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Rural residents' social distance with tourists: an affective interpretation

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of basic (i.e. positive and negative) and complex (i.e. emotional solidarity) emotions in explaining residents' preference for both intimate and casual social encounters (i.e. social distance) with tourists. Considering a burgeoning rural destination in the U.S., known for its natural and cultural amenities, data were collected on-site and online from 511 residents. A two-step sequence of analysis (i.e. confirmatory factor analysis followed by structural equation modelling) was undertaken to test 12 hypotheses within a proposed conceptual model. Eight hypotheses were supported; three of those not supported involved negative emotions as antecedents to emotional solidarity. A high degree of variance was explained in emotional solidarity and social distance. Implications and recommendations are also discussed.

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Positive emotions; negative emotions; emotional solidarity; social distance; resident and tourist relationship; social encounters

Introduction

Recently, there has been an increasing call to highlight the role of emotions in motivating and shaping tourism behaviours. The urge seems timely and appropriate given the significant role that emotions play in the development of individuals' perceptions and behaviours regarding tourism (Joo et al., 2023a; Joo et al., 2023b). Nevertheless, the extant work on emotions in tourism has been riddled with complexity and ambiguity (Volo, 2021). Emotion, as a construct, can be defined as loosely as a 'category of mental states' (Dixon, 2012, p. 33), and this results in a plethora of emotional states, making it more difficult to research them and apply the findings (Volo, 2021). A nearly indefinite list of emotions has been considered in tourism research, such as euphoria, apathy, irritation, and antagonism in Doxey's (1975) classic model; emotional solidarity in recent studies of residents and tourists (e.g. Joo et al., 2019; Woosnam et al., 2009), romance (e.g. Trauer & Ryan, 2005), or nostalgia (e.g. Cho et al., 2019), as well as basic feelings like shame and sadness (e.g. Shakeela & Weaver, 2012).

Drawing some distinctions among emotions would enable a more systematic understanding of how emotions dictate individual's reactions to tourism. Some emotions are universal across cultures and thereby more basic: happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, and surprise (Ekman, 1992). These

emotions tend to accompany immediate physiological and behavioural responses (Ekman, 1992). In tourism research, basic emotions usually appear as positive (e.g. happiness, love, or cheerfulness) and negative emotions (e.g. sadness, anger, or annoyance) (e.g. Kim et al., 2022). There is also a more complex layer of emotions that arises from individuals' appraisal of cues (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Most non-basic emotions addressed in tourism research, such as emotional solidarity (e.g. Woosnam et al., 2009) or nostalgia (e.g. Cho et al., 2020), belong here. Tourism research thus far has rarely distinguished the two forms of emotions and explored their collective impacts on individuals' intentions or behaviours regarding tourism.

Differentiating basic emotions from complex ones can bring additional knowledge to light, especially regarding residents' reactions to tourism. Doxey's (1975) *irridex*, for instance, assumes that residents become more unhappy and frustrated as they see an increasing number of tourists. Such progression to negative feelings may precipitate residents being less welcoming of tourists. As such, there may be an adverse relationship between residents' negative emotions and emotional solidarity—feelings of welcoming, closeness, and understanding (Woosnam & Norman, 2010)—residents have toward tourists. At the same time, residents are often expected to play the role of friendly hosts who greet tourists regardless of how they feel about tourists (Aramberri, 2001), especially in rural destinations where residents maintain traditional values (Kastenholz et al., 2013). If such a host-and-guest expectation is in play, residents' anger and frustration (i.e. negative emotions) may not lower their positive social emotions (e.g. emotional solidarity) toward tourists. In other words, residents would still be greeting and welcoming tourists even if they feel angry or sad about their presence.

How residents' emotional bonds with tourists dictate their preference for social encounters can be another question of theoretical and practical value. Social distance refers to "the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally" (Park, 1924, p. 339) and is usually expressed in terms of social encounters that individuals prefer or refuse (Bogardus, 1933). Sharing a meal, for instance, signals a smaller social distance than casual interaction in public spaces. Social distance has been applied in studies concerning resident-tourist relationships (e.g. Joo et al., 2018; Yilmaz & Tasci, 2015), but its existing use did not differentiate between causal and substantial social encounters. Helping with directions and exchanging correspondence represent different levels of social encounters and thus social distance as well. Granted that the distinction between intimate and casual social encounters holds, emotional solidarity may have diverging impacts on each.

In sum, the following gaps in the tourism literature need to be addressed for an enhanced understanding of residents' emotions regarding tourists and their social encounter preference. (1) Are there differences between basic (i.e. positive and negative) and complex emotions (i.e. emotional solidarity) and between intimate and casual social encounters?; (2) How are positive and negative emotions related to emotional solidarity?; (3) How does emotional solidarity dictate the preference for the two different forms of social encounters? In addressing these questions, survey data were collected from residents of a rural destination in the U.S. and analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM).

