

INTERNET USE AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

The current work investigates the determinants of life satisfaction in Georgia with a particular focus on Internet use by considering individuals as consumers and laborers. The main motivation is the idea that Internet use may increase the life satisfaction of individuals (consumers and workers) and eventually their productivity. Caucasus Barometer 2021 survey data covering 1,540 individuals are used for empirical analysis. Since life satisfaction is a binary variable (either satisfied or not satisfied), a logit model is employed to investigate the relationship. Findings indicate that the highest impact on life satisfaction is captured by income level. Accordingly, higher income levels end up with a higher probability of life satisfaction. Those who are female, young, educated, and employed are more likely to be satisfied with their lives. Finally, daily Internet use shows a positive effect on life satisfaction. In this context, it is stated that Georgia can develop and implement policies that encourage Internet use.

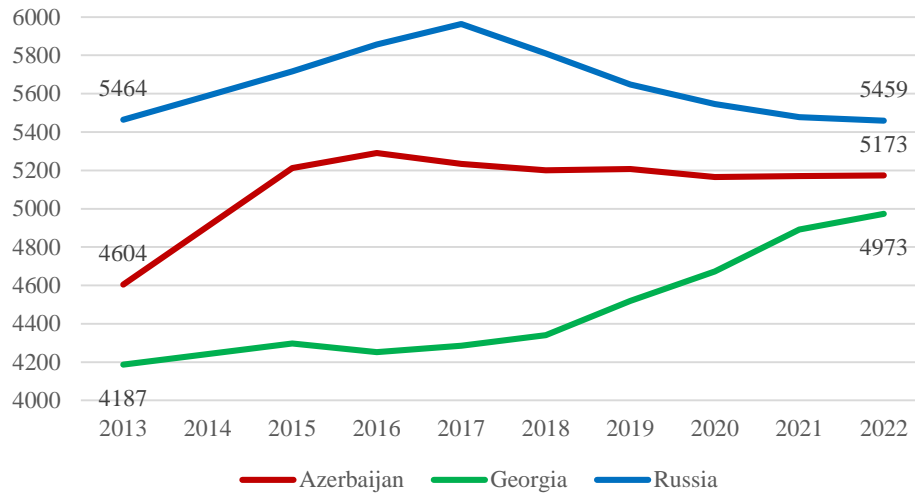
Keywords: Internet, Life Satisfaction, Microeconomics, Logit.

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1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is what people pursue. It can be seen that happiness and life satisfaction are synonymously used terms in the literature. Veenhoven (2012) defines happiness as “*the personal enjoyment of life overall*”. Although there may be more abstract ways, life satisfaction can be obtained from the consumption of goods or services. One of the services subject to consumption is the Internet. The Internet allows many things to be done quickly, such as communication, access to information, complex calculations, etc. Thus, Internet use may contribute to life satisfaction. In other words, the level of Internet use could be correlated with happiness level. Considering individuals as laborers, they are important parts of the country’s production. In this respect, happier labor force may bring more output. It may be useful to examine the relationship between life satisfaction and Internet use because of both utility and productivity.

Figure 1. Happiness scores of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia (2013-2022)



Source: Helliwell et al. (2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)

