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Examining Rapport with Local People, International Students' Roles through Travel Experience and Sustainable Tourism

Alisa Kazakova, Meerim Karimova and Insin Kim *

Department of Tourism and Convention, Pusan National University, Busan 46241, Korea; alisancrdbl@pusan.ac.kr (A.K.); meerim2496@gmail.com (M.K.)
* Correspondence: insinkim@pusan.ac.kr

Abstract: As the educational travel market is growing rapidly, it is fundamental to explore the role of international students in sustainable tourism. By improving the relationship between international students as tourists and local people, travel destinations can be easily recognized globally through promotion by international students. The aims of the current study were to identify important attributes of local people in developing rapport with international students during their travel experience and investigate the structural relationships among international students' rapport with the local people, satisfaction with travel experiences and willingness to share their travel experiences online and offline. Data were collected from 220 international students currently studying in South Korea who have traveled to South Korea for the purpose of being international students. As a result of structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, among the sub-dimensions of the attributes of local people that international students met, physical attractiveness and displaying positive emotions positively influenced the rapport between international students and local people. On the other hand, helpfulness did not affect the rapport between local residents and international students. In addition, the rapport between local people and international students has positive effects on travel satisfaction and willingness to share travel experiences online and offline. Study findings also found that travel satisfaction has a significant positive impact on the willingness to share travel experiences online and offline. Therefore, theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed.

Keywords: international students; travel experience; local people; perceived attributes; rapport behaviors; travel satisfaction; willingness to share

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1. Introduction

The international student market is growing rapidly [1] because more young people are pursuing higher education in a country other than their own [2]. These sojourners experience different cultures through sustained contact with local people [3,4]. Tourism researchers have highlighted the importance of travel experience, which provides international students with the opportunity to discover themselves and to develop foreign language skills and intercultural awareness [5–7]. In addition to student benefits from travel experiences, tourism researchers noted that international sojourners attract a variety of visitors (e.g., their friends, partners, or families), who are beyond marketing activities in host countries [2,8,9]. That is, international students act as a pull factor motivating friends and relatives from their home country to visit the country in which they are studying. Thus, students serve both as a host and an ambassador [10,11].

Tourists for visiting friends and relatives (VFR) are defined as tourists who are invited by friends and/or relatives and stay at international sojourners' destinations overnight [12]. Although VFRs tend to invest less in accommodation, they tend to spend more on other activities, such as shopping and food [13]. In other words, VFRs' economic contribution to tourism and destination is more than non-VFRs' [14]. Additionally, tourism researchers have stressed that international students are likely to revisit a host country after the com-

pletion of their studies [2,8,15]. Therefore, it is essential to identify the roles of international students as a travel market as well as an ambassador.

Meanwhile, scholars have emphasized that residents' support is important for successful tourism development of destinations and sustainable tourism of the community [16–18]. For sustainable tourist destinations, local people should form favorable attitudes toward tourists and make effort to keep a good relationship with them [16]. From the perspective of tourists, when the tourism experience is supported by residents, tourists perceive the travel experience as enjoyable and unforgettable [19]. During their stay in a host country, international students as tourists are motivated to seek novelty, broaden their horizons about different cultures [20,21], and attempt to contact members in different group for their acculturation [4]. That is, during foreign students' travel, building connections with local residents enhances the destination image [22,23]. Thus, it is important to discover determinants of building a good relationship with local people during international students' travel.

Dutt et al. [24] emphasized that the tourism experiences of sojourners have not received sufficient attention in the tourism literature. Most studies on international students focus exclusively on educational aspects of the sojourn, with little attention paid to leisure trips [15,25,26]. In tourism studies, international students can make significant contributions, either directly (e.g., traveling local tourism attractions, revisiting after graduation, and recommending to other students) or indirectly (e.g., attracting friends and relatives) [10,11,27]. Additionally, international students not only frequently travel because they have more free time but also promote diverse tourism sites of the host country via social media to friends and family in their home countries, resulting in positive economic and social impacts on the host country [28]. Therefore, it is necessary to better understand foreign students' roles through travel experience in a host country.

