reflect their true preferences.
The relation between affective forecasts of novel experiences and the desire to repeat an experienced event may be understood in terms of the explicitness and implicitness of affective forecasts. Whereas an affective forecast about future satisfaction with an upcoming event is explicitly observable as a prediction, the current behaviour or a future choice also represents an instance of an affective forecast, albeit a rather implicit one because the forecast must be inferred from the individual’s actual choices (Kahneman & Thaler, 2006) rather than being explicitly observable. Such inferences may be somewhat restricted for other reasons, such as the fact that people actually want to repeat the experience, but are unable to do so, for various reasons. Taken together, people’s choices are generally assumed to reflect their preferences. However, these choices may be based on biased memories of the emotions that accompany their past experiences (Kahneman, 2000), and may not actually reflect their true preferences.

Summary and Conclusions

Environmental and quality-of-life problems are associated with the ever-increasing use of cars. This has led to the implementation of policies and marketing campaigns that aim to increase public transport use (Richter, Friman & Garling, 2010). However, it has not yet been fully clarified exactly how car users predict, experience and remember their satisfaction with public transport. Car users’ reluctance to switch to public transport may be caused by an impact bias, whereby they make inaccurate predictions about their possible future satisfaction with public transport use, and therefore make non-optimal decisions about which specific travel mode will satisfy them. Furthermore, car users may not be able to correctly remember their degree of satisfaction related to previous public transport experiences, which could make them even more reluctant to travel by public transport. One focus of the present thesis is on potentially biased predictions caused by the focusing illusion. In relation to this,
another focus is on counteracting the adverse effects of the focusing illusion. A third focus is related to exploring how well car users remember their previously experienced satisfaction with public transport, and how predictions, experiences and recollections of satisfaction influence their desire to repeat the use of public transport services. The empirical studies summarised in the next section address these issues further, as applied to car users’ predictions, experiences and recollections of their satisfaction with public transport, as well as their desire to repeat the experiences (that is, concurrent and future use of public transport).

Figure 1 provides a simplified illustration of the content of this thesis by visualising the various components of affective forecasting. In the figure, the first three vertical columns illustrate the different phases of explicit satisfaction-evaluations; that is, expectation (prediction), experience and memory. The fourth column illustrates current and future choice, which represents an implicit affective forecast. The middle horizontal row illustrates the process of predicting, experiencing and remembering satisfaction, as well as the desire to repeat the experience. The upper horizontal row illustrates the biases influencing predictions and recollections, respectively, whereas the lower horizontal row illustrates the measures that can be used to counteract these biases. The solid lines between the concepts illustrate what the thesis has investigated empirically. The dashed lines (between predicted satisfaction and remembered satisfaction, between the peak-and-end rule and remembered satisfaction, and between day/event reconstruction and remembered satisfaction) illustrate relations that are important but have not been empirically examined in this thesis.
Summary of Empirical Studies

Overview

The overarching purpose of this thesis was to investigate car users’ affective forecasts about their satisfaction with public transport. One important aim of the empirical studies was to investigate car users’ predictions of their future satisfaction with public transport. Another aim was to investigate whether the focusing illusion is the mechanism responsible for satisfaction biases. A third aim is to investigate whether it is actual experiences that influence the desire to repeat an experience or memories of those experiences. The final aim was to examine whether it was possible to counteract the adverse effects of a focusing illusion in car users’ predicted satisfaction with public transport.

Paper I reports on a survey that was conducted to disclose potential discrepancies in satisfaction between users and non-users of public transport. Subsequently, an intervention – a trial passenger project – was carried out to investigate whether car users’ actual experiences of public transport differed
from their predictions of their future satisfaction with services; this is something that would imply an impact bias.

Paper II discusses two randomised experiments containing critical incidents that were conducted in order to investigate the possible existence of a focusing illusion, which could lead to an intensity bias.

For Paper III, a longitudinal study was conducted to investigate whether car users’ remembered satisfaction differed from their on-line experienced satisfaction with public transport, and whether it is the car users’ experienced satisfaction or their remembered satisfaction that influences their desire to repeat the experience of public transport use.

