

# Research on the Relationship Between Emotional Energy and Revisit Intention in Camping Tourism: Based on Structural Equation Model

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## Abstract

Camping tourism was more popular during the COVID-19 epidemic around the world, which made camping tourism a crucial part of the worldwide tourism industry. However, previous research did not fully study camping tourism from a comprehensive perspective, just focused on the environment or peer interaction, as a result, they are hard to deeply understand the nature of camping tourism. In this paper, we introduce the tourism field theory and interaction ritual chain theory to construct our model and test the model with the method of structural equation model. After testing the model, we find: (1) The tourism field can significantly and positively affect individual tourist's emotional energy; (2) Interaction ritual can significantly positively affect the emotional energy of individual tourists; (3) The emotional energy of tourists can significantly positively affect the revisit intention; (4) There is a significant mutual positive influence between the tourism field and the interaction ritual. Based on the research conclusions, the study provides theoretical support and reference suggestions for tourism planners and product designers from three aspects: emphasizing the construction of the tourism field, providing opportunities for interaction rituals, and developing diversified tourism projects.

**Keywords:** camping tourism, tourism field, interaction ritual, emotional energy, revisit intention

## 1. Introduction

Camping started to become a kind of leisure activity and tourism form in the 19th century when people were assaulted by industrialization, urbanization, and a series of social changes, such as smoke, noise, and class. To find and recover a sense of belonging and connection in the cacophony of modern urban life, many Americans turned to embrace camping (Young, 2017). From then on, camping was not only accommodation for armies, beggars and others but also a popular way to travel for citizens. In recent years, people have shown a great passion for camping, especially during and after the COVID-19 epidemic all over the world (Brooker et al., 2013), which made it an important segment within the global tourism industry (Mikulić et al., 2017). Data from the U.S. National Park Service show that the outbreak of COVID-19 has made the camping sector busier (Sánchez-Sánchez, 2022), and this phenomenon has also appeared in China, where camping tourism has become a new fashion. Camping tourism in China originated in the 1990s, and the majority of early tourists were explorers and professional campers (Yang, 2022). However, the situation has changed since the epidemic held medium- and long-distance tourism back and social media spread camping content. Then, camping tourism became more popular and became a crucial part of the tourism industry in China.

Camping tourism is considered to be an outdoor activity and one of the best choices for nature-based tourism. Outdoor activities are greatly affected by the natural environment and geographic resources, so scholars discussed the relationship between weather and camper satisfaction and sensitivity (Jeuring, 2017; Hewer et al., 2015), and assessed the camping competitiveness from different destination attributes (Grande et al., 2023). However, just analysing camping tourism from the environment or geography is not enough to understand tourists' experience, because camping tourists always travel with others (Zhu, 2022), which means interaction

between individual tourists and companions can affect tourists' experience. In this situation, taking into account the interaction between a tourist and the environment and the interaction between a tourist and peers will lead to a more complete research framework and a better understanding of camping tourism.

Therefore, we want to construct a comprehensive frame to study the whole tourist experience and the relationship between tourist emotions formed in the tourist experience and revisit intention. To achieve the goal, we introduce the interaction ritual chain theory and tourism field theory to construct a research model and see the emotional energy proposed by Collins as the result of the tourist experience.

## 2. Emotional Energy and Its Influence Pathways

Collins (2009) constructed the concept of "emotional energy" as a feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative when taking action in his interaction ritual chain theory, in other words, emotions are energetic. Besides, Collins argues that there are four outcomes of interaction rituals, namely group solidarity, individual emotional energy, group symbols, and moral sense. This paper mainly studies the changes in individual behaviour and emotions of camping tourists, explores the impact of camping tourism on individuals, and how this impact affects tourists' decision-making on camping tourism. In real situations, although group solidarity, group symbols and moral sense may have a certain impact on tourism decision-making and behaviour, the decision-making is still mainly formed by individual tourists. To sum up, we don't pay attention to group solidarity, group symbols and moral sense because they are not the focus and only have little impact on the decision-making of tourists. The way just focuses on emotional energy can avoid interfering factors and analyse the mechanism process more clearly, which is in line with the emotional energy dynamic mechanism of the tourist experience proposed by Xie (2016), and is also consistent with the treatment methods of Xu (2018), Jin et al. (2023), and Bargeman et al. (2020) who research tourist experience from the same perspective.