The current study aims to identify important attributes (physical attractiveness, displayed positive emotions, and helpfulness) of local people that affected international students during their travel in inducing rapport with locals. Additionally, we investigate the relationships among international students' rapport with local people, travel satisfaction, and willingness to share their travel experiences. The study finds that by improving the relationship between international students as tourists and local people, travel destinations can be easily recognized globally through promotion by international students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Students in South Korea and Their Travel

South Korea has become an increasingly popular study destination for foreign students [29]. The number of international students enrolled in South Korea's higher education institutions was 87,480 in 2010 and reached 180,131 in 2019 [30]. According to KOSIS, the international students with diverse nationalities across the 225 countries reside in South Korea for various academic programs involving language, undergraduate and graduate courses in 2019. Most of the international students in South Korea are from Asia including China, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and so on. South Korea attracts international students by providing quality education, scholarship programs funded by the government, a high level of technology development, employment support, and career development [29]. Additional cultural factors, such as successful Korean pop music (K-pop) and the phenomenon of "Hallyu" indicating the Korean cultural wave, also play an important role in bringing more foreign students to Korea [31,32].

Tourism and intercultural scholars have suggested that international students not only function as cultural ambassadors but also form a considerable tourism market contributing to their host destinations' economy [33]. Especially, tourism researchers asserted that international students have a high potential in attracting other tourists by inviting relatives and friends to visit their host country [11,34]. Foreign students also travel during study periods and revisit host countries after graduation [34–36]. According to previous research, international students exhibit different tourism behaviors while in their home country

compared to while in their host country. For example, Bae and Song [29] discovered that foreign students in South Korea traveled for experiencing areas of cultural heritage, while in their home countries, their main travel purpose is local food. They also revealed that, in choosing travel information sources, international students preferred online social media within South Korea while gaining travel information from family and friends within their home countries. That is, international students would be a powerful travel information source when they return to their home country [34], implying that they actively introduce and promote different cultures as well as tourism sites of host destinations through online social media to families and acquaintances in their home countries.

2.2. Rapport with Local People

Gremler and Gwinner [37] defined rapport as an individual's perception of having not only an "enjoyable interaction" but also a "personal connection" between two interactants. Specifically, higher levels of rapport lead to more pleasant conversations and the development of a personal relationship between two counterparts [38–40]. Recently, the rapport concept has drawn much attention from scholars in the marketing field since the relationship between employees and customers can lead to positive word of mouth, customer satisfaction, and loyalty [39,41–44]. In addition, Hyun and Kim [42] suggested, despite an employee–customer relationship, the rapport between them induces emotional attachment, and Hwang and Lee [40] indicated certain professional competencies of a tour guide influenced rapport building with package tourists.

According to the theory of rapport-building behaviors, comfortable relationships with others lead to warmer feelings towards people, which might result in greater overall satisfaction [41]. Friendly interaction and a welcoming atmosphere created by locals can help foreign students to feel accepted by society, especially when living on their own in an unfamiliar country. Thus, it is important to discover factors facilitating rapport development between two interactants for more effective marketing efforts.

2.3. Perceived Attributes of Local People

Local people use natural and socio-cultural resources developed for sustainable tourism destinations [45], at the same time, they play roles as resources for sustained growth of tourism in their own communities by successfully maintaining good relationships with their tourists [46]. Local people influence the destination image among actual and potential tourists [47]. Tourists usually meet local people as passers-by, during sightseeing, when buying souvenirs from local stores, encountering service workers in most tourism fields [48], or while having a conversation with a host/restaurant owner. Experiencing a diverse culture through local hospitality and communication with local people at tourism destinations helps create meaningful and unforgettable memories, enhancing the overall image [21]. Thus, tourist–resident interaction is one of the key factors affecting tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and even the possibility of recommending the destination to their acquaintances [22]. It is suggested that international students' perception of local people may play a crucial role in their overall travel experience, their positive assessment of the destination, and future behaviors. Three perceived attributes of local people (physical attractiveness, displayed positive emotions, and helpfulness) are considered critical in destination marketing [49].

