EMOTIONAL SOLIDARITY IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: HOW POLICY AND KNOWLEDGE DRIVE SUPPORT IN GILGIT BALTISTAN, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The participation of local communities is vital in developing tourism, as their attitudes and behaviours can significantly impact the growth and success of a destination. As the primary recipients of future tourism developments, the perspectives of local communities should guide the creation of sustainable policies aimed at maximising benefits and minimising negative impacts. The study examines how government policy, tourism knowledge, emotional solidarity, and support for tourism development are interrelated among the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Based on a quantitative and cross-sectional research design with two sampling stages comprising quota and purposive sampling, 216 responses from the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan were collected and analysed through Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). It was revealed that government policy and tourism knowledge influence residents' welcoming nature and emotional closeness, and they contribute to their support for tourism development. The findings underscore the importance of establishing targeted and effective support systems between stakeholders to sustain the benefits of tourism development.

Keywords: Government policy, Tourism knowledge, Emotional solidarity, Support for tourism development

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INTRODUCTION

The residents of tourist destinations are crucial constituents in the tourism sector, as their support is crucial for ever-evolving tourism planning and growth (Stylidis, 2020). Over the past thirty years, researchers and policymakers have emphasised understanding residents' support for tourism, resulting in numerous studies examining their perceptions and attitudes (Nunkoo & So, 2016). Earlier research primarily investigated local factors influencing residents' views on tourism. However, recent empirical studies by Ganji et al. (2021) and Tosun et al. (2021) highlighted the crucial role of residents' subjective knowledge of tourism as a key internal factor. Residents' attitudes toward tourism are shaped by its impact and personal benefits, and these internal perceptions can be influenced by various factors. While most research focuses on identifying these factors, only a few studies have delved into residents' complex feelings toward tourists and ways in which they have the potential to affect support for the growth of tourism (Aleshinloye et al., 2021; Joo et al., 2018). Despite predictions about residents' attitudes, a scarcity of studies assessing their behaviour through the dynamics of solidarity and intentional support was noted (Wu et al., 2023).

This gap is significant because emotional solidarity is crucial, and it drives residents in tourist planning and indirectly shapes their behavioural intention to support tourism development (Aleshinloye et al., 2021). Notably, some scholars suggest that residents may exhibit solidarity with tourists based on their perceived knowledge of tourism (Munamura et al., 2023), and well-informed residents can readily discern tourism's effects (Joo et al., 2019). This belief is evident in the observed beneficial effects of tourism to prompt residents to express emotional solidarity with tourists and vice versa (Hasani et al., 2016). Furthermore, the role of external factors, such as government policy, cannot be understated. Good government policies can positively affect the dynamics between residents and tourists, thereby influencing residents' emotional solidarity with tourists (Airey, 2015). Thus, exploring this relationship is crucial, as it can shed light on effective governance and community engagement in tourism initiatives. Existing studies highlight the necessity of government trust in shaping residents' attitudes and embracing the advancement of tourism (Jiang et al., 2023). However, in-depth empirical investigations on the direct nexus between government policy and residents' support for tourism development are scarce and need to be addressed.

The interrelationship between government policy, tourism knowledge, emotional solidarity, and support for tourism development is supported by social exchange theory (SET). In a situation that involves the interaction between individuals and groups, SET encapsulates the reciprocal exchanges between these actors. Past studies have extensively employed this theory to comprehend the perceptions of the residents and their supportive attitudes toward tourism

development (Munanura et al., 2023; Stylidis, 2020). Effective government policies and increased tourism knowledge offer significant benefits that lead to the fostering of residents' warm disposition, intimate bond, and empathetic comprehension. In this sense, whenever the advantages surpass the disadvantages, the local populace tends to engage in positive interactions with visitors, and this positive interaction will foster a positive attitude towards tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Government Policy
The government's role in developing tourism has been a focal point in the literature for several years (Bramwell, 2011; Nunkoo, 2015). In tourism, planning and policy-making strategies will look at government bodies, non-government organisations, and business entities as keys (Ruhanen, 2013). The trust that people place in the government is pivotal for community development (Hussain et al., 2022). Ruhanen (2013) argued that governments have amplified accountability for and commitment to tourism destination planning and development. Insufficient government intervention and inadequate tourism management may lead to land use problems and resident displacement (Bramwell, 2011), contributing to negative perceptions of tourism impacts. Thus, effective destination planning can mitigate these negative impacts, enhance positive outcomes (Ruhanen, 2013), and foster residents' supportive attitudes toward tourism.