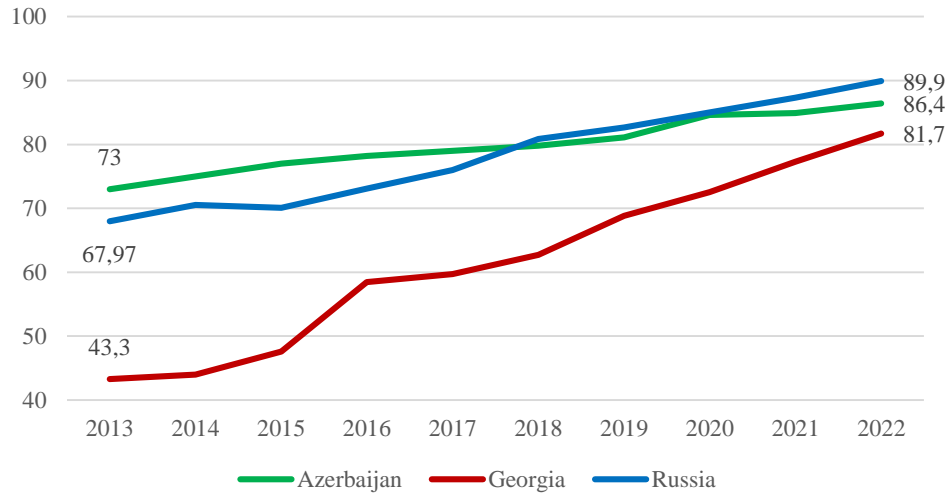
Note: Observations in 2014 are calculated by averaging the observations in 2013 and 2015.

Georgia is one of the former Soviet countries. In 2021, its GDP per capita (2015=100) was about \$4,927. However, its former counterparts, say Azerbaijan (\$5,341) and Russia (\$10,220), had higher figures in 2021 (World Bank, 2022). Similar situations apply to happiness levels and the shares of Internet users as seen in Figures 1 and 2.

The level of happiness can be examined by looking at happiness scores calculated in the World Happiness Reports. First, it would be useful to explain the top countries by year. Denmark in 2013 and 2016; Switzerland in 2015; and Norway in 2017 were ranked first while Finland has ranked first since 2018. Now we can examine Georgia, as well as post-Soviet countries Russia and Azerbaijan for comparison, in Figure 1. It is seen that Georgia always falls behind each of its former counterparts. However, its ranking has increased year by year, 134th in 2013 and 105th in 2022.

Internet users as a percentage of the population for each country are given in Figure 2. All countries exhibit an increasing trend. Between 2014 and 2016, a parallel increase was observed in both the share of Internet users and the happiness scores in Georgia. However, the country falls behind the remaining countries each year. The share of Internet users in 2022 was predicted as 81.7% but the latest data from 2020 was 72.5%.

Figure 2. Internet users (%) in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia (2013-2022)



Source: World Bank (2022)

Note: Observations in 2021 and 2022 are predicted using least squares.

Considering the Internet’s importance on life satisfaction and Georgia’s underperformance, this paper investigates the relationship between them in Georgia. It is hypothesized that “Internet use contributes to life satisfaction”. Using 2021 survey data, the life satisfaction of individuals is modeled as logit. Among others, empirical results indicate that the highest impact on life satisfaction is from high income and daily Internet use also increases the probability of being satisfied.

The paper is organized as follows: The second section reviews the earlier works, the third section explains the empirical strategy, the fourth section gives empirical results, and the final section concludes.

2. Literature Review

Table 1 summarizes the literature on life satisfaction and happiness and presents the coefficients of some explanatory variables. It can be said that frequently used explanatory variables include gender, age, marital status (partner), parental status (child), education, income, employment (job), health, and residency (city). However, technology-related variables, as well as religion, are used in a few studies.

Most of the studies considered here indicate that being female (e.g., Appleton & Song, 2008), having a partner (e.g., Owusu Ansah et al., 2022), and being younger (e.g., Helliwell et al., 2009) increase the probability of being satisfied. Education (e.g., Kolosnitsyna et al., 2017) and employment (e.g., Ngoo et al., 2015) also contribute to life satisfaction. The coefficient of income is either positive (e.g., Zhang et al., 2022) or insignificant (e.g., Kamo, 1998). Good health (Jovanović & Joshanloo, 2019) is also expected to increase life satisfaction. However, the impact of child and living in a city or urban remain unclear since the number of studies that found positive and negative effects are equal.