Paper IV reports on two randomised experiments containing a generic and a self-relevant defocusing technique. These experiments were conducted to investigate whether defocusing is a viable means of counteracting the adverse effects of the focusing illusion.

*Paper I: Affective Forecasting: Predicting and Experiencing Satisfaction with Public Transport*

The aim of Paper I, Study 1 was to investigate whether non-users of public transport reported lower satisfaction levels than frequent users of services. The study used a major European survey regarding satisfaction with public transport in and around Stockholm, Sweden, with data collected in 2006 from 1000 respondents. The survey consisted of 17 items related to overall satisfaction with services, as well as attribute-specific satisfaction (e.g., travel time, seat availability, whether vehicles were clean and modern, distance to nearest bus stop, safety onboard vehicles and at stations, and employee information and friendliness). A factor analysis of the items (principal component analysis) resulted in three factors, which were interpreted as reliability (travel time, waiting time, seat availability), comfort (cleanliness of vehicles, information, staff behaviour, comfort), and safety (safety onboard vehicles and safety at stations). Comparisons were made between non-users (those who travelled by
public transport once a month or less) and users (those who travelled by public transport more than once a month) and were measured as t-tests. Non-users reported lower overall satisfaction and satisfaction with the reliability and safety of the services, but not with the comfort aspect. Based on previous research into affective forecasting, it was hypothesised that non-users’ reports of their satisfaction could be inaccurate due to an impact bias; this bias was subsequently investigated in Paper I, Study 2.

The aim of Paper I, Study 2 was to empirically examine whether habitual car users were able to accurately predict their future satisfaction with public transport. The sample consisted of 106 participants, all of whom used their cars as their primary travel mode to and from work but would also objectively be able to travel by bus or train given that public transport services were operating between their homes and workplaces and that the stops/stations were within walking distance. The participants were recruited through radio spots, letters of invitation sent to workplaces, and visits to private homes by local transportation authorities. The participants voluntarily agreed to use public transport to and from their workplaces, signing a contract to use the services on a daily basis, and received a free one-month ticket. The participants completed online questionnaire before, during, at the end of, and two weeks after their one-month public transport period. The results from repeated-measures MANOVA showed that the car users experienced greater satisfaction with public transport than they had predicted they would. Therefore, the results support the hypothesis that car users mispredict their satisfaction levels due to an impact bias.

**Paper II: Effects of Critical Incidents on Car Users’ Predicted Satisfaction with Public Transport**

The aim of Paper II, Study 1 was to investigate whether a focusing illusion is the cause of car users’ inaccurate predictions about their future satisfaction with public transport. Fifty-six habitual car users who had stated their intention to
change their travel behaviour in favour of more public transport use participated in this study. Three variations (one positive, one negative and one neutral) of a frequent critical incident in public transport were used as focusing tasks. The participants were randomly assigned one of three variations of the same critical incident, or a control condition with no critical incident. The respondents started by rating their current satisfaction with public transport, before reading the description of the critical incident. Finally, they predicted what their satisfaction would be if they would encounter that same incident when using public transport. The participants in the control condition did not read any descriptions of critical incidents; they only predicted what their satisfaction would be if they were to use public transport. The results from inter-group multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVA) showed that the group subjected to the negatively-framed critical incident predicted lower levels of satisfaction than the other groups. The fact that the car users predicted lower satisfaction, both overall and on several attribute-satisfaction measures, implies that their predictions were biased by a focusing illusion. The conclusion is that the stated intention of car users to undertake a shift in travel mode may have represented the expectation of a pleasant experience. This expectation may have been stronger than the positive and neutral variances of the critical incidents, which may have resulted in similar predictions of satisfaction in these groups.

The primary aim of Paper II, Study 2 was to further investigate whether car users’ predictions are affected by a focusing illusion. A more specific aim was to eliminate the possible effect of positive expectations on these predictions. Thirty-eight car users who had not stated their intention to change their travel mode participated in this part. Two variations of a critical incident (one positive and one negative) were used as focusing tasks. The participants were randomly assigned one of two variations of the same critical incident, or a control condition with no critical incident. As was the case with Paper II, Study 1, respondents rated their current satisfaction with public transport and then read the description of the critical incident. They then predicted what their
satisfaction would be if they would encounter that same incident when using public transport. The participants in the control condition did not read any descriptions of critical incidents and only predicted their satisfaction if they were to use public transport. The results from inter-group multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVA) showed that the group subjected to the negatively-framed critical incident predicted lower satisfaction levels than the other groups. This implies that the car users’ predictions were biased due to a focusing illusion in the negative condition.