Literature review

Positive and negative emotions

Emotions are complex mental reactions associated with a specific referent (e.g. individual, object, or event) (Wolman, 1973). Individuals normally develop their interpretations of the same situation or stimuli (i.e. cues) and this may lead to different emotional reactions involving subjective experience, physiology, and behaviours (Mauss & Robinson, 2009). While the mechanism through which emotions form remains abstruse, emotions are undoubtedly a subjective state as well as a potent trigger, which can provide diversified and enriched insights into human reactions to their surroundings or experiences (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003).

There are various views on how emotions can be classified. The discrete emotion theory assumes six basic emotions that accompany universal facial expressions (Ekman, 1992), but such an approach falls short in explaining other more nuanced and complex emotions and thus may be less empirical (Keltner et al., 2019). A more widely supported view is a dimensional approach that classifies emotions based on their valence (i.e. pleasant or unpleasant) and arousal (i.e. arousing or relaxing) (Russell, 1980). According to the two-dimensional view, emotions can simply be positive or negative, which makes the conceptualization and measurement of emotions less challenging (Mauss & Robinson, 2009).

Emotions are indispensable to any social phenomenon and are highly important clues to human cognitions and behaviours. Tourism provides individuals with opportunities for first-hand multi-sensory experiences (Agapito, 2020) which would elicit various emotions (Brochado et al., 2021). At the same time, emotions are a critical element in making tourism experiences more memorable (Moyle et al., 2019). Consequently, there has been continuous research on how destination images or tourist experiences activate emotions (e.g. Qu et al., 2011) which then lead to favourable feelings, perceptions, or behaviours (Tucker, 2009). Regardless of their contextual or methodological differences, the common findings are that positive emotions lead to favourable outcomes and negative ones produce negative reactions (Kim et al., 2022).

Despite the growing attention on emotions as they relate to tourism, the focus has been limited mostly to tourists' points of view. Scholars have looked at how tourists' emotions can be tracked or measured (e.g. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015), enhance tourists' experiences (e.g. Santos et al., 2021), or be incorporated into experience design or marketing (e.g. Volo, 2021). Rarer are the studies like Jordan et al.'s (2019) which explored how tourism influences residents' emotions and stress levels. Emotions are universal to everyone and the dearth of residents' emotion research signals an important research gap to be filled.

Emotional solidarity

Emotional solidarity, according to Woosnam et al. (2009), is the affective bond that individuals of comparable beliefs and behaviours may develop with one another as they interact. It is primarily an affective construct but with cognitive aspects; of its three dimensions, *welcoming nature* includes cognitive evaluations of the benefits that tourists bring, while *emotional closeness* or *sympathetic understanding* is more focused on emotional reactions (Woosnam & Norman, 2010). Its formation (i.e. interaction with similar others) or composition (i.e. affective yet cognitive) rejects viewing emotional solidarity as a simple pleasant emotion (Joo et al., 2023b). Residents may have emotional solidarity toward tourists and tourists may have theirs for residents (Woosnam, 2011); however, in essence, emotional solidarity is theoretically the same construct regardless of who and whom (Joo & Woosnam, 2020).

Emotional solidarity normally grows out of conditions conducive to shared beliefs, shared behaviours, and interaction. For instance, in Joo et al.'s (2017) study of tourists, emotional solidarity was inversely related to travel distance, meaning geographic proximity—which increases the likelihood of interaction and perceived similarity—would enhance affective bonds. Likewise, the higher the place attachment, the greater the tourists' emotional solidarity toward residents (Lee et al., 2022; Woosnam et al., 2018), possibly because place attachment can promote revisitation and interaction (Lee et al., 2022). Contact frequency is also a strong predictor of residents' emotional solidarity with tourists (Joo et al., 2018).

Residents' emotional solidarity is often followed by positive perceptions or behaviours related to tourism. Most notably, high emotional solidarity frequently translates into greater appreciation of tourism impacts and supportive attitudes toward tourism development, a finding validated in residents' data (Joo et al., 2021; Woosnam, 2012) as well as those of tourists (Joo et al., 2019). In Chua et al.'s (2022) study, U.S. residents' emotional solidarity toward Muslim tourists predicted their positive attitudes, which then extended to their value cocreation behaviours with tourists. In another

study by Seo et al. (2021), residents' emotional solidarity reduced tourism-related stress and thereby enhanced their quality of life.

Tourism research thus far has rarely questioned how emotional solidarity is related to positive or negative emotions. While emotional solidarity is considered an affective construct, it embodies cognitive elements as well and represents lasting feelings (Woosnam & Norman, 2010) which sets emotional solidarity apart from more basic, temporal, and immediate feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness. As various forms of emotions may coexist and interact with one another (Volo, 2021), it is possible to posit causal relationships between short-term positive or negative feelings and an endured feeling of emotional solidarity. However, without further empirical evidence, the relationship is only an untested possibility.