Table 1. Summary of selected studies

| Author | Time | Country/Region | Findings |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|---|
| Kamo (1998) | 1995 | Japan (Men) | Partner (+), Age (+), Education (.), Job (.), Income (+) |
| | | Japan (Women) | Partner (+), Age (+), Education (+), Job (-), Income (.) |
| Ji et al. (2002) | 1993 | China | Health (.), Income (+), Education (.), Job (.), Child (.), City (+), Female (.), Age (.) |
| Appleton & Song (2008) | 2002 | China | Income (+), Employment (-), Age (-), Age-sq. (+), Female (+), Partner (+), Child (.), Health (+), Job (+), City (.) |
| Helliwell et al. (2009) | 2007 | Global | Female (+), Age (-), Age-sq. (+), Partner (.), Income (+) |
| Kavetsos & Koutroumpis (2011) | 2005-2008 | Europe | Technology ownership (+), Female (+), Age (-), Age-sq. (+), Partner (+), Employed (+), Income (+), City (-) |
| Brown et al. (2012) | 2008 | New Zealand | Age (-), Age-sq. (+), Female (+), Child (.), Health (+), Education (+), Income (+), Employment (+), Partner (+) |
| Ebrahim et al. (2013) | 2008 | South Africa | Age (-), Age-sq. (+), Education (+), Partner (+), Female (-), Health (+), Religion (+), Child (+), Income (+), Employment (+), City (+) |
| Pénard et al. (2013) | 2008 | Luxemburg | Internet use (+), Age (.), Age-sq. (+), Partner (+), Female (.), Education (-), Job (-), Health (+), Income (+) |
| Meyer & Dunga (2014) | 2014 | South Africa (Low income) | Income (+), Employment (.), Age (.) |
| Ngoo et al. (2015) | 2005-2007 | East Asia | Female (.), Age (+), Education (+), Income (+), Partner (+), Employment (.) |
| | | South Asia | Female (.), Age (+), Education (+), Income (+), Partner (+), Employment (-) |
| | | Central and West Asia | Female (-), Age (-), Education (.), Income (+), Partner (+), Employment (.) |
| | | Southeast Asia | Female (.), Age (-), Education (+), Income (+), Partner (+), Employment (+) |
| Kolosnitsyna et al. (2017) | 2009-2012 | Russia (Older age) | Age (+), Age-sq. (-), Health (-), Education (+), Income (+), Job (+), Partner (+), Child (.) |
| Jovanović and Joshanloo (2019) | 2007 | Serbia | Female (.), Age (-), Age-sq. (.), Health (+), Income (+), Religion (.), Education (+), Employment (+), City (.), Partner (.) |
| Wang et al. (2020) | 2014 | Guyana (Young adults) | Female (+), Partner (.), City (-), Education (.), Income (.), Internet user (.), Health (.) |

Table 1. (cont'd)

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------|--|
| Ulutürk-Akman (2021) | 2019 | Türkiye | Female (+), Partner (+), Education (+), Age (+), Income (+), |
| Owusu Ansah et al. (2022) | 2017-2018 | Ghana | Female (+), Age (-), Education (+), Partner (+), Child (-), Income (+), City (.) |
| Zhang et al. (2022) | 2010-2018 | China | Female (+), Age (+), Education (-), Partner (.), Income (+), Health (+) |

Note: (+) significant positive impact, (-) significant negative impact, (.) insignificant.

As for technology-related variables, Wang et al. (2020) find that being an Internet user has no significant influence on life satisfaction among young adults in Guyana. However, Pénard et al. (2013) reveal that internet use increases the probability of being happy in Luxemburg. Finally, the findings of Kavetsos and Koutroumpis (2011) support the positive impact of technology ownership in Europe. Also, Doyar et al. (2022) positive effects of technology ownership on internet use in Georgia.

3. Empirical Strategy

3.1. Data

The survey data used is sourced from the Caucasus Research Resource Centers' (CRRC, 2021) website. The survey was implemented in Georgia in 2021 and includes 1,540 respondents.

