Article

The Effect of Tourist-to-Tourist Interaction on Life Satisfaction: A Mediation Role of Social Connectedness

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Abstract: This study examines the general relationship between tourists' park visits and life satisfaction. Specifically, the article focuses on relationships between verbal and nonverbal and positive and negative tourist-to-tourist interactions, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. Results show that friendly conversation has significant positive relationships with life satisfaction and social connectedness, whereas unfriendly behavior is negatively related to social connectedness. Social connectedness has a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction and plays a mediating role between tourist-to-tourist interaction and life satisfaction. By exploring several types of tourist-to-tourist interaction, this study offers insights into tourist-to-tourist interaction and life satisfaction under a pandemic context.

Keywords: tourist-to-tourist interaction; social connectedness; life satisfaction; well-being; urban park

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1. Introduction

More than half of the world's population resides in urban areas [1]. Green parks, as a type of publicly available natural space, are considered a necessity for urban dwellers [2]. Urban parks contribute to environmental preservation, education, and outdoor recreation [3,4]. These parks make urban areas more pleasant and provide residents an enjoyable city setting. Engaging in nature-based and recreational activities also enables participants to release daily pressure and recover from fatigue [5]. People who regularly visit urban parks have been shown to exhibit greater well-being, quality of life, and life satisfaction along with less stress and anxiety [1,6]. These parks therefore play a prominent role in enhancing public health and wellness.

A substantial body of work has outlined the effects of urban park visits, including in terms of health and wellness benefits [1,7–9]. Scholars have used numerous measures to evaluate changes associated with park visits and then to indicate whether these impacts boost visitors' well-being or life satisfaction. Another research stream has delineated specific advantages of park visits, such as improved physical fitness, greater happiness, lower emotional stress, and relief from mental exhaustion [5,8,10]. The present study seeks to advance understanding of park visits by uncovering the consequences of interactive factors tied to tourists' life satisfaction.

Authors from diverse disciplines have considered tourist-to-tourist interaction (TTI) in tourism and leisure contexts [11–13]. Despite being abundant in marketing and consumer research, studies of customer-to-customer interaction (CCI) have only recently emerged in the tourism field—let alone for urban park visits. The power of social interaction in elevating visitors' health and wellness remains to be determined [5]. Urban parks, as a platform for interaction, are essential for city sustainability [14]. Associated bonds and networks lead urban parks to influence residents' sense of place and identity [14–16]. Scholars have mostly examined the positive impacts of park visits on individuals' well-being [8,9]. Far less is known about the contributing factors that may bolster life satisfaction

after urban park exposure. The importance of social interaction in urban park visits is addressed herein.

In sum, this study explores which aspects of tourist-to-tourist interaction contribute to life satisfaction improvements in urban parks. The research objectives are twofold: (1) to discern interactive factors that affect park visitors' life satisfaction in accordance with tourist-to-tourist interaction theories; and (2) to test the relationships between identified factors and visitors' life satisfaction. The proposed relationships are inspected using data from a survey of 352 randomly selected respondents who visited urban parks in Shenzhen, China, a location known as a "city in parks." Results enhance the understanding of how tourist-to-tourist interaction during urban park visits shapes life satisfaction. This study enriches relevant literature by focusing on interactions among park visitors, a topic that has not been closely examined in work on how park visits benefit health and wellness. Finally, findings provide insight into ways to manage tourist-to-tourist interaction to maximize advantages for park visitors and urban cities.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Contributions of Urban Park Visits to Well-Being

Parks are instrumental to psychological health. They provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to increase life satisfaction [17]. Urban parks represent prime neighborhood spaces and enable residents to enjoy nature and to partake in social activities. Several studies have demonstrated that urban park visits promote physical and mental health. For example, visiting these parks can improve cardiovascular and pulmonary functioning [18,19]. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, visiting a park at least three times per week can enhance one's physiological health by 25% [20].

Pandemic-related restrictions on indoor recreation and social gatherings have transformed urban parks into a source of resilience. This trend is partly due to parks' roles in individuals' physical, psychological, and social well-being [21]. Park visits can reduce the risk of disease transmission and amplify social cohesion; for instance, tourist-to-tourist interaction in parks can foster participants' perceived inclusion and integration [21]. The psychosocial benefits of urban park visits have been widely recognized as well. In addition to gaining immediate pleasure, visitors value interaction and the chance to encourage or help others [22]. This is salient in promoting emotional solidarity and fostering social cohesion among individuals over the COVID-19 times [23]. In particular, the community solidarity to confront the crisis together is required, given that the entire population is affected by the pandemic [24].