Tourism Knowledge
Residents possess an extensive awareness of tourism, including information about the development of tourism and the role of the local government in the business. Prior research has shown that residents' attitudes towards the perceived impacts of tourism are influenced by their knowledge of the subject. Andereck et al. (2005) highlighted that when residents have greater knowledge of tourism, they will be more readily in identifying the negatives and positives of tourism development, and revealed that residents with higher levels of tourism knowledge tended to perceive more positive impacts. In contrast, Nunkoo and So (2016) discovered that there is a notable relationship between knowledge and the perceived adverse effects of tourism. Thus, it can be argued that residents' knowledge of tourism does not affect their perception of the benefits, as residents perceive similar benefits regardless of their level of tourism knowledge. Next, Joo et al. (2019) established a positive association between tourism knowledge and residents' empowerment, highlighting the need for further investigation into how tourism knowledge influences residents' emotional solidarity and support for

tourism. In conclusion, the impact of tourism on residents' emotional solidarity and support remains an underexplored area, warranting further research.

Emotional Solidarity

Emotional solidarity can be traced back to Durkheim's theory, which posits that affective bonds are formed through interactions, beliefs, and shared behaviours. The theory of emotional solidarity emerged as the preferred alternative to explain support for tourism the social exchange theory was critiqued for its inability to clearly define tangible and intangible aspects of tourism support. Initially introduced by Woosnam et al. (2009) in sociology, this concept was later applied to tourism. Subsequently, numerous scholars have utilised emotional solidarity to understand residents' support for tourism. As a result, the emotional solidarity scale (ESS) was developed, and this scale incorporates emotional closeness to visitors, welcoming nature, and sympathetic understanding (see Erul et al., 2020; Ganji et al., 2021; Joo et al., 2018). Since its introduction, many studies have adopted these three dimensions to assess residents' support for tourism (Munanura et al., 2023).

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT
Government Policy and Emotional Solidarity

In tourism, government involvement during planning, decision-making, coordination, and resource management plays a vital function in promoting sustainable tourism and benefiting the residents of tourism destinations (Ruhanen, 2013). Public tourism initiatives encourage residents to adopt a welcoming nature by promoting respectful and inclusive interactions with tourists. This attitude can prepare residents in engaging positive, helpful, and informative interactions with tourists (Chancellor et al., 2021). Additionally, the government's inclusion of communities in tourism planning can help cultivate stronger emotional bonds and sympathetic understanding between residents and tourists, ensuring that tourism development aligns with local values and interests and promoting emotional closeness (Tolkach & King, 2015). Inclusive policy-making that considers residents' and tourists' needs and concerns can lead to more harmonious interactions, subsequently increasing residents' sympathetic understanding of the tourism sector. Residents must be regularly made aware, exposed, and well-informed concerning short and long-term tourism goals and plans by destination and policy planners. This awareness would offer greater opportunities for residents' current dynamics with tourists to be understood (Aleshinloye et al., 2021). Drawing from these empirically supported facts, the following hypotheses have been developed to prove the relationship of government policy with the three factors of emotional solidarity.

H1: Government policy significantly predicts the welcoming nature of residents towards tourists.

H2: Government policy significantly predicts the emotional closeness of the residents with the tourists.

H3: Government policy significantly predicts the sympathetic understanding of the residents of tourists.

Tourism Knowledge and Emotional Solidarity

Tourism impacts residents' perceptions, which are influenced by their understanding, as noted by Nunkoo and So (2016). Andereck et al. (2005) showed that residents who possess more knowledge about tourism will have the ability to recognise the costs and benefits of tourism, maintain a positive view of its impacts, and show appreciation for the industry. This appreciation can lead to a more supportive attitude towards tourism (Meimand et al., 2017). Another study also suggested that well-informed residents about tourism's economic and social advantages are more likely to engage positively with tourists, resulting in increased hospitable and supportive behaviours, thus creating a welcoming atmosphere for tourists (Tekalign et al., 2018). Residents with cultural or subcultural knowledge are likely to communicate with tourists actively, fostering emotional intimacy (Li et al., 2022). Residents who are more connected with tourists and tourism tend to have a more positive disposition and sympathetic understanding towards them (Helgadóttir et al., 2019; Martín et al., 2017). Based on these studies, the hypotheses are:

H4: Residents' tourism knowledge significantly predicts their welcoming nature towards tourists.

H5: Residents' tourism knowledge significantly predicts their emotional closeness with the tourists.

H6: Residents' tourism knowledge significantly predicts their sympathetic understanding of tourists.