Table 2. Variables

| Variable | Categories | Explanation |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Sex | 1 for <i>Female</i> and 0 for <i>Male</i> . | Sex of the respondent |
| Age (18-24 years) | 1 for 18-24 years, 0 otherwise. | Age of the respondent |
| Age (25-44 years) | 1 for 25-44 years, 0 otherwise. | |
| Age (45-64 years) | 1 for 45-64 years, 0 otherwise. | |
| Age (64+ years) | 1 for 64+ years, 0 otherwise. | |
| Education (2-8 years) | 1 for 2-8 years, 0 otherwise. | Years of education of the respondent |
| Education (9-16 years) | 1 for 9-16 years, 0 otherwise. | |
| Education (16+ years) | 1 for 16+ years, 0 otherwise. | |
| Child | 1 for <i>Yes</i> and 0 for <i>No</i> . | Lives with children in the household. |
| Partner | 1 for <i>Yes</i> and 0 for <i>No</i> . | The respondent is married or in a relationship. |
| Income (<i>Low</i>) | 1 for <i>Low income</i> , 0 otherwise. | The economic status of the household. |
| Income (<i>Middle</i>) | 1 for <i>Middle income</i> , 0 otherwise. | |
| Income (<i>High</i>) | 1 for <i>High income</i> , 0 otherwise. | |
| Job (<i>Unemployed</i>) | 1 for <i>Unemployed</i> , 0 otherwise. | Employment status of the respondent. |
| Job (<i>Other</i>) | 1 for <i>Other</i> , 0 otherwise. | |
| Job (<i>Employed</i>) | 1 for <i>Employed</i> , 0 otherwise. | |

Table 2. (cont'd)

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Internet use (<i>Never</i>) | 1 for <i>Never</i> , 0 otherwise. | Internet use density of the respondent. |
| Internet use (<i>Rarely</i>) | 1 for <i>Rarely</i> , 0 otherwise. | |
| Internet use (<i>Daily</i>) | 1 for <i>Daily</i> , 0 otherwise. | |

Respondents' ages vary between 18 and 94 years while their years of education vary between 2 and 25 years. The variables and their explanations are given in Table 2.

Table 3. Descriptive characteristics of the sample by life satisfaction

| Variable | Category | Not satisfied | Satisfied | Total |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| Sex | <i>Male</i> | 296 (55.33%) | 239 (44.67%) | 535 |
| | <i>Female</i> | 525 (54.01%) | 447 (45.99%) | 972 |
| Age | <i>18-24 years</i> | 19 (21.35%) | 70 (78.65%) | 89 |
| | <i>25-44 years</i> | 163 (41.58%) | 229 (58.42%) | 392 |
| | <i>45-64 years</i> | 311 (58.13%) | 224 (41.87%) | 535 |
| | <i>64+ years</i> | 328 (66.80%) | 163 (33.20%) | 491 |
| Education | <i>2-8 years</i> | 56 (74.67%) | 19 (25.33%) | 75 |
| | <i>9-16 years</i> | 700 (54.60%) | 582 (45.40%) | 1282 |
| | <i>16+ years</i> | 61 (44.53%) | 76 (55.47%) | 137 |
| Child | <i>No</i> | 532 (58.78%) | 373 (41.22%) | 905 |
| | <i>Yes</i> | 289 (48.01%) | 313 (51.99%) | 602 |
| Partner | <i>No</i> | 393 (62.78%) | 233 (37.22%) | 626 |
| | <i>Yes</i> | 427 (48.52%) | 453 (51.48%) | 880 |
| Income | <i>Low</i> | 580 (67.29%) | 282 (32.71%) | 862 |
| | <i>Middle</i> | 189 (39.38%) | 291 (60.62%) | 480 |
| | <i>High</i> | 36 (25.71%) | 104 (74.29%) | 140 |
| Job | <i>Unemployed</i> | 135 (60.00%) | 90 (40.00%) | 225 |
| | <i>Other</i> | 464 (60.81%) | 299 (39.19%) | 763 |
| | <i>Employed</i> | 220 (42.88%) | 293 (57.12%) | 513 |
| Internet use | <i>Never</i> | 371 (68.45%) | 171 (31.55%) | 542 |
| | <i>Rarely</i> | 88 (68.22%) | 41 (31.78%) | 129 |
| | <i>Daily</i> | 359 (43.41%) | 468 (56.59%) | 827 |