Social distance

Social distance, as explained by Park (1924), represents the degree of understanding and intimacy that shapes individuals' or groups' interaction with others. The construct has mostly been used to study the perceptions of relationships between groups of different social classes, races, religions, genders, or sexualities (e.g. Gentry, 1987; Triandis & Triandis, 1960). Large social distance is taken as an indicator of prejudice and avoidance intentions or behaviours while small social distance suggests tolerance and approaching reactions. Unlike affective constructs, social distance primarily reflects individuals' cognitive judgments of others.

The contact theory suggests that the quantity and the quality of interaction influence the social distance between interacting parties. While more frequent interaction generally helps narrow social distance, the context in which the interaction occurs and individuals' appreciation of the interaction also matter (Allport et al., 1954). This was validated in multiple contexts involving relationships between ethnic groups (Ives et al., 2016), individuals with and without physical disabilities (Huskin et al., 2018), and different sexualities (Gentry, 1987), as well as between tourists and residents of dissimilar backgrounds (Yilmaz & Tasci, 2015).

Tourism usually requires social encounters between dissimilar others, and social distance has also drawn much attention in tourism research. Earlier studies examined how social distance affects residents' attitudes toward tourists from other countries or cultures (e.g. Thyne et al., 2006) or how tourism experiences reduce social distance (e.g. Tasci, 2009). More recently, studies have validated the contact theory also in domestic tourism settings, such as Joo et al.'s (2018) study on a cultural and nature-based destination in the U.S. or Aleshinloye et al.'s (2020) study of religious tourism in Nigeria.

Social distance is commonly measured via someone's willingness to engage in or avoid various social encounters, but little differentiation has been made concerning the intensity of social encounters. Studies have grouped all approaching behaviours (e.g. sharing a meal, and chatting in public spaces) under a single dimension of affinity (e.g. Joo et al., 2018; Tasci et al., 2022). Nevertheless, inviting someone home or exchanging correspondence represents a more intense form of social encounters than seeing tourists or chatting with them in public spaces. A distinction between the two social encounter forms can lead to additional insights regarding the impacts of emotional solidarity on social distance.

Conceptual model

Basic, immediate emotions are an important precursor to how individuals interpret their surroundings before engaging in logical reasoning (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003), and thus positive (or negative) emotions normally entail favourable (or unfavourable) emotional, perceptual, or behavioural outcomes (Lazarus, 1991). In Al-Msallam's (2020) study, tourists' anger, sadness, and fear were negatively associated with their satisfaction and destination loyalty, a finding also replicated in Kim et al.'s (2022) study of tourists' agonistic and retreat emotions. Concerning

the emotions-emotional solidarity nexus, Suess et al. (2021) confirmed that residents' high (or low) emotional solidarity with Airbnb visitors was related significantly to positive (or negative) emotions toward them.

The symmetric association between emotions and emotional solidarity seems solid, but their causal relationship is open to debate. Suess et al. (2021) and Wang et al. (2022) equally considered emotional solidarity as a predictor of positive (or negative) emotions. However, it is plausible that more immediate and basic emotions (i.e. positive or negative emotions) precede more long-term and complex emotions (i.e. emotional solidarity). Also, as noted above, emotional solidarity incorporates cognitive elements, which makes it also natural to view it as an outcome rather than a predictor of positive (or negative) emotions. Based on such theoretical considerations, the following hypotheses were developed.

H₁₋₃: Residents' *positive emotions* evoked by tourists will increase residents' *welcoming nature* (H₁), *emotional closeness* (H₂), and *sympathetic understanding* (H₃) toward tourists.

H₄₋₆: Residents' *negative emotions* evoked by tourists will decrease residents' *welcoming nature* (H₄), *emotional closeness* (H₅), and *sympathetic understanding* (H₆) toward tourists.

Residents' emotional solidarity toward tourists may dictate their preferred form of social encounters with tourists. As an affective construct, emotional solidarity can be an influential driver of social distance, where its abundance (or absence) would narrow (or widen) the social distance between individuals (Joo et al., 2018). Such a positive (or negative) correlation between emotional solidarity and approaching (or avoidance) intentions was validated in domestic tourism contexts by Aleshinloye et al. (2020) and Joo et al. (2018). A similar pattern of relationships is likely to occur between emotional solidarity and the two different forms of social encounters (i.e. more intimate, less intimate). Emotional solidarity can be viewed as an emotional reward from social encounters (Joo et al., 2023b), and individuals are inclined toward social encounters that offer a larger emotional reward (Collins, 1993). It is usually more intimate social encounters that are likely to be more emotionally rewarding, which leads to the following hypotheses and the conceptual framework in Figure 1.

H_{7, 9, & 11}: Residents' *welcoming nature* (H₇), *emotional closeness* (H₉), and *sympathetic understanding* (H₁₁) toward tourists will increase their willingness for *more intimate social encounters* with tourists.