2.3.1. Physical Attractiveness

Physical attractiveness can be defined as "a cultural standard of beauty involving an assessment and evaluation of aesthetic quality based on body type, hair texture, skin color, and facial features" [50] (p. 230). That is, from the viewpoint of tourists, the assessment of local people's physical attractiveness is undertaken within the cultural context.

Social psychology researchers suggest that the first impression plays a key role in the interaction between encounters [51]. Previous studies in service marketing revealed that employee's physical attractiveness is one of the decisive factors influencing customer

satisfaction [51,52]. For instance, Söderlund and Julander [52] found that the level of the physical attractiveness of a service employee has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Additionally, front-line employee's physical attractiveness generates a good impression, leading to favorable evaluation about employees and the company's overall image. Similarly, if local people that the tourists encounter at a tourist destination are physically attractive, the overall image of the destination is enhanced [49].

People tend to believe that an attractive person is more self-confident, socially adept, successful in changing attitudes, warm, persuasive, intelligent, friendly, and happy [49,53]. Since locals directly interact with tourists, their physical attractiveness may influence tourists' first impression about the destination and overall satisfaction. Nam, Kim, and Hwang [49] found that residents' physical attractiveness positively impacts the strong connection with tourists.

Hypothesis 1. *The physical attractiveness of local people has a positive effect on the rapport between international students and local people.*

2.3.2. Displayed Positive Emotions

Displaying positive emotions involves friendly or courteous behavior, such as politeness, thankfulness, smiling, and giving a proper greeting [54]. Scholars in service marketing noted that, when customers evaluate service encounters, emotions shown by service employees during the interaction are considered important elements [55]. It is well known that a service worker who is friendly and performs tasks with a nice smile may contribute to a positive customer response [51].

According to the emotional contagion theory, the emotions of one person and associated behaviors directly cause similar emotions and behaviors in other people. Therefore, stronger positive emotions displayed by hosts elicit a greater guest response which in turn influences the assessment of hosts, destinations/service companies and travel/service experience in general [49,51,56]. Barger and Grandey [57] found that a smile from an employee induces a smile from a customer in response during their service encounter. According to Gillis, Bernieri, and Wooten [58], smiling is one of the crucial behavioral factors which helps to establish a good rapport. Thus, it is proposed that if local people display positive emotions, it can lead to a better rapport between them and foreign students. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2. *Local people displaying positive emotions have a positive effect on the rapport between international students and the local people.*

2.3.3. Helpfulness

An individual's helpfulness can be understood as the degree to which he/she demonstrates a willingness to help/serve or creates an impression of interest in a counterpart [49,51]. Previous research has shown that employee helpfulness directly affects customer satisfaction [51,59]. For instance, successful retail interactions often position employees' helpfulness as the basis for evaluating the performance of the service provider [51]. Krueckeberg [60] revealed that employee assistance during shopping was considered helpful, and customers recognized it as a significant part of the service. Subsequently, a competent and accessible employee with a high ability to provide required services meets the minimum expectations of customers [51], while extra voluntary performance can enhance customer satisfaction. In the context of the current study, the helpfulness of local people can include helping visitors by providing local information and sharing experiences [49,61]. Both extra effort and time investment exerted by locals might facilitate building social bonds with international students. Hyun and Kim [42] revealed that sharing information, which is related to helpfulness, has an important influence on the generation of emotional attachment towards service providers. Therefore, the helpful actions of lo-

cal people are critical antecedents affecting the overall assessment of the destination and increasing the quality of personal connections with tourists [49].

Hypothesis 3. *The helpfulness of local people has a positive effect on the rapport between international students and the local people.*

2.4. Travel Satisfaction and Willingness to Share Travel Experience

Satisfaction is defined as the judgment or evaluation for all attributes of products, relationships, and experiences [62–64]. A number of service management researchers have systematically studied customer satisfaction, and research findings indicate that there is a high possibility for a satisfied customer to exert positive behavioral responses, such as revisit, repeat purchases, or positive word-of-mouth [65–67]. Travel satisfaction can be described as an "individual's formation and evaluation of an affective attitude regarding a trip" [68].