Even with growing evidence of the positive relationship between urban park visits and well-being [5], the roles of these experiences on individuals' life satisfaction have not been thoroughly investigated. Diener and colleagues [25] proposed that future studies should explicate how certain variables affect the construct of well-being, for example, life satisfaction. Life satisfaction, referring to a holistic assessment of one's life, is a popular metric of subjective well-being [26]. Global judgments of life satisfaction [LS]—including one's desire to change their life and their satisfaction with their past, current, and future life—are distinct from other types of well-being. Pavot and Diener [27] developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale to measure life satisfaction in a valid and reliable manner. This study accordingly investigates how park visits shape people's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic based on life satisfaction.

2.1.2. Tourist-to-Tourist Interaction and Social Connectedness

The study of human social relations provides a novel lens through which to view the tourist experience. Relevant work has mainly revolved around interactions between tourists and locals and between tourists and service providers [13]. Scholars have also scrutinized host–guest relations to clarify residents' perceptions of tourism [28,29]. Zhang

and colleagues [30] discovered that tourists and locals frequently switched roles during intense interactions. Most tourists in urban parks are area residents rather than long-distance travelers. The influence of tourist-to-tourist interaction on the tourist experience underlines the importance of tourists' relationships with one another [11,13].

The TTI concept originated from CCI, which has been widely explored in service marketing research. Many studies have addressed CCI in service encounters. For example, scholars have striven to determine ways to enhance customer satisfaction via customer management [31]. CCI can have negative or positive effects. Cai and colleagues [32] argued that one customer's misbehavior can detract from other customers' experiences. By contrast, CCI has been found to improve customers' perceptions of the value of a company's offerings [33]. Tourism consumption can span a longer period than other forms of consumption. Travelers naturally have more interaction opportunities in such cases [34]. As a result, TTI has come to be recognized as a core aspect of tourists' engagement and sense of closeness [35].

Woosnam, Norman, and Ying [36] claimed that emotional solidarity between residents and tourists is important, and some residents reported friendship with tourists via interaction, which is an influential antecedent of emotional solidarity [37]. Cohen [38] noted that some tourists prioritize interaction with different people. Crompton [39] later added that TTI is more likely than tourist–local interaction. Interactions and affective bonds between tourists are also essential factors that shape their travel experiences [40]. Subsequent studies have examined TTI during cruise tourism, backpacking, and group tours [11,12,41]. Huang and Hsu [12] considered how TTI influenced tourists' cruise experiences and vacation satisfaction. The authors indicated that TTI quality had a positive direct effect on these experiences and an indirect impact on vacation satisfaction. In Sørensen's [41] study, impromptu social interactions among backpackers were conducive to the development of backpacker travel cultures. Chen and colleagues [11] more recently investigated TTI in a group tour setting. Positive TTI improved individuals' well-being, whereas passive TTI compromised it. They also noted that tourist-to-tourist interaction and well-being were partially mediated by social bonding [11]. The relations among tourist-to-tourist interaction, social bonding (i.e., social connection or social connectedness), and life satisfaction are readily evident.

Social connectedness [SC] is a personal attribute characterized by cognitive experiences of closeness with others [42]. It has also been described as a relational structure or a cognitive schema conveying consistencies in interpersonal patterns [43]. Psychoanalytic self-psychology theory maintains that a person's sense of social connectedness begins to form at a young age and develops throughout life [44,45]. Adults can integrate their experiences with past and present relationships in their overall sense of self, resulting in fairly stable social connectedness [43]. People with positive experiences tend to display high social connectedness in adulthood and vice versa [42,45]. Social connectedness essentially emphasizes the independent self that associates with others. This concept is a notable part of one's sense of belonging [42,46]. Many people are interested in enhancing their SC, and travel may serve this purpose through physical encounters [46]. Interactions between tourists in urban parks are crucial to preventing social isolation, thereby heightening life satisfaction as well as one's physical and mental well-being. The hypotheses guiding this study are drawn from the literature on tourist-to-tourist interaction, social connectedness, and life satisfaction as described in the following subsection.