Xie (2005) and Jiang (2008) were influenced by psychologist Lewin's psychological field theory and imitated the psychological field to propose a tourism field. Xie (2005) as a representative in the research field believed that the tourism field reflects the interaction between various types of behavioural processes experienced by tourists during travelling and the environment at the time, namely the interaction between a tourist and the environment. Then, Xu et al. (2018) and Wang et al. (2021) used this theory to explore the relationship between tourists and the environment, and Xu found that tourism field can affect tourists' emotional energy. We hypothesize:

*H1: The tourism field has a significant positive impact on the emotional energy of tourists.*

The term "ritual" first appeared in the 19th century, and anthropological research on rituals followed two directions. One is discussions around myth-ritual, which is represented by Tylor, Frazer, etc., and the other revolves around religion-ritual, which is represented by Smith, and Durkheim (Peng, 2002). Conceptually, rituals can be divided into two categories: narrow and broad. Narrow rituals are usually limited to the special aspects of religion and special ethnic groups, while broad rituals are embodied in various social behaviours, such as greetings and farewells (Xie et al., 2016). In terms of the broad concept of ritual, Golfman proposed "interaction ritual", which focused on ritual interaction in human society and emphasized the attention to daily social rituals. On this basis, Collins proposed the "interaction ritual chain", arguing that all interaction between people occurs in certain situations, and the interaction ritual chain is formed by the interconnection and mutual development of different micro situations. Interaction rituals all take place in certain situations, and emotional energy is contained in the cognitive part of the brain in interaction rituals. However, Collins's primitive interaction model arose in a strong social context with power, class and status (especially in religious rituals), such as the upper class with high-intensity emotional energy dominating the lower class with low-intensity emotional energy (Collins, 2009). Xie et al. (2016) believe that the emotional energy generated in Collins's interaction model is often compliant, and it is essentially at the cost of the mental oppression of the person with low emotional energy. However, the tourism context is different from the daily social life context, it provides tourists with a different field from daily life, the identity, occupation, class, etc. of tourists in the field are no longer important, and the status and class corresponding to different intensities of emotional energy in the Collins theoretical model are in a state of absence, so the interactive structure would be reconstructed, and the emotional energy will also be changed. As a result, interaction rituals are capable of changing emotional energy. Similarly, Yu et al. also found that interaction rituals in group relationships can create emotional energy in the study of volunteer tourism; Bargeman et al. (2020) constructed a conceptual model of tourism practice based on Collins' interaction ritual chain theory to explain the reasons why people join and leave tourism practice; Sterchele (2020) revised Collins's theory and constructed a model to demonstrate the factors that play a role in the tourism experience. Based on this, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

*H2: Interaction rituals have a significant positive impact on the emotional energy of tourists.*

Xu (2018) also believes that the tourism field is a spatio-temporal stage that temporarily liberates tourists with

different emotional energy intensities from structured social relations. It can be seen that the tourism field, as the basis for the occurrence of interaction rituals in this context, can affect the interaction rituals. In addition to being influenced, interaction rituals can also affect the interaction between tourists and the tourist field. Yu (2022) argued in his research on heritage tourism that the interaction rituals between tourists can promote their in-depth interpretation of cultural heritage and landscape; in the study of Li et al. (2022), individual tourists resisted the toasting ceremony and finally accepted it through the persuasion of friends, which also reflects that peer interaction can affect the interaction between tourists and tourist field. Therefore, the study hypothesizes:

*H3: There is a significant positive relationship between the tourist field and the interaction ritual.*