Munar and Jacobsen [69] suggested that sharing travel experience in social media involve knowledge sharing related to tourism destinations and products as well as additional factors related "communicating emotions, imaginations and fantasies about features of a holiday, for example through photographs, emoticons and other linguistic markets" (p. 47). Such a way of sharing travel experience is different from traditional sharing experience (e.g., word-of-mouth). Westbrook [70] defined word of mouth as "informal communication directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers." Prior research findings reported that the willingness to recommend a destination to their friends and relatives is affected by the destination image [71,72]. Because sharing travel experiences with relatives, family, and friends is proven to be more credible than commercial advertisements [73–75], word-of-mouth can be a more reliable source of travel information for potential tourists than other sources [76]. That is, when foreign students return to their homeland during vacation or after graduation, they can effectively share their travel experience in South Korea and promote Korean culture to their relatives and friends.

Alongside conventional offline methods, the Internet nowadays plays a crucial role in sharing individuals' post-trip experiences [77,78]. Through social media platforms, tourists can communicate with other users and share their experiences, knowledge, and feelings [78–80]. This method can be a powerful marketing tool. In social media platforms such as blogs, microblogs, WeChat, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter [78], travelers have an opportunity to share their tourism experiences, and potential tourists can obtain information. When people share tourism experiences through social media, their friends and relatives can see and experience what travelers have seen without physically being there. Previous studies investigated the influence of online sharing on motivation [69], consumers' behavior, and its benefits to marketers in the tourism industry [81,82]. For example, tourists are very motivated to share their experiences on the Internet to help other travelers with useful tips and possible ways to avoid the use of unpleasant products and services [69,83].

According to Gunderson et al. [63], tourists' overall travel experience is determined by the level of (dis)satisfaction with services received. Thus, during foreign students' travel to discover intercultural uniqueness, building rapport with local people may exceed their expectations, leading to satisfaction with their travel experience. Additionally, the rapport developed between interactants is significantly related to future behavioral intentions [39,40,84]. Based on Gremler and Gwinner's [37] study, rapport influences sharing consumption experiences with others in a positive way. Therefore, the rapport built with local people during foreign students' travel might lead to a strong willingness to share their experiences with potential visitors offline as well as online.

Hypothesis 4. *Rapport has a positive impact on travel satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 5. *Rapport has a positive impact on the willingness to share travel experiences.*

Hypothesis 6. *Travel satisfaction has a positive impact on the willingness to share travel experiences.*

Based on the literature review, this study investigates crucial factors of local people's attributes in building rapport between international students and local people. In addition, the relationships among the rapport with the local people, international students' travel satisfaction, and the willingness to share the travel satisfaction were examined. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed model of this study.

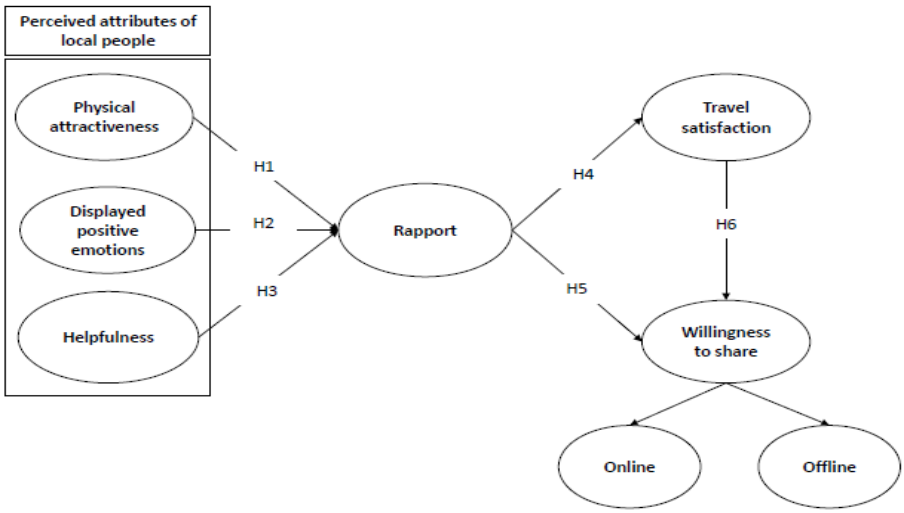


Figure 1. The research model.