**Paper III: The Role of Predicted, On-Line Experienced, and Remembered Satisfaction in Current Choice of Public Transport Use**

Paper III had two main aims. The first was to empirically examine whether car users were able to recall their previously experienced satisfaction with the public transport services; that is, whether their remembered satisfaction was similar to their on-line experienced satisfaction with the services. The second aim was to investigate whether their current choice of public transport use (that is, their desire to repeat the public transport experience) was motivated by their remembered satisfaction or their on-line experienced satisfaction. The sample initially consisted of 106 car users who, prior to using the services, first predicted their future satisfaction with public transport, with regard to both overall satisfaction and satisfaction with quality attributes. They then reported their on-line experienced satisfaction with public transport during their actual use of the services. Two years later, the car users were asked to recall their satisfaction with the services at the time of actual use and to report their present frequency of public transport use, as well as their planned frequency of public transport use during the forthcoming year. Sixty-two car users responded in the final wave. The results from repeated measures’ ANOVAs and MANOVAs showed that the car users were unable to accurately recall their satisfaction, both in terms of overall satisfaction and with regard to a number of quality aspects in the public transport services. The car users’ on-line
experienced satisfaction was notably higher than their remembered satisfaction. It was evident from the results that the car users misremembered the satisfaction they had actually experienced.

In addition, Path Analysis revealed that only the car users’ overall remembered satisfaction, not their overall on-line experienced satisfaction, accounted for their current choice of public transport use. It can be concluded from this that it is the car users’ remembered satisfaction that influences their desire to repeat the public transport experience, not their on-line experienced satisfaction. Therefore, the users’ current choice of public transport use can be interpreted as an implicit affective forecast about their potential satisfaction with public transport. It may seem that the car users’ explicit affective forecasts (predicted satisfaction), as well as their implicit affective forecasts (inferred from their current choices) differ from the satisfaction they actually experienced while using the public transport services. The car users were simply more satisfied than they had expected to be beforehand and had remembered afterwards.

*Paper IV: Counteracting the Focusing Illusion: Effects of Defocusing on Car Users’ Predicted Satisfaction with Public Transport*

The primary aim of Paper IV was to investigate whether a generic and self-relevant defocusing technique would counteract the adverse effects of the focusing illusion, which would increase the car users’ predicted satisfaction with public transport. An additional aim was to investigate the effects of car use habit on car users’ predicted satisfaction with public transport, regardless of an experimental defocusing manipulation.

In Paper IV, Study 1, 50 car users were subjected to a randomised experiment that involved a generic defocusing technique. The experimental group first estimated the time they spent each day on each of 10 pre-selected activities, and then predicted their satisfaction with public transport. The members of the control group only predicted their future satisfaction with
public transport. It was hypothesised that the car users' predicted satisfaction would increase when they were prompted to reflect on activities that would remain unchanged, even if the user undertook a travel mode switch. The results from ordinary least-squares (OLS) simple linear regression analyses showed that the generic defocusing technique did not have any effect on the car users' predicted satisfaction. When interpreting the results, it was hypothesised that the generic defocusing technique did not contain sufficiently personally relevant activities, which meant that it did not require sufficient personal involvement in the task to generate the hypothesised effect.