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics. Respondents in categories male, female, old age groups, low level of education groups, no children in the household, no partner, low income, unemployed and other job groups, Internet non-users, and rare Internet users are not satisfied with their lives. However, respondents in categories of young age groups, high level of education group, children in the household, having a partner, higher income groups, employed, and daily Internet users are satisfied with their lives.

3.2. Model and Methodology

The empirical strategy employed here can be explained by referring to Long & Freese (2001: 100-101). The dependent variable life satisfaction (y_i) has a binary nature as follows:

$$y_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } y_i^* = \mathbf{x}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta} + u_i > 0 \\ 0 & \text{if } y_i^* \leq 0 \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

y_i takes the value of 1 if the latent variable y_i^* is higher than zero. In this case, the respondent is said to be satisfied with their life. Otherwise, y_i takes the value of 0 and the respondent is understood not to be satisfied with their life. \mathbf{x}_i is the vector of explanatory variables and includes sex, age, education, children in the household, marital status, income, job, and Internet use. $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ corresponds to the vector of coefficients. Finally, the random error term u_i , which has zero mean, is assumed to have logistic distribution. Therefore, the following logit model is employed to investigate the relationship:

$$\Pr(y_i = 1|\mathbf{x}) = \frac{\exp(\mathbf{x}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta})}{1 + \exp(\mathbf{x}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta})} \quad (2)$$

4. Estimation Results

Table 4 presents marginal effects calculated from the logit model. The logit model produced lower information criteria than the probit model. Results from the probit model can be found in the Appendix.

Table 4. Marginal effects calculated from the logit model

| Variable | Marg. effect | Std. error |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Sex: <i>Female</i> | 0.072*** | 0.027 |
| Age (Base: 18-24 years) | | |
| 25-44 years | -0.274*** | 0.062 |
| 45-64 years | -0.372*** | 0.061 |
| 64+ years | -0.352*** | 0.064 |
| Education (Base: 2-8 years) | | |
| 9-16 years | 0.088 | 0.059 |
| 16+ years | 0.132* | 0.071 |
| Child: <i>Yes</i> | -0.002 | 0.027 |
| Partner: <i>Yes</i> | 0.141*** | 0.026 |
| Lives in a city: <i>Yes</i> | -0.021 | 0.025 |
| Economic status (Base: <i>Low</i>) | | |
| <i>Middle</i> | 0.189*** | 0.024 |
| <i>High</i> | 0.291*** | 0.043 |
| Job (Base: <i>Unemployed</i>) | | |
| <i>Other</i> | 0.020 | 0.039 |

Tablo 4 (cont'd)

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| <i>Employed</i> | 0.085** | 0.037 |
| Internet use (Base: <i>Never</i>) | | |
| <i>Rarely</i> | -0.085* | 0.047 |
| <i>Daily</i> | 0.072** | 0.031 |
| Observations | 1,493 | |
| Pseudo R-squared | 0.133 | |
| Chi-square | 273.91*** | |
| Akaike information criterion | 1814.869 | |
| Bayesian information criterion | 1899.806 | |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The model's explanatory power is about 13.3%. It is known that pseudo R² can be low in microeconomic models (Lera-López et al., 2011). The model is statistically significant as the chi-square test indicates. The logit model is presented because it produces lower information criteria than the probit model.

Females are %0.7 more likely to be satisfied compared to males. Compared to those between the ages 18-24 years, people in 25-44 years, 45-64 years, and 64+ years are respectively 27.4%, 37.2%, and 35.2% less likely to be satisfied. Only a higher level of education has a significant impact on Life satisfaction. People with 16+ years of education are 13.2% more likely to be satisfied than those with 0-8 years of education. Neither living with a child in the household nor residing in a city has no significant effect.