2.2. Hypothesis Development

Vacationing makes people happier and hence elevates well-being and life satisfaction [47]. However, not all encounters during vacation do so. Positive TTIs foster well-being while negative TTIs diminish it [11]. Tourist-to-tourist interaction can take multiple forms. Lin and colleagues [35] outlined two types: verbal TTI and non-verbal TTI. Other taxonomies have mentioned "etiquette incidents and social incidents" [48]; "basic etiquette, travel norms, communication, assistance, and disturbances" [49]; and "etiquette breaches,

interference and disputes, friendly conversation, advice and help" [50]. As disturbance, interference, and disputes may occur in both verbal and nonverbal forms, and people often justify them as an act of unfriending, the current study focuses on three categories of TTIs from low-intensity to high-intensity—etiquette incidents, friendly conversation, and unfriendly behavior. "Etiquette incidents" refer to basic etiquette and friendly non-verbal behavior; "unfriendly behavior" refers to disturbances, interference, disputes, or other annoyances. The following hypotheses are thus proposed:

H1a. *A significant positive relationship exists between etiquette incidents and tourists' life satisfaction.*

H2a. *A significant positive relationship exists between friendly conversation and tourists' life satisfaction.*

H3a. *A significant negative relationship exists between unfriendly behavior and tourists' life satisfaction.*

Social connectedness is associated with one's sense of cohesion with the social environment and their awareness of interpersonal intimacy [43,45]. It is grounded in a variety of relationship types, ranging from close relations with family or friends to more distant relations with one's community or even strangers [51]. Tourists can realize social connectedness via physical mobility and personal encounters [46]. While urban park visitors are mostly unknown to one another, this type of recreation engenders a personal sense of connection. Productive interactions between tourists contribute to strong social connectedness [11]. A series of hypotheses are put forth accordingly:

H1b. *A significant positive relationship exists between etiquette incidents and tourists' social connectedness.*

H2b. *A significant positive relationship exists between friendly conversation and tourists' social connectedness.*

H3b. *A significant negative relationship exists between unfriendly behavior and tourists' social connectedness.*

People with high social connectedness tend to enjoy supportive relationships and engage in social activities [42]. Social connectedness is a social relationship variable [52]. Social relations benefit one's mental and physical health and contribute to overall well-being [53]. The importance of social connectedness to well-being is well documented [52,54]. This factor, whether developed through a special community or mainstream society, has been shown to reduce mental illness and increase well-being [52]. A longitudinal study confirmed that people with higher social connectedness report greater life satisfaction [55]. In line with prior findings, we speculate:

H4. *A significant positive relationship exists between tourists' social connectedness and life satisfaction.*

Social connectedness is often framed as a mediator among social and psychological variables; for instance, it mediates the relationships between acculturation and well-being [52] and between extraversion and well-being [56]. Using data from 3318 surveys, Brown and colleagues [54] discovered that social connectedness mediated the relationship between the status and well-being of people with volunteer experience. It also mediated the relationship between TTI and well-being in a group tour context [11]. Regarding urban park visits, although tourists are rarely acquaintances, they temporarily form a relatively stable group while sharing recreational space. Park visitors' interaction thus echoes that during a group tour. Life satisfaction is a common measure of well-being [27]. Stated formally:

H5. *Social connectedness mediates the relationship between tourist-to-tourist interaction and tourists' life satisfaction.*

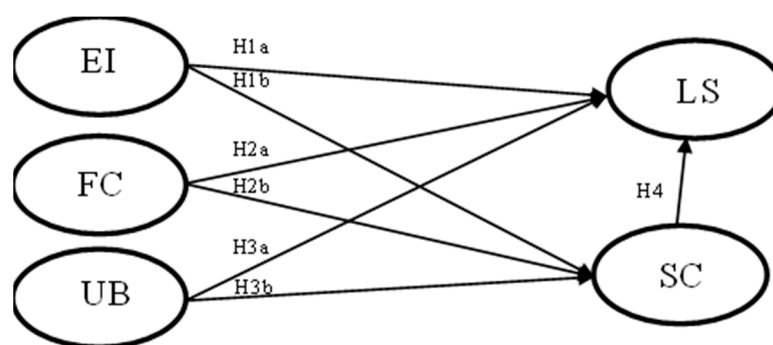Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model underpinning this study.