Tourists can obtain emotional energy in tourism activities (Xie et al., 2016), and changes in emotional energy are closely related to the willingness to revisit. When Xu (2018) studied group tourists, she found that when tourists received a higher team identity in a certain tourism group context (the study used team identity to indirectly measure the emotional energy of tourists), they would have a higher willingness to revisit tourism enterprises. Based on this, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

*H4: Tourists' emotional energy significantly and positively affects their revisit intention.*

### 3. Study Method and Design

#### 3.1 Research Method and Questionnaire Design

The study is conducted with the structural equation model method (SEM). Because the first-generation multivariate data analysis techniques (multiple regression, logistic regression, and analysis of variance, etc.) have several limitations (Haenlein et al., 2004), researchers have increasingly been turning to second-generation techniques to overcome them, and then structural equation modeling appeared. Because it enables researchers to simultaneously model and estimate complex relationships among multiple dependent and independent variables. The concepts under consideration are typically unobservable and measured indirectly by multiple indicators. In estimating the relationships, SEM accounts for measurement error in observed variables. As a result, the method obtains a more precise measurement of the theoretical concepts of interest (Cole et al., 2014).

The study collects data by questionnaire method, and six parts were included in the questionnaire. The first part was used to investigate peer numbers to avoid solo tourists. The second part investigates the interaction between tourists and tourist destinations from landscape, facilities, food, and labour (Xu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). The third part draws on the core mechanism of interaction rituals (Collins, 2009) to investigate the impact of interaction rituals on tourists from three dimensions: the degree of attention to their peers, the degree of influence by their peers' words and deeds, and the degree of resonance. In the fourth part, referring to Collins and Xie's definition of the concept of emotional energy (Collins, 2009; Xie et al., 2016), emotional energy is investigated from four dimensions: happiness, self-confidence, strength, and initiative. The fifth part investigates the willingness to revisit from two perspectives: revisit intention and recommendation intention. The last part is a survey of demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education, and location. Except for the first part (peer numbers) and the fifth part (demographic characteristics), all questions were formed on a 5-point Likert scale, which from 1~5 to indicate from *very disagree* to *very agree*.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

This survey was conducted from October 21 to December 30, 2022, and the questionnaire was spread on WeChat, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu. Online questionnaires can break through geographical restrictions and make research more comprehensive and objective. Before the formal questionnaire, a pre-survey was implemented, and the pre-survey data passed the reliability and validity tests. Besides, all respondents said that they easily understood the content of the questionnaire. Then, we started to spread questionnaires to more participants and got 533 questionnaires back. To ensure the validity and authenticity of the data, the study eliminated the questionnaires with incomplete or inconsistent information, and finally recovered 507 valid questionnaires, with an effective recovery rate of 95.1%. Among valid questionnaires, 286 males accounted for 56.41% of the total sample size and 221 females made up 43.59%, the ratio of males to females was relatively even. In terms of age, under the age of 18 occupied 2.56% of all samples, 31.36% were aged 18-25, 38.46% were aged 26-30, 15.19% were aged 31-40, 5.33% were aged 41-50, and 7.10% were aged 51 and above, which was consistent with the age portrait of camping tourists in the existing studies (mainly millennials and Generation Z) (Zhu, 2022). In terms of educational background, 2.56% were in junior high school or below, 11.05% were in senior high school, 35.70% were in junior college, 37.28% had a bachelor's degree, and 13.41% had a master's degree or above. The first five main surveyed regions were Chongqing, Anhui, Shaanxi, Beijing, and Fujian in China, accounting for 19.33%, 15.98%, 12.43%, 11.24%, and 10.65% of the total sample size, respectively.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Reliability and Validity Test

To ensure the smooth progress of the follow-up hypothesis testing, the data were tested for normality, and we found that the skewness of the 13 observed variables in the sample data ranged from -1.348 to -0.407, with absolute values less than 2, and the kurtosis ranged from -0.436 to 2.427, all of which were less than 8, indicating that the sample data obeyed the normal distribution and was suitable for subsequent analysis (Long et al., 2022). In the reliability test stage, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient method was used to test, and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient and composite reliability (C.R.) of each variable were both greater than 0.7, indicating that the reliability of the measurement results was high. The factor load of all indicators in the scale was greater than 0.63, which means that each factor can explain at least 40% of the variation of the observed variables, which is a good situation (Qiu et al., 2019), and the average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5, indicating that the scale has good convergence validity (Table 1).