Emotional Solidarity and Support for Tourism Development

Emotional solidarity has been extensively employed in the tourism literature to understand the dynamic between residents' emotions about tourists and their support for tourism (Munanura et al., 2023). The prevailing literature indicates that the residents of tourism destinations perceive positive impacts, such as employment and investment opportunities, alongside negative impacts as well, like environmental pollution and traffic congestion (Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). Numerous empirical studies have confirmed that support for tourism among residents is positively influenced by the perceived positive impacts of tourism. Conversely, this support will be diminished when residents harbour perceived

negative impacts (Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). Munanura et al. (2023) reported that support for tourism development is predicted by the three factors of emotional solidarity. Contrarily, Aleshinloye et al. (2021) observed that the best predictors of tourism support are the two dimensions of welcoming nature and sympathetic understanding. Moghavvemi et al. (2017) also discovered that the attitude of residents towards tourism development is strongly influenced by the welcoming nature and sympathetic understanding among the three factors of emotional solidarity, although variations can occur based on different personality traits. Based on these findings, these hypotheses have been formulated to further investigate the dynamics of residents' emotions and their impact on support for tourism.

H7: Residents' welcoming nature towards tourists significantly predicts their support towards tourism development.
H8: Residents' emotional closeness with the tourists significantly predicts their support for tourism development.
H9: Residents' sympathetic understanding of the tourists significantly predicts their support for tourism development.

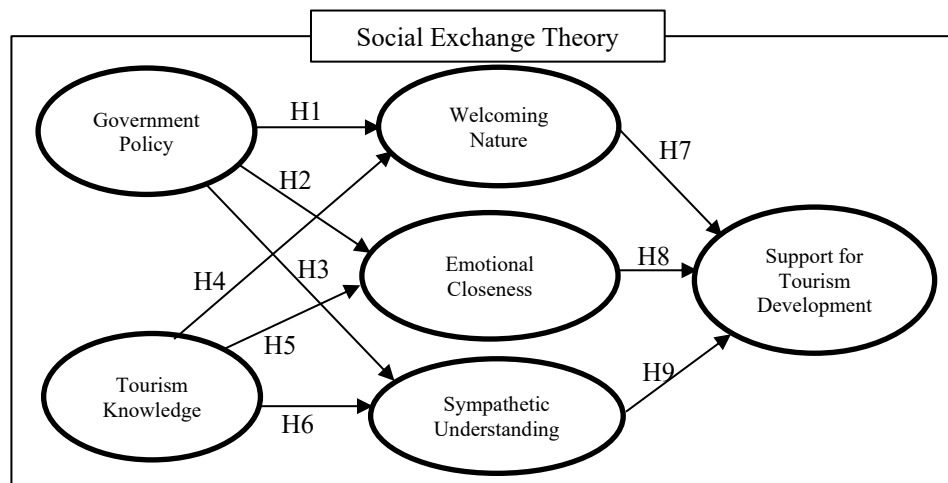The following Figure 1 exhibits the research model.

Figure 1: Research Model

RESEARCH DESIGN
This study is a quantitative and cross-sectional research conducted in three prominent tourist destinations within the Gilgit region of Gilgit-Baltistan,

Pakistan. The study focuses on the main tourist districts of Hunza, Nager, and Ghizer (see Figure 1). According to the Tourism Department of Gilgit-Baltistan, these districts are highly popular among mountaineers, trekkers, and adventure enthusiasts. Their scenic landscapes and rich cultural experiences attract thousands of international and local tourists, particularly during peak seasons.

The sampling was carried out in two stages. Firstly, quota sampling was used in the three districts to ensure representativeness and sample size adequacy were achieved for the study. Then, purposive sampling was utilised to select the participants to ensure the specificity and relevancy of the results regarding tourism development in their regions. To participate in the survey, respondents were asked four screening questions to determine their eligibility. Eligible participants must be 18 or older, have lived in Gilgit-Baltistan for more than two years, understand tourism, and be aware of any tourism development planning in Gilgit-Baltistan.
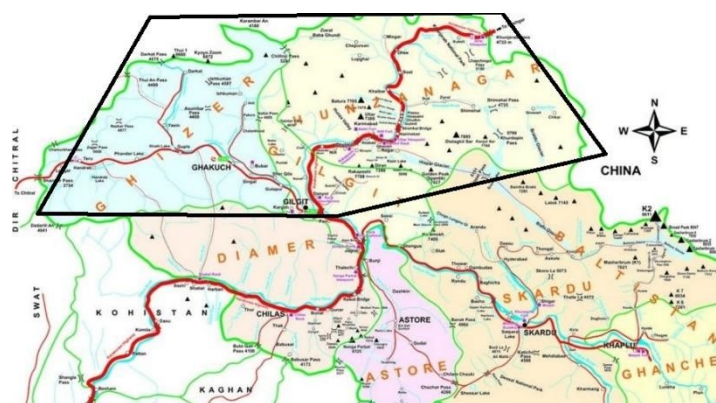