3. Method

3.1. Measures

To empirically measure the latent constructs proposed in the study, reliable and valid measurement variables were obtained from prior studies. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the first part is related to local people (perceived attributes of local people and rapport with local people); the second part is related to international students' travel experience and following behaviors (travel satisfaction and willingness to share travel experience); and the last part is related to demographic information. Perceived attributes of local people were measured with ten items, including three for physical attractiveness, three for displayed positive emotions, and four for helpfulness, which were employed by Keh et al. [51], Nam, Kim, and Hwang [49], and Yi et al. [85]. Rapport was measured using four questions adapted from Gremler and Gwinner [37], Hwang et al. [39], and Hwang and Lee [40]. Four questions to measure travel satisfaction were derived from Choi et al. [68], Keh et al. [51], and Seiders et al. [86]. The willingness to share travel experience online was measured with four questions adapted from Jacobsen and Munar [80], and Munar and Jacobsen [69], and offline assessed with four questions derived from Gremler and Gwinner [37], and Hwang and Han [74]. All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale, in which 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree". In addition, the questionnaire included questions related to respondents' demographic details.

3.2. Data Collection and Sample

The sample targeted in this study included international students currently studying in South Korea. To choose the suitable respondents, screening questions were used in the questionnaire: "Are you an international student in South Korea?"; "Have you stayed in South Korea for more than six months?"; "Have you had any travel experience in South Korea while studying here?"; "Have you ever interacted with local people during your travel in South Korea?". Respondents who answered "yes" to these screening questions

continued with the survey, while participants that responded with "no" to any of these questions were informed that the survey would terminate. Then, respondents provided the name of the city that they traveled to most recently, where any interaction with local people occurred, and were requested to answer all questions based on the selected city.

Our survey was conducted through a face-to-face method from 23 January to 12 March 2020. The questionnaire was distributed to international students in South Korea, and the snowball-sampling method was used. A total of 347 responses were obtained, and 127 were excluded during the screening questions. Consequently, a total of 220 usable responses were used for further analysis. The participants in the survey are from 50 countries, and 43.6% are from China. Based on KOSIS [30], 70,378 Chinese students stay in South Korea, accounting for about 40% of the total. Additionally, female students are more than male students in South Korea. That is, the obtained sample is representative of the characteristics of international students in South Korea. Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of international students. The current study employed the knowledge of the Korean language by foreign students as an additional demographic feature, which is displayed as TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) level. TOPIK measures the ability of nonnative speakers to understand and communicate in the Korean language [87]. The comprehension level of a local language can be a significant factor contributing to the overall experience of tourists at a destination.

Table 1. Profiles of respondents.

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	77	35.0
	Female	143	65.0
Age	Under 25	96	43.6
	26–35	113	51.4
	36+	11	5.0
Education level	Freshman	4	1.8
	Sophomore	6	2.7
	Junior	9	4.1
	Senior	28	12.7
	Graduate student	145	65.9
	Others	28	12.8
Nationality	China	93	42.3
	Kyrgyzstan	22	10.0
	Russia	14	6.4
	Kazakhstan	11	5.0
	Uzbekistan	6	2.7
	Others	74	33.6
Duration of stay	Less than a year	6	2.7
	More than 1 year~less than 2 years	48	21.8
	More than 2 years~less than 3 years	58	26.4
	More than 3 years~less than 4 years	29	13.2
	More than 4 years	79	35.9
TOPIK level	Level 2	11	5.0
	Level 3	29	13.2
	Level 4	48	21.8
	Level 5	55	25.0
	Level 6	57	25.9
	I have not taken the test	20	9.1

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model

To verify the validity and reliability of all measurments used in the study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used. The results of the CFA revealed an acceptable overall

model fit (χ^2 = 676.135, df = 282, χ^2/df = 2.398, $p < 0.05$, IFI = 0.919, CFI = 0.918, TLI = 0.906, RMSEA = 0.080). As Byrne [88] suggested, the values of CFI, TLI, and IFI exceeded the cut-off of 0.90 and RMSEA value indicated an acceptable fit.