Consequently, a more self-relevant defocusing technique was employed in Paper IV, Study 2, with the participants selecting their own activities. It was hypothesised that this would make participants reflect upon relevant activities, which would require more involvement in the task. Firstly, a sample of 42 car users were asked to think about the activities in their daily lives that consumed the most time and to estimate the time spent on each activity. The car users were then asked to predict their future satisfaction with public transport (the control group only predicted their future satisfaction, as was the case in Study 1). Results from ordinary least-squares (OLS) simple linear regression analyses showed that the self-relevant defocusing had an effect, which counteracted the focusing illusion by increasing the car users' predicted satisfaction with regard to a number of quality attributes. Paper IV, Study 1 and Paper IV, Study 2 both found that car-use habit accounted for the level of predicted satisfaction, regardless of the experimental defocusing manipulation. In other words, the higher the car-use habit, the lower the predicted satisfaction. Thus, car-use habit may have an adverse effect on predicted satisfaction that appears difficult to counteract with defocusing techniques.
Discussion

The ever-increasing use of cars poses a threat to the environment in general and, in particular, to quality of life, especially in urban areas. Novel approaches are needed in order to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying the reluctance of car users to use public transport. This thesis has challenged the managerial assumption that car users are able to make accurate predictions about their potential or forthcoming satisfaction with public transport (namely, that their reluctance to use public transport is based on the fact that they will actually not be very satisfied with this mode of transport). On the contrary, the present thesis has found support for the hypothesis that car users are reluctant to use public transport due to a focusing illusion and that experiencing public transport leads to greater satisfaction than car users initially predict.

Based on a review of earlier research into affective forecasting (e.g., Wilson & Gilbert, 2003), Paper I, Study 1 hypothesised that non-users of public transport would be less satisfied with the services than more frequent users. The results showed that this was indeed the case, so the hypothesis was supported. Consequently, Paper I, Study 2 hypothesised that this difference in satisfaction was an effect of non-users being biased in their evaluations. The results of Paper I, Study 2 showed that car users do not make accurate predictions about their future satisfaction with public transport, which supports the hypothesis that car users mispredict their future satisfaction with the services.

Studies 1 and 2 of Paper II support the hypothesis that the focusing illusion is responsible for the impact bias in car users’ predictions about their future satisfaction with public transport. They did this by showing that focusing on negative or undesirable employee behaviour caused car users to predict lower satisfaction with public transport, both overall and with regard to certain service attributes. In fact, focusing on one single negative critical incident was
enough to alter car users' predictions about their future satisfaction with the services.

There was no observed effect of positive critical incidents on car users' predictions. One explanation for this finding is that the positive expectations of the participants in Paper II, Study 1 had no effect; this is a reasonable interpretation given that relatively similar results were obtained during both parts of Paper II. Another explanation is that the results reflect the fact that the participants in both parts of Paper II had positive expectations with regard to the services. For instance, appropriate employee behaviour (such as the bus driver waiting at the bus stop for a passenger), is expected and will not generate any increased satisfaction levels. On the other hand, a bus that leaves the station despite the driver being aware of a late-arriving passenger, will clearly generate dissatisfaction.

The results from Paper III support the hypothesis that car users are unable to correctly remember the level of satisfaction they experienced while actually using and experiencing the services, and that it is their memories – and not their actual experiences – that influence their desire to repeat the experience of public transport use. Considering that affective forecasts (and therefore predictions) may implicitly be inferred from the car users' choices to use (or not to use) public transport, it is evident that both the explicit (observable predictions) and the implicit (current choices) affective forecasts differ from the satisfaction that the car users actually experienced at the time of using the services.

Paper IV, Study 2 found that a self-relevant defocusing technique was successful in increasing car users' predicted satisfaction with public transport, which supported the hypotheses. One reasonable explanation for this is that a self-relevant defocusing technique actually reduces the impact of the focusing illusion by making car users reflect upon all of their daily activities, as well as the amount of time they spend on these activities. The primary, and adverse, effect of the focusing illusion is that it makes car users maintain an undue focus on the travel mode switch. As a result of this, a car user tends to forget the
elements of their life that will remain unchanged, even if a travel mode switch is undertaken. However, a self-relevant defocusing technique can help a car user focus on the wider context of their life. This can make the user realise that the presumed emotional effect of a travel mode switch could be absorbed in the larger context of the events in his or her daily life. Although the participants’ (in Paper IV, Study 2) current mood (while participating in the study) may have been affected by thinking about their daily activities, something which may influence judgments (Västfjäll, Peters & Slovic, 2009), it is equally likely that the defocusing-effect is related to construal-level, in which psychological proximity (Trope & Liberman, 2010) plays an important role in cognitive processing.