Table 1. The result of the reliability and validity test

Scale items	Standardized loadings	AVE	C.R.	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<b>Tourism Field (TF)</b>		0.564	0.837	0.834
TF1 The landscape made me feel positive	0.656			
TF2 The facilities and equipment in the camping made me feel positive	0.786			
TF3 The food in the camping made me feel positive	0.756			
TF4 The labour in camping made me feel positive	0.797			
<b>Interaction Ritual (IR)</b>		0.515	0.761	0.760
IR1 I paid attention to the reactions and performance of my travel companions	0.703			
IR2 I was influenced by other people's words or actions	0.731			
IR3 I had similar thoughts with others in the process of travel	0.718			
<b>Emotional Energy (EE)</b>		0.538	0.823	0.820
EE1 I was happier than usual after the trip	0.753			
EE2 I was more confident than usual after the trip	0.789			
EE3 After the tour, I was more empowered than usual	0.727			
EE4 After the trip, I became more proactive in my daily affairs	0.659			
<b>Revisit Intention (RI)</b>		0.634	0.776	0.760
RI1 I would love to travel again	0.797			
RI2 I would recommend others to travel	0.796			

#### 4.2 Model Testing

We used AMOS 26 software to test our model, and the final model analysis showed that  $\chi^2/df$ , RMR and RMSEA were 2.990 (<3), 0.029 (<0.05) and 0.063 (<0.08), respectively. Besides, the GFI index, NFI index, IFI index, TLI index and CFI index were 0.951, 0.949, 0.965, 0.952 and 0.965, respectively, all of which were greater than 0.8, indicating that the adaptability of the model was ideal. After finishing the path analysis, the result showed that the research hypotheses were all valid (Table 3). The specific results are as follows: (1) tourism field can significantly and positively affect tourists' emotional energy ( $\beta=0.653$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and hypothesis 1 is valid; (2) Interaction rituals could significantly and positively affect tourists' emotional energy ( $\beta=0.322$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and hypothesis 2 was valid. (3) Tourists' emotional energy can significantly and positively affect their revisit intention ( $\beta=0.807$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and hypothesis 3 is valid. (4) There was a significant positive interaction between the tourist site and the interactive ritual ( $\beta=0.828$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and hypothesis 4 was valid.

Table 2. The result of the path analysis

Hypotheses	Standard Path Coefficient	Standard Error	Test Results
H1 Tourism Field $\rightarrow$ Emotional Energy	0.653***	0.094	supportive

H2 Interaction Ritual → Emotional Energy	0.322***	0.085	supportive
H3 Emotional Energy → Revisit Intention	0.807***	0.077	supportive
H4 Tourism Field ↔ Interaction Ritual	0.828***	0.036	supportive

Note: \*\*\* means  $p \leq 0.001$ , which is very significant.

Finally, the model test results are shown in Figure 1.