Figure 2: The research setting for this study – Hunza, Nager, and Ghizer

This study employed the G*Power method to calculate and analyse the minimum size of samples. Based on the G*Power calculations, a minimum of 166 samples were needed for this study. Before the actual fieldwork, the draft questionnaire was vetted by two experts in tourism to establish face validity. Next, the questionnaire underwent a pilot study (n = 30) to ensure validity and reliability. Then, 216 responses were collected in the fieldwork from the residents of the three selected tourist districts of the Gilgit region.

The questionnaire was self-administered to collect the primary data, and it has two sections. The first section contains socio-demographic information, and the second section includes the variables of the research model: government policy (Ali et al., 2022), tourism knowledge (Nunkoo, 2015; Stylidis & Quintero, 2022), the three dimensions of emotional solidarity of emotional closeness,

welcoming nature and sympathetic understanding (Aleshinloye et al., 2021), and support for tourism development (Li et al., 2023; Neuts et al., 2021). A five-point Likert scale was utilised to assess each item, with responses ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree).

The Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilised to analyse the proposed model and conduct hypothesis testing. PLS-SEM is recognised for its strong and reliable capability to estimate structural models, making it a preferred alternative in assessing the complex dynamics among the constructs.

ANALYSIS
Assessment of Measurement Model
The reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs can be analysed through the measurement model. Construct reliability can be assessed using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extraction (AVE). As explained by Hanafiah (2020), if most of the CR and Cronbach's Alpha exceed the minimum criterion of 0.7, it indicates dependable study constructs. For convergent validity, it is indicated by looking at the by item loadings and AVE of the variables, and checking whether these variables surpass the suggested threshold (Hair et al., 2017). However, sympathetic understanding, a dimension of emotional solidarity, did not meet the threshold and, thus, consequently removed from the model due to low factor loadings and AVE that affected the measurement model's reliability and validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation, and none of the HTMT values reached the threshold value of 0.90, signifying adequate discriminant reliability.

Assessment of Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing
In Table 1, the results of the structural model assessment are presented. The assessment of the R^2, Q^2, and f^2 values falls within the acceptable thresholds as per Hair et al. (2017) and Hanafiah (2020). Specifically, it is indicated that 7.5 per cent ($R^2 = 0.075$) of the variation in the welcoming nature construct can be accounted for by government policy and tourism knowledge. A similar low variance was also recorded for the variance of emotional closeness (9 per cent or $R^2 = 0.090$) construct, which was also contributed by the government policy and tourism knowledge. The highest variance was recorded by the support for tourism development, with all the variables attributed to 21.4 per cent ($R^2 = 0.214$). This variance is deemed to be a moderate contribution by Cohen (1988). In the analysis of predictive relevance (Q^2), it was found that welcoming nature, emotional closeness, and support for tourism development reflect Q^2 values of 0.033, 0.062, and 0.135, respectively, indicating a significant predictive model (Henseler,

2012). The impact of welcoming nature on support for tourism development (f^2 = 0.216) is considered to be of medium strength per Cohen (1988). Next, the effect size of government policy and tourism knowledge on the intention to recommend (f^2 = 0.140) is small. A similar small effect size was observed for the relationship between tourism knowledge and emotional closeness (f^2 = 0.086).

Regarding path coefficients, the analysis shows that government policy (β = 0.191***) and tourism knowledge (β = 0.203*) positively affect residents' welcoming nature. This positive influence is also evident in the relationship between tourism knowledge and emotional closeness (β = .291***). As for the support of tourism development, only welcoming nature reflects a significant positive coefficient (β = .458***). In contrast, the relationship between government policy and emotional closeness and the link between emotional closeness and support for tourism development provides a statistically insignificant relationship. Based on the results, only H1, H4, H5 and H7 were supported.