H_{8, 10, & 12}: Residents' *welcoming nature* (H₈), *emotional closeness* (H₁₀), and *sympathetic understanding* (H₁₂) toward tourists will decrease their willingness for *less intimate social encounters* with tourists.

Methods

Sampling and data collection

This study selected permanent residents of the Hochatown and Broken Bow Lake area in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, U.S., as the target population. Hochatown is the major town that lies adjacent to Broken Bow Lake, a 22-mile lake created by the damming of the Mountain Fork River. Although Hochatown is the administrative centre of the area, residents live alongside the lake outside the town limits as well. The area is considered rural as per U.S. Census Bureau's standard with 51.98 residents per square mile (U.S. Census, 2020), well below the 1,000 per square mile requirement for an urban area (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). The county-level population density is even lower, making the study site strictly rural (Figure 2).

McCurtain County, where the study site is situated, has been growing steadily and increasing in popularity among tourists. Its relative proximity to major cities, such as Dallas (Texas), Little Rock (Arkansas), and Oklahoma City (Oklahoma), is one reason for this. Another reason for the growth is the perfect blend of natural amenities (e.g. bodies of water), cultural appeal (e.g. Native American culture), as well as casino and marijuana tourism experiences. However, tourists to the study site are

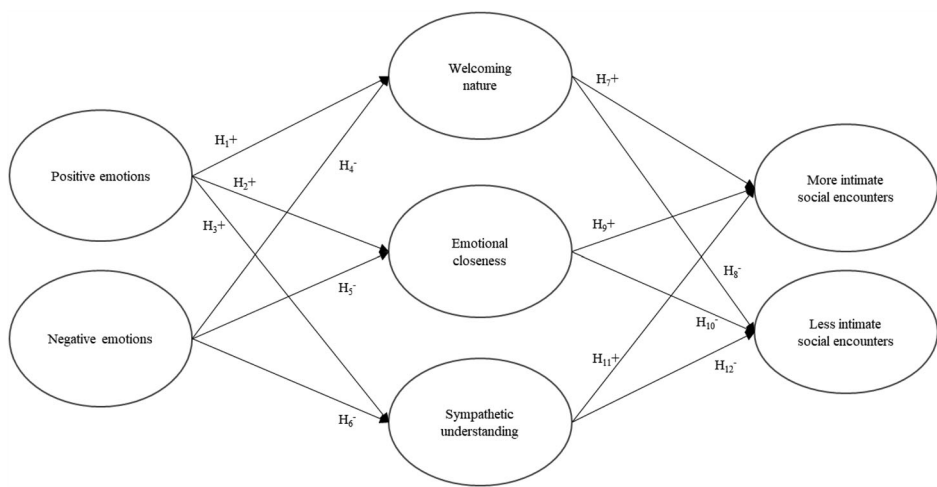


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

mostly after its natural amenities and activities available in Broken Bow Lake and Beavers Bend State Park. Casino and marijuana tourism are present in the City of Broken Bow which is 10 miles from the study site (Brandes, 2020).

The exponential growth of tourism in McCurtain County and the rural characteristics of the study site made it an ideal setting to examine residents' emotions toward tourists. With the addition of new condos, restaurants, shops, and tour programmes, tourism has gained momentum as an economic and social driver in the study site (Dean Runyan Associates, 2021). Yet, given the low population density and ruralness of the area, tourism's impacts, both negative and positive, could be more identifiable among residents, possibly leading to a mixture of bliss and anguish. Furthermore, given its early stages of tourism development and the traditional mindsets and lifestyles, there might be a greater commitment to playing friendly hosts to any tourists, enabling multiple results.

Data collection was undertaken using a combination of multiple sampling and distribution strategies for enhanced efficiency and coverage. Onsite distribution of questionnaires was done using a



Figure 2. Location of the study site.

multi-stage systematic random sampling strategy where random neighbourhoods, streets, and houses were selected and approached for participation. An online survey was also administered using a non-probabilistic convenient sampling method; in this case, links to an online version of the same questionnaire were posted on a Facebook group page where numerous Hochatown and Broken Bow Lake residents were members. The onsite data collection occurred in May and June of 2021, both on weekdays and weekends. The online data collection took place between June and August of 2021.

From the data collection, 511 complete responses were secured. Of the 775 households initially visited in person, only 394 answered but 195 of them declined. Even among those 199 who had agreed to participate, only 134 provided complete responses without signs of disengagement ($134 / 394 \times 100 = 34.0\%$). The online data collection yielded 477 responses, but 55 were incomplete, 36 were completed in less than five minutes, and nine were from non-McCurtain County residents as inferred from their reported zip code. Resultingly, 377 responses were retained from the online data collection. Since the number of those who accessed the online survey link was unknown, the response rate was unobtainable.