As provided in Table 2, all factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$ and ranged from 0.550 to 0.959. Further, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs exceeded the 0.50 threshold. Thus, a high level of convergent validity was confirmed [89]. The discriminant validity was estimated by comparing the squared correlations between constructs and AVE values. The Cronbach's alpha value of each construct was greater than the cut-off value of 0.7. Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) value of each construct exceeded 0.70 (see Table 3), thus indicating an adequate level of internal reliability [90].

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) items and loadings.

Items	Loading	AVE	α
Local people's attribute—Physical attractiveness			
The local people I met during my travel were very good-looking.	0.798	0.755	0.901
They had an attractive appearance.	0.939		
They would generally be thought of as beautiful/handsome.	0.864		
Local people's attribute—Displayed positive emotions			
They said "hello", "how are you today", or other greetings to me.	0.682	0.619	0.825
They smiled at me.	0.836		
They were pleasant.	0.832		
Local people's attribute—Helpfulness			
They assisted me in finding products (e.g., tourist attractions and restaurants.	0.759	0.733	0.916
They helped me with my travel (e.g., giving information).	0.829		
They taught me how to use services correctly.	0.919		
They explained to me how to use services correctly.	0.907		
Rapport with the local people			
I had a warm feeling toward the local people.	0.847	0.544	0.826
I was comfortable interacting with the local people.	0.811		
There were local people who wanted to get close to.	0.629		
I have taken a personal interest in the local people.	0.636		
Travel satisfaction			
I am pleased with my overall travel in Korea.	0.959	0.862	0.961
I feel delighted with my overall travel in Korea.	0.928		
I am completely satisfied with my travel experience in Korea.	0.889		
I am happy with my overall travel in Korea.	0.937		
Willingness to share			
Online		0.639	0.880
share my travel experience through email/text messages/mms.	0.578		
share by posting photos/videos for acquaintances, on Facebook, etc.	0.886		
use Instagram to share my photos/videos about my travel experience.	0.814		
make a blog/diary on the Internet to share my travel experience for all.	0.550		
Offline			
say positive things about my travel experience to others.	0.823		
recommend the travel destination to others.	0.874		
encourage others to visit this place.	0.897		
share my travel experience with others.	0.885		

Notes: All factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$; AVE = average variance extracted; α = Cronbach α.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and associated measures.

	Construct	Mean	SD	CR	1	2	3	4	5
1	Physical attractiveness	3.44	0.794	0.925	1.00				
2	Displayed positive emotions	3.47	0.911	0.807	0.493 (0.243)	1.00			
3	Helpfulness	3.62	0.921	0.912	0.469 (0.220)	0.754 (0.569)	1.00		
4	Rapport	3.41	0.821	0.812	0.550 (0.302)	0.896 (0.803)	0.738 (0.544)	1.00	
5	Travel satisfaction	4.01	0.825	0.970	0.457 (0.209)	0.659 (0.434)	0.535 (0.286)	0.705 (0.497)	1.00
6	Willingness to share	3.86	0.723	0.925	0.462 (0.213)	0.599 (0.359)	0.487 (0.237)	0.668 (0.446)	0.765 (0.585)

SD = standard deviation; CR = composite reliability; squared correlations are presented in parentheses.

4.2. Structural Model Testing

To test the hypotheses of the proposed model, structural equation model analysis (SEM) was conducted. The results of SEM showed that the overall fit of the structural model was acceptable (χ^2 = 680.367, df = 288, χ^2 / df = 2.362, $p < 0.05$, IFI = 0.919, CFI = 0.919, TLI = 0.908, RMSEA = 0.079).