Those who have partners are 14.1% more likely to be satisfied than single. The highest impacts on life satisfaction are captured by income levels. Compared to low income, middle income and high income end up with 29.1% and 18.9% higher probability of satisfaction. There is no significant impact of being in the other job groups. However, the employed appear 0.85% more likely to be satisfied than the unemployed. Interestingly, rare Internet users are found 0.85% less likely to be satisfied than Internet non-users. However, everyday Internet users are 0.72% more likely to be satisfied than those who do not use the Internet.

5. Conclusions

Life satisfaction of individuals as consumers and workforce can affect their utility and productivity levels. In the meantime, the place occupied by the internet, as well as other technologies, in people's lives has been increasing day by day. Therefore, if the internet influences life satisfaction, examining it will be important for a country's economy.

In this study, Georgia, which underperforms compared to some of its former partners, is examined. Survey data used for empirical analysis include 1,540 respondents and cover the year 2021. Life satisfaction is modeled as a function of internet use, as well as other variables. Within the framework of the logit model, findings indicate that being female, young, educated, and employed, as well as having a partner and high income are more likely to be satisfied with their life. These findings on sex, age, education, partner, income, and job are in parallel with Appleton and Song (2008), Helliwell et al. (2009), Brown et al. (2012), Ngoo et al. (2015), Ulutürk-Akman (2021), and Ebrahim et al. (2013), respectively. However, both child in the household and living in a city has no significant impact as in Ji et al. (2002) and Owusu Ansah et al. (2022). Young people and those in relationships being happier are

already expected outcomes. However, sources of positive impact of being female could be related to the social structure of Georgia. Therefore, it can be examined separately in the future research. Also, educated and employed people may be able to reach happiness more easily by using the knowledge and experience they own. Finally, employment and high income may be removing barriers to happiness.

A significant and positive coefficient of the life satisfaction variable confirms the hypothesis indicating “internet use contributes to life satisfaction”. This finding is compatible with Kavetsos and Koutroumpis (2011) and Pénard et al. (2013). The country may develop and implement policies to encourage Internet use in this regard.

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Çalışmanın yazarı, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedir.

The author declares that has no competing interests.

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APPENDIX

Table. Marginal effects from the probit model

| Variable | Marg. effect | Std. error |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Sex: <i>Female</i> | 0.070** | 0.027 |
| Age (Base: <i>18-24 years</i>) | | |
| <i>25-44 years</i> | -0.258*** | 0.059 |
| <i>45-64 years</i> | -0.356*** | 0.058 |
| <i>64+ years</i> | -0.336*** | 0.061 |
| Education (Base: <i>2-8 years</i>) | | |
| <i>9-16 years</i> | 0.087 | 0.058 |
| <i>16+ years</i> | 0.128* | 0.070 |
| Child: <i>Yes</i> | -0.000 | 0.027 |
| Partner: <i>Yes</i> | 0.137*** | 0.026 |
| Lives in a city: <i>Yes</i> | -0.020 | 0.025 |
| Economic status (Base: <i>Low</i>) | | |
| <i>Middle</i> | 0.193*** | 0.025 |
| <i>High</i> | 0.289*** | 0.043 |
| Job (Base: <i>Unemployed</i>) | | |
| <i>Other</i> | 0.018 | 0.039 |
| <i>Employed</i> | 0.084** | 0.037 |
| Internet use (Base: <i>Never</i>) | | |
| <i>Rarely</i> | -0.084* | 0.046 |
| <i>Daily</i> | 0.074** | 0.032 |
| Observations | 1,493 | |
| Pseudo R-squared | 0.132 | |
| Chi-square | 272.158*** | |
| Akaike information criterion | 1816.620 | |
| Bayesian information criterion | 1901.556 | |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1