Measurement scales and data analysis

Positive and negative emotions of residents evoked by tourists were measured using 10 items adapted from Ouyang et al. (2017) and Zheng et al. (2021). Emotional solidarity with tourists was assessed by Woosnam and Norman's (2010) scale. Finally, to measure residents' social distance toward tourists (i.e. social encounter preference), a shortened social distance scale based on Thyne et al.'s (2022) study was used. All measurement items were presented in a 7-point Likert scale format where '1' and '7' indicated 'strong disagreement' and 'strong agreement' to a positive statement or 'very comfortable' and 'very uncomfortable' to different social encounters. The questionnaire also featured additional questions on participants' socio-demographic and economic backgrounds. To minimize the risk of common methods bias (CMB), questions were randomly sequenced on the questionnaire to reduce any potential misconstruance of responses (Ribeiro et al., 2022) and to have predictors and outcomes presented on separate pages (Jordan & Troth, 2020).

Prior to analysis, the data were examined for normality and subjected to further CMB tests. Actual data analysis followed Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach to SEM. That is, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first performed to establish a measurement model with an adequate fit to the data. The best-fitting measurement model identified from the CFA was then converted into a structural model for hypothesis testing. Both CFA and SEM were performed using Amos v26.

Results

Sample characteristics

The socio-demographic overview of the sample is provided in Table 1. Participants were primarily middle-aged ($M = 47$ years). There were nearly equal numbers of those in their 30s (24.1%) and 40s (24.4%) and the 18-30-year-old group had the smallest presence (13.1%), which was in line with the general age make-up of the U.S. rural population. Females (60.7%) significantly outnumbered males (37.8%), and this might be due to the questionnaire being distributed during the daytime when more homemakers were present. The median household income was USD80,000-119,999, but the largest income group was USD40,000-79,999. More than two-thirds of the sample completed (41.7%) or had some college education (29.4%). Over 80% of the sample said that they had lived in McCurtain County for more than 20 years, including 20.5% who reported living in the county for at least 50 years.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

Socio-demographic variable	n	%
Age ($M = 47$ years of age)		
18-30 years of age	67	13.1
31-40 years of age	123	24.1
41-50 years of age	125	24.4
51-60 years of age	89	17.5
61+ years of age	107	20.9
Gender		
Female	107	20.9
Male	193	37.8
Prefer not to respond	8	1.6
Annual household income (Median = USD80,000-119,999)		
Under USD40,000	94	18.4
USD40,000-79,999	160	31.3
USD80,000-119,999	144	28.2
Over USD120,000	113	22.1
Education level (Median = Some college)		
Less than high school	10	2.0
High school graduate or GED	76	14.9
Technical/vocational/trade school	62	12.1
Some college	150	29.4
Four-year college degree	157	30.7
Master's degree	48	9.4
PhD/professional degree	8	1.6
Native American descendants		
No	406	79.5
Yes	105	20.5
Length of residence ($M = 33.8$ years)		
Less than 20 years	97	19.0
20-29 years	106	20.7
30-39 years	117	22.9
40-49 years	86	16.9
50 years or more	105	20.5

Note: $N = 511$

Initial data analysis

The skewness and kurtosis of all item responses were within the desired ranges of ± 2 (skewness) and ± 7 (kurtosis), indicating a normal distribution of the data (Hair et al., 2010). In general, participants reported a neutral state for positive emotions ($M = 3.55$) and a preponderance of negative emotions ($M = 4.52$). Of the three emotional solidarity dimensions, only *welcoming nature* ($M = 4.65$) was on the positive side while *emotional closeness* ($M = 3.63$) and *sympathetic understanding* ($M = 3.45$) were at neutral levels. Participants preferred *less intimate social encounters* ($M = 5.07$) to *more intimate social encounters* ($M = 3.41$).

Measurement model and structural model analysis

The baseline measurement model, presented in Table 2, showed an excellent fit to the data, as revealed in the following fit indices: $\chi^2 = 891.77$, $df = 369$, $\chi^2/df = 2.42$, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.053, SRMR = 0.039 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All factor loadings were significant as well. Except for one item with a factor loading of 0.61, all items had substantial factor loadings, close to or above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability (CR) ranged between 0.90 and 0.97, indicating that all factors were internally reliable (Hair et al., 2010). The convergent validity of the factors was also demonstrated with all average variance extracted (AVE) estimates in excess of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Finally, the squared root of each factor's AVE was greater than its

Table 2. Measurement model results.