Table 4 presents the results of SEM analysis with standardized coefficients and their t-values. Specifically, the effect of the physical attractiveness of local people on rapport was significantly positive (β = 0.153, $p < 0.01$); thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. Displayed positive emotions of local people significantly influenced rapport (β = 0.742, $p < 0.01$); thus, hypothesis 2 was supported. However, the effect of the helpfulness of local people on rapport was not significant (β = 0.109, $p > 0.05$); therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported. The effects of rapport on travel satisfaction (β = 0.719, $p < 0.01$) and willingness to share travel experience was positively significant (β = 0.256, $p < 0.01$) and travel satisfaction had a significant positive impact on willingness to share travel experience (β = 0.580, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 were supported.

Table 4. Standardized parameter estimates for the structural model.

Hypothesis	Path			Standardized Estimate	*t*-Value	Result
H1	Physical attractiveness	→	Rapport	0.153	2.753 **	Supported
H2	Displayed positive emotions	→	Rapport	0.742	6.902 **	Supported
H3	Helpfulness	→	Rapport	0.109	1.325	Not Supported
H4	Rapport	→	Travel satisfaction	0.719	11.463 **	Supported
H5	Rapport	→	Willingness to share	0.256	2.947 **	Supported
H6	Travel satisfaction	→	Willingness to share	0.580	5.288 **	Supported

** $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study investigated important attributes of local people in forming a rapport with international students and examined relationships among international students' rapport with local people, travel satisfaction, and willingness to share their travel experiences. The conceptual model was empirically tested via SEM analysis using data collected from

220 international students currently studying in South Korea. Implications based on the findings are provided below.

5.1. Effects of Perceived Attributes of Local People on Rapport

Firstly, the research findings indicate that the physical attractiveness of residents has a positive impact on rapport with international students. The more physically attractive international students perceive locals to be, the higher the likelihood for an intimate connection to develop between them. When tourists arrive at a destination, the first thing they interact with is the local population. According to previous studies on tourism marketing, the physical attractiveness of encounters, i.e., service providers, can be one of the crucial factors influencing consumer satisfaction [51,52]. This finding does not apply simply to local service workers but to residents who might encounter tourists as well. Physical attractiveness can be manipulated by adapting clothing and cosmetics [52,91]. Mehrabian and Blum [92] revealed that several aspects of appearance could be controlled by make-up and grooming, which are positively associated with the general assessments of physical attractiveness. Local people's traditional dressing style can have an impact on the first impression of residents and the destination itself.

Secondly, findings indicate that displaying positive emotions has the most positive impact on rapport. This suggests that the more positive emotions locals display, such as smiling and greeting with warm words, the more likely international students will perceive a more intimate relationship with them. This result supports the findings of prior researches [37,56]. Displaying positive emotions appeared to be the most significant element in building rapport between international students and local people. It might involve friendly or courteous behavior, such as politeness, thankfulness, smiling, and proper greeting [54]. Especially for international students who are far from their home country, local people displaying positive emotions can help create warm feelings. When local people smile, greet, try to speak English, compliment or show interest in international students, it can make them feel more welcomed and accepted in a host country. Therefore, destination marketers should encourage locals to display positive emotions by providing an understanding of how tourists support the local economy. It might be helpful to distribute promotion videos and posters with smiling and happy local people.

The findings also indicate that the relationship between helpfulness and rapport is insignificant. This result is different from findings of previous studies, for instance, Keh et al. [51]. Their study revealed that the helpfulness of employees has a stronger impact on consumer satisfaction than displaying positive emotions or physical attractiveness. Employees' helpfulness is defined as the situation in which a service provider demonstrates a willingness to help or serve or creates an impression of curiosity in the customer [51]. However, in the case of international students, the non-significant relationship can perhaps be explained by the demographical profile of the respondents. Most respondents lived in South Korea for more than a year and have a high level of TOPIK, which means they know how to move around and know the language to some degree, thus making them more independent and less in need of help.