This thesis reports results that are in line with previous research into affective forecasting; specifically, people also mispredict their future satisfaction with regard to public transport. Obviously, undertaking a switch in travel mode does not create a permanent condition (unlike, say, becoming permanently disabled) or a transient event such as seeing one’s favourite football team win or lose. However, switching travel mode does represent a deliberate and voluntary action that implies a daily, future behavioural change. Previous research into affective forecasting has not investigated this aspect. So, one of this thesis’ contributions to the ongoing research into affective forecasting is that mispredictions about future levels of satisfaction are also present in terms of predicting the satisfaction outcomes of future behavioural changes. The thesis has also investigated actual behavioural changes in a field setting – that is, behaviours that take place in real life situations – while previous research has been primarily concerned with experiments containing imagined future events that may or may not happen.

One interesting remark pertains to the results from previous research into affective forecasting, the general findings of which are that people tend to overestimate the intensity or duration of future emotions as a response to future events. Although the results from this thesis are in line with previous research into affective forecasting in that people mispredict the intensity of future emotions (such as satisfaction), there is still one distinct difference. In
this thesis, car users underestimate the positive effects of a future event; this is somewhat different than results from previous research, in which people tended to overestimate both positive and negative emotions. Therefore, the results of the present study may imply, albeit somewhat speculatively, that car users actually perceived the future switching of their travel mode as something negative, and that they therefore overestimated the negative effect of that switch. This contrasts with underestimation of the positive effect, even though the effect manifested itself on the satisfaction part of the satisfaction-dissatisfaction scale. These results have several managerial implications. Firstly, car users cannot be assumed to be able to accurately predict their potential satisfaction with public transport. Secondly, it should not be assumed that car users are able to correctly remember the satisfaction they actually experienced when they actually used the services, due to their memory’s susceptibility to being influenced by biases. Consequently, car users are not able to make their decisions according to accurate evaluations of satisfaction. Thirdly, car users’ biased evaluations are likely to result in mispredictions about how well public transport services will satisfy their travel needs, as well as faulty recollections of how the services have actually satisfied them in the past, which could subsequent result in reluctance to use public transport. Fourthly, since mispredictions about future satisfaction levels are likely to occur, the framework of affective forecasting is applicable with regard to understanding people’s reluctance to also undertake other types of behavioural changes; examples could be related to behaviours that protect an individual’s health or reduce the potential risk of illness or accidents. Fifthly, it does not seem to be possible to correct reluctance to use public transport by introducing positive features. In other words, car users might not be influenced by positive advertisements about public transport to the extent hoped for. This may also be the case with regard to people’s reluctance to undertake other types of behavioural change, whereby positive advertisements may not have the desired effect. Finally, and fortunately, it seems to be possible to counteract mispredictions caused by the focusing illusion, at least to some extent.
Therefore, when car users are prompted to reflect upon things in life that will remain unchanged even if a travel mode switch is undertaken, they are able to make more accurate predictions about their potential future satisfaction with public transport. This may cause them to be less reluctant to use public transport for their daily travel. The results of this thesis may be subject to certain limitations. Firstly, the participants in Paper I, Study 2 may not be representative of the general population of car users, which may bias the results and subsequent interpretations. For instance, participants who volunteer to take part in the study may have predicted a high level of satisfaction due to anticipating a pleasurable experience. However, if the general population of car users is less positive about public transport, there could be greater discrepancies between predictions and experiences than those found in this study; this could reflect a situation in which real-life predictions may actually be even more biased.

Secondly, a field experiment does not allow the same strict level of control over variables as a laboratory experiment, which may impose some restrictions on causal inferences from the results, even though the field experiment is very similar to the context of everyday life, thereby ensuring greater external or ecological validity. However, Paper II included participants who had stated their intention to change their current travel mode and others who had not. Both parts of Paper II offer results that support each other, which implies a robustness that is interesting to note from a validity point of view. Paper II, Study 1 was conducted in a natural setting, whereas Paper II, Study 2 was conducted in a laboratory setting; this is an example of the triangulation of methodology (Kristensson, Matthing & Johansson, 2008).