Factor and item	Mean	Std. β (t-value)***	Skew.	Kurt.
Positive emotions ($\alpha = 0.92$)	3.55			
Happiness	3.59	0.94 (N/A)	0.05	-1.33
Love	3.35	0.92 (39.44)	0.25	-1.09
Gratefulness	3.76	0.87 (32.97)	0.00	-1.32
Excitement	3.50	0.92 (40.06)	0.16	-1.25
Cheerful	3.54	0.94 (43.56)	0.11	-1.25
Negative emotions ($\alpha = 0.91$)	4.52			
Sadness	4.33	0.87 (N/A)	-0.27	-0.89
Anger	4.29	0.88 (26.43)	-0.25	-1.00
Worry	4.78	0.84 (24.51)	-0.55	-0.57
Annoyance	5.28	0.80 (22.63)	-0.91	-0.16
Afraid	3.92	0.69 (17.92)	0.00	-0.87
Welcoming nature ($\alpha = 0.90$)	4.65			
Am proud to have tourists in McCurtain.	3.95	0.93 (N/A)	-0.13	-1.34
Feel the community benefits from having tourists in McCurtain.	4.55	0.87 (29.31)	-0.60	-1.00
Appreciate tourists for their contribution to the local economy.	4.52	0.91 (33.69)	-0.53	-1.12
Treat tourists fairly in McCurtain.	5.56	0.61 (15.94)	-1.33	1.22
Emotional closeness ($\alpha = 0.92$)	3.63			
Feel close to some tourists I have met in McCurtain.	3.66	0.93 (N/A)	0.15	-1.03
Have made friends with some tourists in McCurtain.	3.60	0.92 (33.81)	0.22	-1.09
Sympathetic understanding ($\alpha = 0.92$)	3.45			
Identify with tourists in McCurtain.	3.44	0.88 (N/A)	0.25	-1.12
Have a lot in common with tourists in McCurtain.	3.25	0.88 (36.59)	0.40	-1.00
Feel affection toward tourists in McCurtain.	3.12	0.91 (29.61)	0.45	-0.81
Understand tourists in McCurtain.	3.99	0.73 (20.12)	-0.22	-1.07
More intimate social encounters ($\alpha = 0.94$)	3.41			
Inviting tourists as guests to your home	2.49	0.75 (N/A)	0.93	-0.17
Welcoming tourists as friends or family	3.52	0.87 (23.14)	0.12	-1.14
Sharing a meal with tourists	3.77	0.90 (21.55)	-0.02	-1.17
Having a close personal relationship with tourists	3.49	0.88 (20.99)	0.10	-1.05
Exchanging correspondence with tourists	3.80	0.88 (20.61)	-0.06	-1.05
Less intimate social encounters ($\alpha = 0.95$)	5.07			
Seeing tourists eating dinner at local restaurants or cafes	5.09	0.94 (N/A)	-0.76	-0.20
Seeing tourists at a convenience store	5.08	0.96 (53.38)	-0.79	-0.14
Seeing tourists at a grocery store	4.85	0.94 (35.61)	-0.63	-0.70
Helping tourists with directions	5.24	0.78 (23.48)	-1.00	0.25
Chatting with tourists in public places	5.09	0.88 (24.05)	-0.89	-0.15

Notes: $N = 511$, $\chi^2 = 891.77$, $p < 0.001$, $df = 369$, $\chi^2/df = 2.42$, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.053, SRMR = 0.039

*** $p < 0.001$ level;

corresponding inter-factor correlations, satisfying Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion for discriminant validity (Table 3).

The structural model, which included all items, factors, and paths, demonstrated an excellent data fit: $\chi^2 = 1000.12$, $df = 375$, $\chi^2/df = 2.67$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.057, SRMR = 0.050 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) (Table 4). All but four hypotheses were supported. *Positive emotions* facilitated all three emotional solidarity dimensions as follows: *welcoming nature* ($\beta = 0.80$, $p < 0.001$, H_1

Table 3. Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Factor	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Positive emotions	0.97	0.85	0.92						
2. Negative emotions	0.91	0.67	-0.75	0.82					
3. Welcoming nature	0.90	0.70	0.84	-0.65	0.84				
4. Emotional closeness	0.92	0.85	0.70	-0.52	0.70	0.92			
5. Sympathetic understanding	0.91	0.73	0.80	-0.61	0.79	0.79	0.85		
6. More intimate social encounters	0.96	0.81	0.70	-0.57	0.79	0.62	0.67	0.90	
7. Less intimate social encounters	0.93	0.74	0.70	-0.58	0.71	0.75	0.75	0.76	0.86

Notes: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; The bolded estimates in diagonal are the square root of AVE; inter-construct correlations are shown off-diagonal.

Table 4. Structural model results.