Table 1: Structural Path Analysis

Path Analysis	Beta (β)	P-values	f^2	R^2	Q^2
Government Policy -> Welcoming Nature	0.191**	0.002	0.037	0.075	0.033
Tourism Knowledge -> Welcoming Nature	0.203*	0.016	0.040		
Government Policy -> Emotional Closeness	0.096	0.272	0.010	0.090	0.062
Tourism Knowledge -> Emotional Closeness	0.291***	0.000	0.086		
Welcoming Nature -> Support for Tourism Development	0.458***	0.000	0.216	0.214	0.135
Emotional Closeness -> Support for Tourism Development	-0.025	0.835	0.000		

*Note: ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05*

DISCUSSION

This study analysed the nexus between the perceived internal and external factors towards support for tourism development. It focused primarily on two independent variables: government policies and tourism knowledge. The internal and external based variables were analysed in relation to residents' support for tourism development by integrating the perspectives of tripartite emotional solidarity dimensions of welcoming nature, emotional closeness and sympathetic understanding. Such integration produced empirical evidence that bridges the gap between tourism knowledge, government policies and support for tourism development.

Accordingly, residents' knowledge of tourism positively impacts their welcoming nature and emotional closeness. Specifically, emotional closeness is

affected stronger than the former. There is limited literature on this area, however this finding was postulated to be similar to Tucker (2016) to a certain degree. Tucker (2016) found that when tourism providers and residents better understand tourists' experiences and feedback, it can lead to increased empathy and support. This understanding requires strong networks between the residents and relevant tourism suppliers, as tourists' experience is shaped by coherent destination planning and management (see Azinuddin et al., 2020; Azinuddin et al., 2023).

Conversely, government policy significantly influences the welcoming nature of residents toward tourists but not the emotional closeness between them. This study suggests that government policy shapes the overall environment and perceptions around tourism, impacting how welcoming residents are to tourists (see Nunkoo, 2015). However, creating a deeper emotional bond between residents and tourists may require more targeted efforts that transcend government policy. When comparing the impacts of government policy and tourism knowledge, the findings have shown that the latter has a stronger influence on residents' welcoming nature and emotional closeness. This result may be due to the emotional solidarity aligning with the self-concepts of the residents in creating more meaningful connections compared to external influences such as government policy.

The findings on the link between a welcoming nature and support for tourism development aligned with the earlier research by Woosnam et al. (2012). This study indicates that the impact of emotional closeness on support for tourism development is insignificant, a finding consistent with Hasani et al. (2016). These findings suggest the absence of a strong emotional connection between tourists and residents, indicating that more time is needed to build this connection. Building emotional closeness is not immediate and depends on the residents' self-concept and willingness to form relationships with tourists. This lack of immediate emotional closeness can explain the absence of a substantial on support for tourism development. Perhaps this absence can be remedied through strategic curation of destination reputation using technologies and social media to bridge the gap between residents and tourists, as studies have verified its influence in shaping fundamental destination performance-based antecedents in the form of trust and perceived value (see Ibrahim et al., 2023; Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2023; Mohd Salim et al., 2024).

A similar conclusion can be said in the context of sympathetic understanding. In this study, the sympathetic understanding was removed from the model equation, contradicting many works of past studies that used similar instrumentations (see Alenshinloye et al., 2021; Woosnam & Norman, 2010). The reasoning for this may lie in the cultural relevancy of the residents in Gilgit-Baltistan, where sympathetic understanding might not play a significant role

considering the specific needs, concerns and priorities compared to other regions studied by past researchers.

CONCLUSION

The study significantly contributes to the tourism body of knowledge by extending SET, and simultaneously integrating government policies, tourism knowledge, emotional solidarity and support for tourism development in a research model. This model is considered novel for several reasons. Firstly, the inclusion of government policies and tourism knowledge enables a comparison of the role of internal (tourism knowledge) and external-based (government policy) independent variables in facilitating residents' support for tourism development. Secondly, the operationalisation of emotional solidarity at the dimension level allows a deeper identification of the distinctive impacts of each dimension in explaining the unique differences between government policy and tourism knowledge in shaping the varying levels of support for tourism development among the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan. Subsequently, this study heightens the need for policymakers to draft more significant targeted efforts beyond just government policies, such as facilitating meaningful intercultural exchanges and fostering a sense of shared experiences and values. Therefore, a more context-specific and data-driven approach is required, given the complexity and nuances of tourism development for the community. This is proven by the different patterns of empirical evidence generated in the study compared to previous research.

In light of this, it is imperative to treat the result of this study with caution as it employs non-probability sampling techniques. Thus, the findings may not be applicable to populations outside of the study. As for future study recommendations, other mediating and moderating factors can be considered, such as place image, community participation, and perceived empowerment of residents. All these variables are suggested, given their characteristics and predispositions closely related to the well-being and sustainability of the community and destinations.

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