A possible limitation of Paper III is in regard to the final response rate, although when the relatively long time span (two years) is considered, it would hardly seem possible to increase this rate. However, because the findings in this paper are in line with results from previous research (e.g., Wirtz et al., 2003) into complex societal contexts, it seems justifiable to argue that car users’ desire to repeat the public transport experience is influenced by biased memories, not
their actual experiences. Another limitation regards the inference of preference from the car users’ choices. One cannot rule out the possibility that the car users were unable to repeat the public transport experience for reasons other than those related to potential satisfaction with the services, and one cannot completely rule out that their recall of previous satisfaction is affected by their current appraisals (Levine et al., 2001) of the public transport services.

With regard to Paper IV, a sample of students may differ from the general population of car users. On the other hand, the fact that all four papers seem to offer results that support each other in various ways implies that the potential difference between students and a general population of car users may not be particularly large after all.

**Future Research**

To reduce the adverse effects of car use on the environment, alternative approaches are required in order to promote public transport to car users, as they do not accurately predict their future satisfaction with public transport. These mispredictions constitute an impact bias, which is probably influenced by the focusing illusion. This thesis has shown that the focusing illusion can be counteracted by using a self-relevant defocusing technique, with self-selected and therefore relevant activities that promote personal involvement in the task. Future research should also employ defocusing but with new samples in other contexts, to identify whether the results support the findings in this thesis. To further explore ways of correcting the adverse effects of this focusing illusion, either of two paths can be followed during future research. The first path is to investigate whether car users’ evaluations and predictions improve if they are given assistance to gaining access to their memories. Reconstruction methods that can be used to help car users correctly remember their previously experienced satisfaction include the day reconstruction method (cf., Kahneman et al., 2004) and the event reconstruction method (cf., Grube et al., 2008). These methods may help car users reconstruct a particular event or a particular
day in their lives, thereby accessing their episodic memory for the emotions that accompanied the events of that particular day or within a particular event. The second path is to investigate whether awareness of the process of adaptation, which is described as a distinct type of focusing illusion (Ubel et al., 2005), is also likely to improve car users’ predictions about their satisfaction with public transport. Inviting car users to reflect on behavioural changes that they may have needed to undergo in their lives may lead them to become aware that they may be able to adapt to new and different changes in their lives, and that these changes may not be as emotionally disturbing as they expected them to be.

However, this thesis provides support for the notion that the focusing illusion is the psychological mechanism responsible for the impact bias in car users’ predictions about public transport, which could explain their reluctance to use public transport more often. However, there may also be other domains (such as increasing health and reducing health risks and accidents) in which people are reluctant to undertake a behavioural change; this could include domains where managers would benefit equally from knowledge of these mechanisms. Therefore, attempts should also be made to explore how people predict their future satisfaction, as well as remember their previously experienced satisfaction (that is, whether they actually have previous experiences) in other domains where behavioural changes are needed. It is also worth investigating whether defocusing techniques and reconstruction methods may also be helpful with regard to undergoing behavioural changes other than those related to travel mode choices.

Conclusions

This thesis has contributed to the framework of affective forecasting both in a theoretical sense and an empirical sense. Firstly, it supports the framework of using interventions in a field context, which has implications for external validity. Secondly, the thesis employed randomised experiments, both to disclose the mechanisms responsible for biases and with regard to
counteracting these mechanisms; this has implications for internal validity. Thirdly, the thesis explores affective forecasting in a completely new and complex context; namely, satisfaction with public transport. Finally, the thesis offers an overall view of the multiple components enclosed in the affective forecasting of complex contexts.

Specifically, this study has shown that car users are unable to accurately predict their potential future satisfaction with public transport and that this shortcoming is an effect that is influenced by the focusing illusion. Negative aspects of public transport services generate lower predicted satisfaction, whereas positive aspects do not generate higher predicted satisfaction. Actually experiencing public transport services generates more accurate predictions and greater perceived satisfaction.

However, it is both time-consuming and expensive to recruit car users and implement trial passenger projects in order to make car users experience public transport. Therefore, public transport authorities and contractors should attempt to engage in alternative marketing approaches in order to attract car users and help them undertake a possible shift in their travel mode.