Regression path	Std. β	t-value	Result
H ₁ : Positive emotions → Welcoming nature	0.80***	16.74	Supported
H ₂ : Positive emotions → Emotional closeness	0.73***	12.45	Supported
H ₃ : Positive emotions → Sympathetic understanding	0.81***	14.86	Supported
H ₄ : Negative emotions → Welcoming nature	-0.06 ^{ns}	-1.23	Not supported
H ₅ : Negative emotions → Emotional closeness	-0.02 ^{ns}	-0.30	Not supported
H ₆ : Negative emotions → Sympathetic understanding	-0.01 ^{ns}	-0.16	Not supported
H ₇ : Welcoming nature → More intimate social encounters	0.76***	13.72	Supported
H ₈ : Welcoming nature → Less intimate social encounters	-0.41***	-7.16	Supported
H ₉ : Emotional closeness → More intimate social encounters	0.15**	2.38	Supported
H ₁₀ : Emotional closeness → Less intimate social encounters	-0.01 ^{ns}	-0.03	Not supported
H ₁₁ : Sympathetic understanding → More intimate social encounters	0.26**	3.08	Supported
H ₁₂ : Sympathetic understanding → Less intimate social encounters	-0.49***	-5.29	Supported

Note: $N = 511$, $\chi^2 = 1000.12$, $p < 0.001$, $df = 375$, $\chi^2/df = 2.67$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.057, SRMR = 0.050

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; ns = not significant

$R^2_{\text{Welcoming nature}} = 0.72$

$R^2_{\text{Emotional closeness}} = 0.51$

$R^2_{\text{Sympathetic understanding}} = 0.66$

$R^2_{\text{More intimate social encounters}} = 0.67$

$R^2_{\text{Less intimate social encounters}} = 0.65$

supported), *emotional closeness* ($\beta = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$, H₂ supported), and *sympathetic understanding* ($\beta = 0.81$, $p < 0.001$, H₃ supported). On the contrary, *negative emotions* produced statistically insignificant outcomes, and thus H₄, H₅, and H₆ could not be supported. The three emotional solidarity dimensions had positive impacts on *more intimate social encounters* as follows: *welcoming nature* ($\beta = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$, H₇ supported), *emotional closeness* ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$, H₉ supported), and *sympathetic understanding* ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$, H₁₁ supported). The relationship between emotional solidarity and *less intimate social encounters* was mostly negative, as greater degrees of *welcoming nature* ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < 0.001$, H₈ supported) or *sympathetic understanding* ($\beta = -0.49$, $p < 0.001$, H₁₂ supported) translated into weaker inclination toward such social encounters. The impact of *emotional closeness* on *less intimate social encounters* was statistically insignificant ($\beta = -0.01$, H₁₀ not supported). Overall, the predictors within the model explained a robust percentage of variance in the outcome constructs: 72% for *welcoming nature*, 51% for *emotional closeness*, 66% for *sympathetic understanding*, 67% for *more intimate social encounters*, and 65% for *less intimate social encounters*.

Conclusions

Discussion of the results

The results suggested disparate effects of *positive* and *negative emotions* on emotional solidarity. As hypothesized, *positive emotions* stimulated *welcoming nature*, *emotional closeness*, and *sympathetic understanding* in nearly the same intensity. On the contrary, adverse effects of *negative emotions* were spotted but statistically insignificant. The results in part contradicted the symmetric impacts of emotions on feelings, perceptions, or behaviours (Lazarus, 1991) or wide-held concerns regarding unhappy residents (Tse & Tung, 2022), as *negative emotions* did not induce emotional dissonance or unwelcoming feelings. The insignificant relationships might have been due to the social desirability bias or the obligatory tone of the emotional solidarity items. Conventionally, residents are expected to play the role of hosts who greet guests (Aramberri, 2001). Also, *welcoming nature* items, especially, convey the ideas of pride, appreciation, or fairness which are harder to renounce. Resultingly, even if residents felt angry or annoyed by tourists, they might have been cautious about translating the feelings into emotional dissonance.

A high level of *welcoming nature*, *emotional closeness*, or *sympathetic understanding* was correlated positively with *more intimate social encounters* such as sharing a meal or exchanging

correspondence. As validated by Aleshinloye et al. (2020), Joo et al. (2018), and Tasci et al. (2022), high emotional solidarity makes individuals feel more socially interactive. Also identified was the relatively big influence of *welcoming nature* as shown in its standardized regression coefficient size. This was in line with what others (e.g. Woosnam et al., 2016; Woosnam et al., 2021) have reported recently in the tourism literature as well. The predominance of *welcoming nature* as a predictor might have been due to the inherent friendly tone of its items. Or else, the middling mean scores of *emotional closeness* or *sympathetic understanding* might have blurred their impacts on the outcome construct.

More interesting were the relationships between the emotional solidarity dimensions and *less intimate social encounters*. Those who scored high in *welcoming nature* ($\beta = -.41$) and *sympathetic understanding* ($\beta = -.49$) were more likely to avoid passive social encounters. The results may seem to contrast with the previous findings that emotional solidarity would promote interaction, possibly regardless of interaction type (Aleshinloye et al., 2020; Joo et al., 2018). However, as demonstrated by the discriminant validity test and hypothesis testing outcomes, not all social encounters are the same, and high emotional solidarity pushes individuals away from superficial ones and pulls them to more weighty social encounters. This echoed Joo and Woosnam's (2020) application of the interaction ritual chain theory where individuals were theorized to seek more emotionally rewarding social encounters and allocate their time and effort accordingly.