5.2. Effects of Rapport on Travel Satisfaction and Willingness to Share

The study results showed that the rapport between local people and international students has a significant positive effect on travel satisfaction. In service marketing, employee behavior is central to customer perceptions of satisfaction and quality of service [43]. Grove and Fisk [93] found that when service providers are friendly or hospitable, a "warm feeling" can develop towards them, which in turn will lead to customer satisfaction. This study supports Gremler and Gwinner [37], which highlighted that rapport is significantly related to consumer satisfaction. Empirical results of the present study reveal that encounters with local people can be remembered by international students. Although one may have a bad travel experience, memorable interactions, warm feelings, and personal connections that develop with local people can indeed improve post-trip evaluation. Therefore, tourism

professionals should make efforts to promote interaction between international students and local people, such as hiring residents to get involved in providing tourism services (e.g., tour guiding) [22]. In addition, because South Korea holds many local festivals every year (e.g., Korea Jarasum music festival, Hi Seoul festival) [94,95], tourism managers should promote unique and rich cultural events to international students. In such circumstances, foreign students can directly encounter residents and experience Korean culture firsthand. Therefore, strategies to promote interaction between tourists and the local community might benefit the tourism industry as a whole.

Based on data analysis, rapport has a positive impact on the willingness to share travel experiences online and offline. Therefore, when customers' perceived rapport with the local people is high, they are more likely to share their experiences with others in a positive way. This research supports and expands on the findings of Gremler and Gwinner [37], concerning the positive influence of rapport on word of mouth. As mentioned prior, after using a particular service/product, people tend to share their experiences with others. Social sharing of post-trip experiences (on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook) usually results in a more positive assessment of the destination [96]. By sharing positive experiences with their acquaintances, international students can encourage others to visit a destination since acquired information from family, relatives, and friends is considered to be more reliable [97]. In addition, international students usually reside in a host country for at least six months. Throughout their stay, they can promote different tourist destinations of the host country to friends and family through social media and continue promoting even after returning to their home country. Hence, destination tourism managers should provide a suitable atmosphere and environment to facilitate social interaction with locals, which in turn can boost visitors' willingness to share their travel experiences.

5.3. Effects of Travel Satisfaction on Willingness to Share

Data analysis showed that travel satisfaction significantly impacts the willingness to share travel experiences online and offline. Satisfaction has been widely known as a crucial driver of word of mouth [37]. By testing this argument, the present research supports and expands the theory in the international student market. Encountering local people and having enjoyable interactions can help exceed the expectations of international students, which will serve to boost satisfaction and word of mouth. As mentioned prior, international students may promote a host country for a long time directly and indirectly. Nowadays, a lot of people use social media platforms for communicating, searching, and sharing information [69]. By sharing their positive tourism experiences through social media and face-to-face interactions, international students can encourage other international friends who reside in South Korea and those in their home country to visit a particular destination. Tourism professionals should develop social media communication tools to encourage international students to share their experiences both during and after visiting a destination. In addition, destination managers should create interesting programs at destinations, such as multi-cultural students traveling with local students, where international students can visually demonstrate the process via social media.

6. Conclusions

This study focused international student tourism market from the perspective of sustainable tourism. This study identifies that it is critical to build good relationships between local residents and international students. This facilitates international students playing the role of ambassadors by providing cultural and travel information offline as well as online through social media. To successfully achieve sustainable tourism, it is fundamental to enhance economic growth, minimize cultural social and natural environmental damages from tourism in destination [98]. Therefore, destination marketers and tourism policymakers should offer international students various opportunities to travel to host destinations with local students who can teach how to preserve cultural, social and environmental resources to foreigners while traveling. Despite the important practical

and theoretical implications of the present study, several limitations should be noted. This study mainly focused on international students residing in South Korea. However, the rapport between local people and foreigners for independent travel (e.g., free independent tourists, FIT) is also important due to its substantial growth. Therefore, future research may attempt to compare the effect of the rapport of local people with international students with that of other segments. Another limitation is that although international students in South Korea are from diverse nationalities, their cultural/national/ethnic differences were not considered. In future studies, it is needed to compare international students' rapport behaviors depending on their culture, nationality, or ethnicity.

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