The introduction of features outside the domain of public transport, which may remain unchanged despite undertaking a shift in travel mode, has proven effective at drawing the attention of car users away from the service's initially narrow range of salient negative features (cf., Ayton et al., 2007), and has therefore generated greater predicted satisfaction. Introducing the process of adaptation may make car users aware of the possibility of adapting to a new travel mode (i.e., public transport), which could, similarly, moderate the adverse effects of this distinct kind of focusing illusion (Ubel et al., 2005) and generate greater predicted satisfaction.

Helping car users reconstruct previous experiences with public transport, if they have experiences from this domain, may help them correctly recall their actual experiences and emotions, which could cause them to evaluate the qualities of the public transport services more correctly.
With regard to the effects of defocusing presented herein, it can be tempting to offer an unconventional way for authorities and companies to address car users and invite them to undertake a travel mode switch. Public transport authorities and companies would obviously like to draw the attention of potential customers towards the qualities of public transport. However, persuasive information about the qualities of public transport is unlikely to influence habitual car users (Beale and Bonsall, 2007). Instead, attempts could be made to de-emphasise the impact of the travel mode switch by means of defocusing, which would introduce a broader context and make car users aware of the parts of their life that would not change if they undertake a travel mode switch. At first glance, such an approach may seem counterintuitive; nevertheless, having considered the effects of defocusing seen in this thesis, it may be worthwhile testing such an application.

These actions may help achieve the overall goal of sustainable travel by helping car users to undertake a switch in travel mode, thereby contributing to a cleaner environment, which will enhance the quality of life of people in urban areas.

Other societal contexts and domains may also benefit substantially from the results of such research. There are many domains in which people may be reluctant to change their current behaviour, such as increasing healthy behaviour or reducing unhealthy behaviour. Authorities, companies, and managers in different societal domains cannot simply assume that people are capable of making accurate predictions about their future satisfaction, or, for that matter, of accurately remembering their previous satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that people’s judgements are often biased and to approach the target audience accordingly.
References


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Affective Forecasting in Travel Mode Choice

The general aim of this thesis was to investigate affective forecasting in the context of public transport.

A survey conducted in Paper I disclosed that non-users of public transport were less satisfied with the services than users. It was hypothesized that this is a result of biased evaluations. A subsequent field experiment revealed that car users were more satisfied with the services after a trial period than they predicted they would be, in support of the biased-evaluations hypothesis. To address the question of whether a focusing illusion (over-focusing on a limited range of aspects) is the psychological mechanism responsible for this bias, two experiments containing critical incidents were conducted in Paper II. These experiments investigated the impact of specific incidents on car users’ predicted satisfaction with public transport. A negative critical incident generated lower predicted satisfaction, both for car users with a stated intention to change their current travel mode, and for car users with no stated intention to change their travel mode, which support the hypothesis that car users’ inaccurate predictions about future satisfaction with public transport is caused by a focusing illusion. Paper III showed that car users misremember their satisfaction with public transport as a result of their recollections of satisfaction with public transport being lower than their on-line experienced satisfaction. Additionally, the desire to repeat the public transport experience is explained only by remembered satisfaction, not by on-line experienced satisfaction. Paper IV investigated whether defocusing would counteract the focusing illusion by introducing a broader context, thereby generating higher predicted satisfaction. A generic defocusing technique did not generate higher predicted satisfaction, whereas a self-relevant defocusing technique generated higher predicted satisfaction with public transport. Additionally, it was found that car-use habit accounted for the level of predicted satisfaction regardless of defocusing; the stronger the car-use habit, the lower the predicted satisfaction.

It is concluded that non-users of public transport rate the services lower than users do, and that car users become more satisfied when using the services than they predicted. These mispredictions are a result of the focusing illusion. Car users’ desire to repeat the public transport experience is influenced by their inaccurate memories of the services and not by their actual experiences. Defocusing may help car users make more accurate predictions about future satisfaction with public transport; this could facilitate a mode switch from using the car to using public transport services more often. Switching to a more sustainable transport mode could be beneficial for the individual and for society.