Study implications

The findings above suggest two important distinctions; one between basic emotions and complex emotions (e.g. emotional solidarity) and the other between *more* and *less intimate social encounters*. *Negative emotions* were present among individuals but that did not lead to hostility against tourists. This implies that emotional solidarity is a more advanced form of emotion whose manifestation and impacts deviate from those of basic emotions. While there has been a general urge to give greater recognition to the affective side of tourism, emotions also have different layers which necessitate a more segmented approach. Likewise, few studies have embarked on such a robust model involving social distance as done within this study. While interaction tends to entail positive outcomes, not all social encounters are the same, as some may remain mechanical and superficial (e.g. helping tourists with directions) whereas others are more inviting and personal (e.g. sharing a meal with tourists) (Thyne et al., 2022). Tourism is one of few contexts where both forms of social encounters occur concurrently, but the distinction has not been put forth in other studies.

Another major theoretical implication is related to the mechanism by which residents decide the form of social encounters they prefer to engage in with tourists. The findings, interestingly, suggest that residents are still entrapped by the traditional role of hosts who welcome guests regardless of the negative emotions guests may evoke. In tourism research, the terms hosts and guests have often been criticized as coercing such an unfair conventional role to residents (Aramberri, 2001). Although such a call might be ethically desirable, in reality, the traditional view still remains dominant and thus should not be neglected. The transition from emotional solidarity to social distance was also interesting as it supported Joo and Woosnam's (2020) application of the interaction ritual chain theory devised by Collins (1993). The preference for *more intimate social encounters* over *less intimate* ones, found in this study, suggests that individuals gauge the potential emotional rewards from a range of social encounters and choose the one that seems most rewarding. While the interaction ritual chain theory has been used as a theorizing tool (e.g. Joo et al., 2023b), there has not been clear empirical evidence like the findings of this study.

Though residents indicated they agreed more with negative feelings ($M = 4.52$) about tourists than with positive feelings ($M = 3.55$), the implications pouring out of these positive emotions were more apparent. In essence, having positive emotions about tourists contribute to greater

perceived connections (i.e. emotional solidarity), which in turn leads such residents to express increased desires to engage in more meaningful, intimate social encounters with tourists. Good resident-tourist relationships not only improve residents' quality of life (Seo et al., 2021) and the likelihood of tourists' revisit (Ribeiro et al., 2018) but also lay the groundwork for sustainable tourism. That said, the McCurtain County Tourism Authority (MCTA) should consider the best means to stimulate residents' positive feelings about tourists. This would most certainly have to begin with a conveyance to residents just how important tourism is to McCurtain County. One place to start would be through educating residents about the financial contributions made to the county from tourism. Perhaps publishing data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and Labour Statistics regarding direct tourism employment, state/local/federal tourism taxes generated, and state/local tax savings from tourism throughout the county could be one way to accomplish this. Beyond an educational campaign, the MCTA may work jointly with the towns throughout the county to create more intentional opportunities for resident-tourist interaction to occur (e.g. seasonal festivals and special events). This would provide an opportunity to encourage greater opportunities for residents and tourists to experience personal and organic relationships with one another and not base their feelings on stereotypes shared by those with limited exposure to tourists. The hope here is that such exposure would foster greater understanding. The MCTA may also hold regular public forums for residents to voice concerns about tourism and tourists. So that the MCTA may be most accountable for making changes concerning voiced concerns, some residents who do not have economic interests in tourism (i.e. those who do not own a business or work in the public sector) should be appointed to the authority. This would also ensure that the general population within the county is represented.

Study limitations and research suggestions

First of all, this study was undertaken in a rural destination in the southeastern U.S. where residents follow a more traditional lifestyle. As such, residents' welcoming feelings toward tourists regardless of their negative emotions might be related to the 'southern hospitality' expected of residents. Had the study been undertaken in other more mature, non-rural destinations, different findings might have been achieved. Secondly, the conceptual model did not consider non-emotional antecedents of social distance, such as income dependency on tourism. However, the focus of this study, once again, was to unveil the emotional landscape of social relationships and thus such non-affective constructs were not considered. Thirdly, social distance is a reliable indicator of someone's relationship preference but this may not be manifested into actual behaviours. There may be additional factors to consider such as race, gender, and age of tourists for a more robust view of the outcome, and to determine whether such preferences translate into behaviours. Finally, the impacts of various tourism types on residents' feelings and attitudes were not considered in this study. Although the study site focuses strictly on nature tourism, residents may still observe and experience the impacts of more disruptive forms of tourism (e.g. casino and marijuana tourism) not very far from the study site, and this is something that future research may need to consider.

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