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Sample Profile

This research was conducted in the city of Shenzhen, China, a well-known "city in parks". The area was home to 1206 parks as of August 2020. To test the relationships among tourist-to-tourist interactions, social connectedness, and life satisfaction in this study, quantitative data were required. Data were collected using a questionnaire survey due to its high efficiency and anonymity. The validity and reliability of this data collection method have been demonstrated in other studies [11], and related authoritative scales have been developed for decades [27].

Study respondents were urban park tourists in this city, including residents and non-residents. Two authors and a research assistant were involved in approaching respondents. A field survey was conducted with pens and papers in more than ten popular urban parks in Shenzhen, such as Shenzhen Bay Park and Children's Park. From 17 April to 6 May 2020, 180 questionnaires were collected by a random sampling strategy. As these respondents were approached face-to-face and one by one, all questionnaires were qualified and useful. Additionally, an online survey was adopted in April–May 2020 and April–May 2022. In accordance with the results of the fieldwork, the majority of online respondents approached were retirees, freelancers, employees, and students. Of another 180 questionnaires distributed online, 172 were valid. Hence, a total of 352 questionnaires were retained for analysis. The gender distribution was fairly balanced, and the age distribution was reasonable. The sample profile shows an overview of all respondents (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample profile.

Category	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	176	50.0%
	Female	176	50.0%
Age	Under age 18	42	11.93%
	Age 18–25	56	15.91%
	Age 26–35	74	21.02%
	Age 36–45	60	17.05%
	Age 46–55	40	11.36%
	Age 56–65	38	10.80%
	Over age 65	42	11.93%
Distribution of tourists	Residents	239	67.90%
	Non-residents	113	32.10%
Duration of stay	All day	5	1.42%
	Half day	30	8.52%
	2–3 h	89	25.28%
	1–2 h	182	51.70%
	Less than 1 h	46	13.07%

Table 1. *Cont.*

Category	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Visiting frequency	Less than 5 times per year	34	9.66%
	6–8 times per year	19	5.40%
	9–11 times per year	40	11.36%
	1–3 times per month	106	30.11%
	1–3 times per week	67	19.03%
	4–6 times per week	43	12.22%
	Everyday	43	12.22%

3.2. Survey Instrument

The researchers adapted items from established scales based on participant observations in urban parks. Five experts in tourism studies were then invited to provide suggestions on items' appropriateness for evaluating associated variables to ensure the instrument's face validity before obtaining data. A pilot test was performed with 123 tourists to create the final measure. Exploratory factor analysis indicated that the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.844, reflecting the scale's suitability for factor analysis [57]. Items' factor loadings were larger than 0.5, indicating convergent validity [58].

The final survey contained 28 items related to respondents' recent recreation experiences, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. All items were scored on a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). Fourteen items concerned TTIs, including five on etiquette incidents (EI), four on friendly conversation (FC), and five on unfriendly behavior (UB). Social connectedness was measured with three items, and five items referred to life satisfaction. Table 2 presents all survey items and their literature sources.

Table 2. Measurement scale and literature sources.

Factors	References
1. Tourist-to-Tourist Interaction -Etiquette Incidents (EI) Tourists in this park dress neatly and in a decent manner. Tourists in this park follow the public norms. Tourists in this park are gentle and polite. Tourists in this park apologize when they cause trouble. My behavior is friendly and polite in the park. -Friendly Conversation (FC) Tourists in this park communicate in a friendly way. Tourists in this park comfort me when I encounter unpleasant things in the park. I chat casually with the tourists in the park in a relaxed atmosphere. I offer recommendations and suggestions for other tourists in this park. -Unfriendly Behavior (UB) Tourists have poor public etiquette in this park such as littering, spitting, or smoking in public. Tourists in this park behave selfishly, such as occupying seats. Tourists in this park are too loud in public places. Tourists in this park speak rudely. Tourists in this park damage public facilities or improperly use exercise equipment.	Chen, Dong, & Zhang [11]; Grove & Fisk [48]; Jiang & Hu [49]; Jiang & Zhang [50]

Table 2. *Cont.*

Factors	References
2. Social Connectedness (SC) I feel comfortable in the presence of strangers in this park. I find myself actively involved in other people's conversations in the park. I get along well with others in the park.	Lee et al. [42]
3. Life Satisfaction (LS) In most ways, my life is close to my ideal. The conditions of my life are excellent. I am satisfied with my life. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin [59]; Pavot & Diener [27]; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik [60]

4. Results

4.1. Common Method Variance Test

Common method variance (CMV) was tested because data were gathered using a single instrument [61,62]. CMV was estimated using Harman's single-factor test prior to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The first factor explained 16.90% of the total variance, while 69.96% of the variance was explained by all five factors. As such, CMV was not a concern in this study.

