

How do time spent at destination and interaction with residents factor into visitors' emotional solidarity with such individuals? Implications for return visitation

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Introduction

- Emotional solidarity has been used increasingly of late to examine the relationship between visitors to a destination and community resident.
- Majority of extant literature focuses on this relationship from the residents' perspective which is likely an extension of research concerning attitudes toward impacts and tourism development.



Background

- Galveston County, located on the Gulf Coast of Texas was selected as the study site of this work.
- The county ranks 10th in the state for visitor spending (US\$746 million), yet first among all coastal counties (Texas Tourism 2012).
- Knowing that the county has rebounded somewhat, spending is still below the pre-Hurricane Ike numbers of 2008 (US\$765 million)—the last tourist season prior to Ike.



Problem

- Now more than ever it is imperative to examine visitors' perceptions of the relationship they have with residents to determine how that can translate to increased visitation to the county.



Study purpose

- This work has two purposes:
- 1) To determine...
 - a) if the **length of time tourists spend in a destination** as well as the
 - b) **interaction they have with residents** can predict the factors of emotional solidarity (emotional closeness, sympathetic understanding and welcoming nature) that the former experiences with the latter.

Study purpose continued

- 2) To examine if there is a significant relationship between such levels of emotional solidarity and visitors' likelihood of returning to the destination.

Ultimately this work aims to extend Durkheim's (1995[1915]) framework of emotional solidarity through adding antecedents of and an outcome of the construct.

Methods

- Sample and data collection
 - Visitors to GC during first peak tourism season after Ike hit
 - Intercepted at five key locations (i.e., Seawall, Stewart Beach, Moody Gardens, the Strand, and Kemah Boardwalk)
 - Five weekends in July/August using systematic sampling procedure (every 5th) with a random starting point
 - Self-administered survey instrument
 - Effective response rate was 74.6% ($N = 447$)



Methods continued

- Measures
 - Length of stay
 - Continuous variable asking visitors how many days they will stay in Galveston County
 - Interaction
 - Scale-level questions (i.e., how often do you interact with residents during week and on weekend?—on a scale of 1=never; 7=all of the time)
 - Emotional solidarity
 - Scale-level questions based on ESS (10-items on scale of 1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree).
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Descriptive findings

- Demographics
 - $M_{\text{age}} = 39.5$ years
 - 53.7% women
 - 71.3% had at least undergraduate degree
 - 50.4% had household income of at least \$80,000

Respondent lived on average 190.8 miles away from Galveston had previously taken 16 trips to the area.

Results

Purpose 1:

- The number of days ($M = 2.67$) stayed in Galveston County significantly predicted *emotional closeness* with residents ($F = 4.67, p < 0.05; R^2 = 0.01$) and *sympathetic understanding* ($F = 5.44, p < 0.05; R^2 = 0.01$) but not *feeling welcomed* ($F = 2.025, p = 0.16$).
- Interaction with residents ($M = 3.32$) significantly predicted each of the ESS predictors: *emotional closeness* ($F = 104.83, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.19$); *sympathetic understanding* ($F = 104.75, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.19$); *feeling welcomed* ($F = 52.17, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.11$).

Results

Purpose 2:

- Each of the three ESS factors were then examined to determine how such solidarity translated into likelihood of revisiting ($M = 4.24$). From the overall model in the multiple regression analysis, two of the three factors (Sympathetic understanding and welcoming nature) significantly predicted ($F = 20.559, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.12$) the likelihood of revisiting Galveston County in the future (see Table 1); *emotional closeness* did not significantly contribute to the model.

Multiple regression output

Table 1. Multiple regression examining the relationship between ESS factors^a and likelihood of returning to Galveston Co.^b

	B	β	t	p	tol	VIF
Emotional Closeness	-.031	-.059	-1.04	0.30	0.63	1.59
Sympathetic Understanding	.160	.261	4.43	0.00	0.57	1.75
Welcoming Nature	.156	.172	3.18	0.02	0.68	1.48

^a on a scale of 1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree

^b on a scale of 1=highly unlikely; 5=highly likely

Conclusion and Implications

- In examining both time spent at the destination and interaction, it became evident that the latter was not only a much better predictor but also explained a greater degree of variance in emotional solidarity.
- Such a finding is in keeping with Woosnam and Norman (2010) indicating the importance of engaging in some degree of exchange.
- Interestingly, only two of the ESS factors had an impact on the degree to which individuals indicated they would return. Feeling close to residents was not a significant factor, which is in line with the social exchange theory and its applied work by Aramberri (2001) and Ward and Berno (2011).



Limitations and Future Research

- This work did not examine the degree of intimacy in interacting or what individuals were engaged in as it pertained to interaction.
- Such a conceptualization of interaction may have been a more accurate representation of the concept.
- Additionally we only looked at intentions of revisiting. It is unclear as to whether individuals did actually return to Galveston following this study.

- Thank you! Questions? Or Comments?