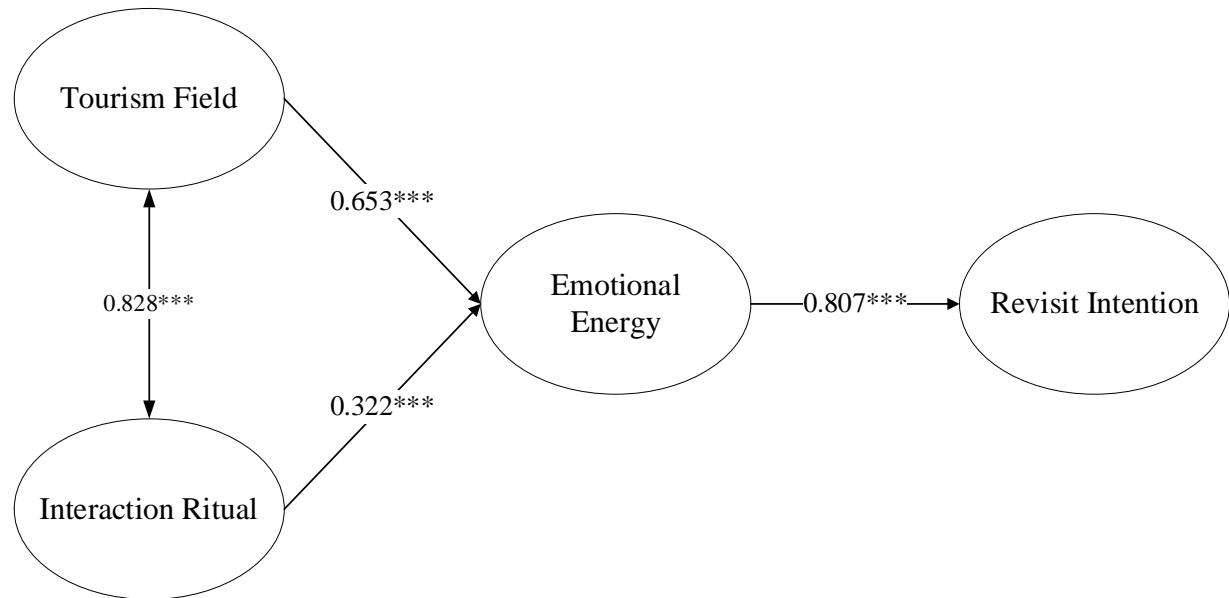


Figure 1. Standardized estimated hypothetical model

## 5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of the model have the following implications for practice: Firstly, pay attention to the construction of the tourism field and create immersive tourism spaces. The results and path index show that the tourism field significantly and positively affects emotional energy with relatively high intensity, and also affects the interaction rituals in the field, which is a basic and important factor in the tourism experience, so the construction of the tourism field is very important. Managers should consider adding the landscape, facilities, food and immerse props to improve the interaction rate between tourists and tourist destinations, for example, the food tasting and labour experience in the field makes tourists participate more deeply in tourism activities.

Secondly, interaction rituals can change emotional energy, which makes it a crucial role in the tourist experience, so managers should provide opportunities for interaction rituals between tourists and their peers by increasing the design of related activities in travel products. Taking camping tourism as an example, product designers can hold bonfire parties, camp music festivals, fan gatherings and some competitions such as cooking competitions, the most beautiful tent selection, and frisbee competitions to raise tourists' involvement and interests.

Thirdly, integrate with other consumption formats and develop diversified tourism projects. The tourism field reflects the basic functions such as aesthetics, entertainment and service and the interaction rituals in the field represent the social characteristic of tourism, that is, peer attention, peer influence, peer interaction, etc., so it can be integrated with the consumption formats that have the same need for basic and social functions, for example, product designers can integrate tourism with other projects, like team building, dating and marriage.

## 6. Limitations

There are several limitations in the paper. Firstly, the study does not consider the impact of peer origin and relationship basis on interaction rituals, so it cannot deeply explain the interaction in the segment field. Second, Collins did not provide any detailed way to measure interaction rituals and emotional energy, even though he put forward subjective self-observation. Subsequent studies have not solved these problems well either, we try to construct the observation variables of interaction rituals and emotional energy based on Collins's original concepts. Although the data of various indicators are good and can support the research, as an exploratory study, it still needs to be further improved. Thirdly, the study mainly investigates the interaction between adult individuals and does not consider other groups such as teenagers, children and their parents.

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