4.2. Measurement Model

To examine the research hypotheses, CFA was initially adopted in Amos 26.0. The reliability and validity of the seven factors were then assessed in terms of outer loadings, composite reliability (CR), the average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. All items' standardized loading estimates ranged from 0.576 to 0.880 and were statistically significant, meeting the criteria suggested by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black [58]. As listed in Table 3, all AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5 (apart from Etiquette Incidents, which nearly reached the threshold). Convergent validity was therefore sufficient. All CR scores were greater than 0.8 to suggest adequate internal consistency [63]. Regarding discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE of each factor was compared with any two factors based on inter-factor correlations. Table 4 shows that factors' AVE values surpassed their inter-factor correlations, indicating sound discriminant validity [63].

Table 3. Factor loadings, composite reliability, and convergent validity.

Dim.	Item	Standardized Factor Loading	*p*	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
Etiquette Incidents (EI)	TTI1	0.720	***	0.498	0.831
	TTI2	0.728	***		
	TTI3	0.774	***		
	TTI4	0.715	***		
	TTI5	0.576	***		
Friendly Conversation (FC)	TTI6	0.692	***	0.604	0.858
	TTI7	0.720	***		
	TTI8	0.851	***		
	TTI9	0.834	***		
	TTI10	0.754	***		
Unfriendly Behavior (UB)	TTI11	0.795	***	0.599	0.882
	TTI12	0.826	***		
	TTI13	0.732	***		
	TTI14	0.759	***		

Table 3. *Cont.*

Dim.	Item	Standardized Factor Loading	p	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
Social Connectedness (SC)	SC1	0.734	***		
	SC2	0.828	***	0.640	0.842
	SC3	0.834	***		
	LS1	0.845	***		
Life Satisfaction (LS)	LS2	0.821	***		
	LS3	0.880	***	0.663	0.907
	LS4	0.805	***		
	LS5	0.711	***		

Note: *** significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Discriminant validity.

	UB	EI	FC	SC	LS
UB	**0.774**				
EI	−0.262	**0.706**			
FC	−0.166	0.477	**0.777**		
SC	−0.262	0.336	0.619	**0.800**	
LS	−0.207	0.255	0.438	0.47	**0.814**

Note: Bold diagonal elements are the square roots of the AVE for each factor.

4.3. Structural Model

Structural equation modeling was carried out in Amos 26.0 to verify the structural relationships between EI, FC, UB, SC, and LS. Results returned the following fit indices: χ^2/df = 2.219, RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.932, IFI = 0.942. Thus, the measurement model demonstrated a good fit [64].

According to the associations between tested variables (Table 5), etiquette incidents had no significant relationship with either life satisfaction (β = 0.024, $p > 0.1$) or social connectedness (β = 0.015, $p > 0.1$). Hence, H1a and H1b were not supported. Friendly conversation and life satisfaction exhibited a significant positive relationship (β = 0.228, $p < 0.01$), lending support to H2a. Friendly conversation also had a significant positive relationship with social connectedness (β = 0.585, $p < 0.001$). H2b was thus supported. Unfriendly behavior had a negative relationship with social connectedness (β = −0.161, $p < 0.01$) but had no significant relationship with life satisfaction (β = −0.085, $p > 0.1$). As such, H3b was supported, while H3a was not supported. Finally, social connectedness had a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction (β = 0.298, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. The associations between tested variables are shown in Figure 2.

Table 5. Results of hypothesis testing.

