

Emotional Psychometric Evaluation of Words in a Tourism Context

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Affective lexical datasets based on valence, arousal, and dominance have substantially advanced the characterization of the behavioral, autonomic, and neurophysiological correlates of emotion. However, their use has predominantly been confined to neutral contexts, thereby limiting their ecological validity. Normative word ratings are widely used yet context-sensitive; for instance, Delatorre et al. (2019) reported significant modulation under suspense. However, the impact of leisure travel planning or booking contexts on affective word evaluation remains unexplored.

The aim of this study is to examine emotional responses to 711 Spanish words in an online tourism search context, in order to advance understanding of consumer behavior and develop a tool to streamline research in this domain.

METHOD

Stimuli: 711 tourism-related words from academic, web, and expert sources; 590 with normative data (Stadthagen-Gonzalez et al., 2017), 130 new.

Procedure: Online task; words presented once. Participants were instructed to evaluate the terms as if searching for information about a leisure trip, without additional contextual constraints to preserve spontaneous mental simulation (Delatorre et al., 2019) using SAM (Bradley & Lang, 1999)

Participants: N = 294 (from 424; 76 men, 24.85%; 218 women, 74.15%), aged 18–29 (M = 21.03, SD = 2.3).

Analysis: Semantic classification ranges: Negative (1–3), Neutral (3–7), Positive (7–9). Emotional Index (EI = arousal – valence) captured affective imbalance (Grollero et al., 2023; Tisak & Smith, 1994).

Design: Simulated travel planning; contextual ratings compared with neutral normative values.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Preliminary analyses revealed a strong correlation in valence ratings was observed across contexts ($r = .88$, $p < .0001$), whereas arousal showed a comparatively weaker association ($r = .33$, $p < .0001$).

No overall differences in the EI were detected between contexts ($t = -0.09$, $p = .931$; $U = 156,515$, $p = .580$, $r = -.02$). However, significant effects emerged when examining word categories: negative words showed higher EI differences ($t = 5.37$, $p < .001$; $d = 1.44$; $U = 659.50$, $p < .001$; $r = .68$), and positive words also differed significantly ($t = -5.47$, $p < .001$; $d = -0.83$; $U = 2,225$, $p < .001$; $r = -.41$), whereas no significant differences were observed for neutral words ($t = 1.49$, $p = .138$; $U = 111,536$, $p = .472$; $r = .03$) (Figure 1).

Results confirmed a strong correlation in valence but a weak association in arousal between the generic and tourism contexts, suggesting that emotional arousal is more context-dependent than valence.

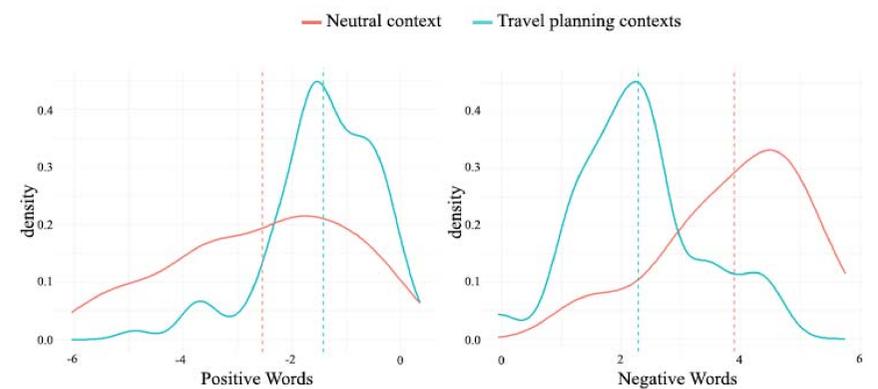


Figure 1. Descriptive results for the generic context (red) versus the tourism context (blue).

Regarding emotional differences across contexts, these were primarily observed in words with extreme valence, both negative and positive. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of developing context-specific affective databases, particularly in consumption settings, in order to enhance the validity and efficiency of research on consumers' affective experience.

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, preliminary findings suggest that affective word evaluations are modulated by contextual factors, particularly in the case of emotional arousal. While valence remains relatively stable across contexts, arousal appears to be more sensitive to situational influences, highlighting the importance of ecological validity in affective research. The observed differences in words with extreme valence further reinforce the role of context in shaping emotional responses.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

These results support the need for context-specific affective norms, especially in consumer settings, and provide a foundation for developing more ecologically valid tools to investigate affective processes in real-world decision-making.

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