	Standardized Coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	p	Hypothesis	Result
EI→SC	0.015	0.100	0.230	0.818	H1b	Not Supported
FC→SC	0.585	0.049	8.631	***	H2b	Supported
UB→SC	−0.161	0.056	−2.944	**	H3b	Supported
EI→LS	0.024	0.113	0.358	0.721	H1a	Not Supported
FC→LS	0.228	0.066	2.825	**	H2a	Supported
UB→LS	−0.085	0.065	−1.493	0.136	H3a	Not Supported
SC→LS	0.298	0.087	3.855	***	H4	Supported

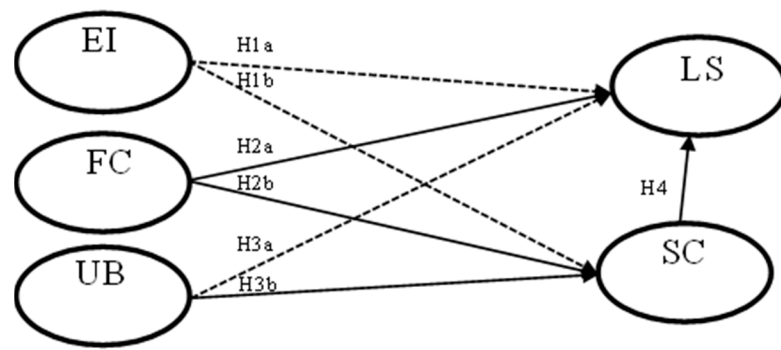Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 2. Relationships between variables.

4.4. Mediating Effects

As presented in Table 6, a bootstrapping method was employed with 2000 iterations to test mediating effects [58]. Social connectedness was found to mediate the relationship between friendly conversation and life satisfaction as well as that between unfriendly behavior and life satisfaction. Additionally, the positive relationship between friendly conversation and life satisfaction was not fully mediated by social connectedness because the direct relationship between friendly conversation and life satisfaction remained significant ($p < 0.05$). Social connectedness therefore was not the sole mediator of this relationship. By contrast, findings revealed a full mediating effect of social connectedness between unfriendly behavior and life satisfaction since the direct relationship between unfriendly behavior and life satisfaction was not significant ($p > 0.1$).

Table 6. Mediating effects (bootstrap = 2000).

	Effects	SE	Bias-Corrected 90% Confidence Interval			Percentile 90% Confidence Interval		
			Lower	Upper	*p*	Lower	Upper	*p*
EI–LS	0.041	0.169	−0.221	0.328	0.786	−0.228	0.320	0.837
EI–SC–LS	0.008	0.049	−0.074	0.088	0.835	−0.077	0.087	0.854
FC–LS	0.186	0.083	0.057	0.328	0.029	0.046	0.320	0.038
FC–SC–LS	0.142	0.054	0.063	0.243	0.003	0.057	0.237	0.004
UB–LS	−0.098	0.077	−0.223	0.026	0.207	−0.225	0.023	0.198
UB–SC–LS	−0.055	0.031	−0.128	−0.018	0.005	−0.118	−0.015	0.010

5. Discussion

Taking urban park visits during the pandemic as a backdrop, this study examined the relationships between types of tourist-to-tourist interaction and life satisfaction along with the mediating role of social connectedness. Etiquette incidents demonstrated no significant relationship with life satisfaction and social connectedness, contradicting prior literature [11]. Chen and colleagues [11] determined that positive TTI exerted significant positive impacts on life satisfaction and social connection. This discrepancy may have arisen because, although etiquette incidents are positive, they typically involve basic etiquette with low-intensity features (e.g., appearance, attitude, possible apologies, and non-physical contact). Interaction variables with higher intensity can directly influence customers' perceived experiential value and behavioral intentions; conversely, interaction variables with lower intensity do not have significant effects [50]. Consequently, etiquette incidents were not significantly associated with tourists' overall life evaluations or their sense of intimacy with others and their surroundings.

People who spend less time alone and more time conversing with others report greater life satisfaction [65,66]. The present study confirmed that friendly conversation is significantly positively related to life satisfaction. Given that friendly conversations appeared to improve tourists' assessments of life satisfaction, cordial conversations in

urban parks function as more than small talk—they are meaningful discussions [65,66]. These conversations also had a significant positive relationship with social connectedness. The concept of social connectedness captures intimate relationships and relationships with strangers [43,45,51]. Sharing information with others during travel amplifies tourists' satisfaction [34]. Self-disclosure also fosters a sense of relational intimacy, as exemplified by the conversational TTI effect, which can positively and significantly influence tourists' perceived intimacy [34,35]. This pattern explains why friendly conversations contributed to tourists' social connectedness in the current study.

Moreover, social connectedness partially mediated the positive relationship between friendly conversation and life satisfaction. Other factors may act as mediators and enhance this form of satisfaction, such as tourists' experiences and trip-related satisfaction [67]. This study also corroborated earlier work in which social connectedness displayed a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction [52,53,55]. People possessing higher social connectedness are more likely to integrate into society and to be more satisfied with their lives overall [55].

Unfriendly behavior was negatively related to social connectedness. Unpleasant experiences in urban parks could diminish one's sense of belonging to their community and compromise perceived intimacy with others, thereby reducing one's social connections [51,52]. However, no significant relationship was observed between unfriendly behavior and life satisfaction in this study, distinct from previous findings [11]. Considering that life satisfaction represents a holistic assessment of one's life [26], unfriendly behavior may have a temporary and less salient effect on it, especially in the context that pandemic-related anxiety also has negative influence on people's emotional and psychological changes. Amid the pandemic, most tourists have worn masks and maintained a certain social distance. COVID-19 has colored people's perceptions of the outside world; individuals are highly cognizant of social isolation and self-safety areas [68,69]. Unpleasant interactions might not significantly affect one's self-perception in relation to life satisfaction. Even though unfriendly behavior had no direct negative impact on life satisfaction, it indirectly affected tourists' life satisfaction via the mediating role of social connectedness. This link suggests that one's interactions with weak ties outside their usual social circle also inform one's sense of belonging and well-being [70].

6. Implications and Limitations

This study extends work on tourist-to-tourist interaction, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. Scholars previously focused on how positive and negative aspects of TTI influence well-being while ignoring other TTI typologies [11]. The present work included verbal and non-verbal TTIs ranging from low- to higher-level interactions. Findings indicated that one's life satisfaction and social connectedness were significantly influenced by conversational interactions in urban parks rather than by low-level TTI (e.g., etiquette incidents). Nonverbal positive interactions are relatively low intensity in this study, while verbal interactions are relatively high intensity. To better understand tourist-to-tourist interaction, verbal and non-verbal categories—and the intensity of interactions—should be considered in addition to positive/negative categories in the future.

Second, this effort expands theoretical applications of tourist-to-tourist interaction by investigating it in the context of urban park visits. Earlier research mainly discussed far-away tourism settings such as cruise tourism, backpacking trips, and group tours [11,12,41]. Interactions between tourists in urban parks involve experiences with strangers and resulting relationships that may be transient and distant (i.e., not intimate). This study revealed that, different from long-haul tourism, positive tourist-to-tourist interaction in urban parks does not always have significant positive effects on life satisfaction and social connectedness. It remains necessary to identify specific tourist-to-tourist interaction categories and cases to thoroughly examine how tourist-to-tourist interaction affects individuals' social connectedness and well-being.

Third, social connectedness has been highlighted as a key aspect of post-pandemic tourism behavior [71]. Compared with studies conducted in non-pandemic times, this study unveiled specific relations between tourist-to-tourist interaction, life satisfaction, and social connectedness during urban park visits in the pandemic era. The COVID-19 crisis has powerfully reinforced the importance of social connections. Tourism will be pivotal in promoting people's social connectedness and well-being during and after this crisis [72]. The present research offers insights into the relationships between tourist-to-tourist interaction, social connectedness, and life satisfaction.

Practical implications of this work will benefit urban park designers and management teams. Tourist-to-tourist interaction can elicit positive psychological effects, and social connectedness plays a part in life satisfaction. Urban Park designers should assume a long-term perspective and consider tourist-to-tourist interaction an outcome of successful park design; visitors' interaction needs are crucial. Encouraging friendly conversations among park visitors will augment opportunities to improve social connectedness and life satisfaction. Urban Park designers are recommended to craft social spaces that inspire visitors to connect with others and enhance their life satisfaction. In addition to regular recreational activities, park management teams can organize social events to facilitate visitors' TTI.

Several limitations of this study leave room for further investigation. First, although the researchers collected as many questionnaires as possible, the sample stands to be enlarged. Rigorous data collection and analysis processes were performed, and the results appear reliable. A larger sample size will nonetheless improve the universality of conclusions. Second, the focal site was a warm city in southern China featuring a distinct geographic and cultural background. Scholars could seek to replicate the study findings elsewhere to enhance generalizability. Furthermore, the pandemic has altered tourists' activities and interactions. Results regarding the impacts of etiquette incidents and unfriendly behavior on life satisfaction should be scrutinized in greater depth as the pandemic wanes.

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