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How to Promote a Destination's Sustainable Development? The Influence of Service Encounters on Tourists' Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions

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Abstract: Destination is an important carrier for tourism activities to be carried out, and tourists are the main body of tourism activities. Service encounters are a crucial component of tourists' experiences and an important factor affecting tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. This research used the SOR model as the theoretical basis to analyze the dimensions of service encounters and the impact of service encounters on tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward a destination in China. The research results indicate that service encounters have multidimensional attributes. In addition to interpersonal service encounters, the service environment of tourism enterprises and the public service environment of the destination are also important components of service encounters. At the same time, service encounters have an impact on tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. The research findings have implications for destination managers in terms of improving service quality and promoting the sustainable development of destinations.

Keywords: destination; service encounter; attitude; behavioral intention

1. Introduction

Tourism is a peaceful force driving social and economic development [1]. With the rapid development of the tourism industry, more and more tourists are going to tourist destinations to carry out tourism activities. The era of mass tourism has arrived, and tourism exists as a way of life [2], which brings enormous opportunities and challenges to the sustainable development of destinations. In the process of destination development, sustainable development should be regarded as a crucial long-term development strategy that fully considers the impact of tourism on current and future economic, environmental, and social development, meets the needs of enterprises, tourists, local residents, and the environment [3], and considers sustainable development as an essential means of enhancing destination competitiveness [4]. Despite the current attempts to promote sustainable development through digital transformation and other measures in destination development [5], problems such as ecological environment destruction, homogenization, and imbalance between supply and demand still exist, which restricts the sustainable development of destinations. Tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions towards a destination significantly impact their subsequent actions, making them a crucial factor in the sustainable development of the destination. The issue of enhancing the popularity of tourism and fostering sustainable development has become a significant area of interest among experts [6].

Tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions are often used to evaluate the attractiveness of destinations and directly affect their actual behavior [7], which are important factors that cannot be ignored in destination research. Tourists' attitudes are seen as a positive or negative evaluation of a specific behavior by tourists during the tourism process, which is influenced by various factors, such as the destination infrastructure and services and tourism experiences. Tourist behavioral intention is formed by tourists in tourism activities,

and specific or particular behavioral practices or tendencies towards tourist destinations and tourism products [8] are the most direct predictive variable that affects tourist behavior [9]; they are often considered as mediating variables between tourist attitudes and behavior. From the perspective of tourists, researching tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions is of great significance for attracting revisit tourists to destinations and promoting destinations' sustainable development.

Service encounters are one of the core concepts of service marketing [10]. Specific research findings have been produced in the traditional retail industry, believing that service encounters enhance consumers' service experiences and improve their overall perception of company products [11]. During tourism activities, service encounters are inevitable [12]. They can be either an interpersonal service encounter or an intangible and experiential service encounter, which may occur during shopping, visiting scenic spots, or using public service facilities at a destination. The service encounters of tourists at a destination are an important part of the tourist experience [13] and an important factor affecting tourist attitudes and behavioral intentions.

However, research on service encounters, especially in the tourism industry, focuses more on the service encounters between organizations and consumers and rarely includes a destination's public service encounter. This study takes Guilin, China, as a destination to achieve the following research objectives: first, to explore the dimension of service encounters. Second, to analyze the impact of service encounters on tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. The third is to provide management suggestions on enhancing the quality of destination services.

This study makes the following contributions: first, in the analysis of service encounters, the research object includes not only interpersonal and enterprise service environment encounters but also the public service environment encounter of the destination. It draws the attention of destination managers to the public service environment. Second, while the academic has extensively researched destinations, tourist attitudes, and behavioral intentions and has achieved rich research results, incorporating service encounters, which are an important aspect of traditional retail research, into the new service-oriented industry of tourism and exploring the interrelationships between service encounters, tourists' attitudes, and behavioral intentions has certain academic value. Third, this study validated the stimulus–organism–response model in the field of tourism research. Fourth, choosing Guilin, a renowned tourist city in China, as a research destination has significantly enhanced the case materials for tourism research, showcasing a tourism research case from a developing country—China.

Excluding the introduction, the main research content of this paper is as follows: the second section entails a literature review that summarizes pertinent studies about the stimulus–organism–response model, service encounters, attitudes, and behavioral intentions to gain a full understanding of the existing research landscape. The third section encompasses the materials and methods, which elucidated the research design and methodologies. The fourth section presents the results of empirical research, such as the dimension of service encounters and the relationships among service encounters, tourists' attitudes, and behavioral intentions. The fifth section comprises a comprehensive discussion highlighting the primary research findings. The sixth section is the conclusion, wherein the research findings are reevaluated, the research's significance and limitations are identified, and pertinent recommendations are proposed for destination managers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Model

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) [14] proposed the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model as a theoretical justification for consumer behavior from an environmental psychology standpoint. A stimulus is an external factor that affects an individual's cognitive or emotional activity, an organism is the individual's cognitive or emotional state formed in response to the stimulus, and a response is the behavioral response attributed to the

individual's cognitive or emotional process. The SOR model posits that the external environment's stimulus will influence an individual's internal state (organism), which urges the individual to make a behavioral response [15]. This model emphasizes the analysis and explanation of the mental process of an organism and the intermediate interaction (between a stimulus from the external environment and an individual's behavioral response) that is considered an emotional or cognitive state [16]. In this sense, when the external environment stimulates an individual, he/she will transform the stimulus into meaningful information that affects his/her subsequent behavior. The SOR model has been widely used in studies concerning consumer behavior; for instance, C.-C. Chen and Yao (2018) [17] confirmed the effects of a website framework's quality on consumers' impulsive purchasing tendencies in mobile auctions. In order to examine the effects of doctors' knowledge on patients' cognitive and emotional trust, as well as on patients' trust in their choice of a doctor, and Shan et al. (2019) [18] used eye-tracking technology and a questionnaire survey. Kumar et al. (2021) [19] analyzed how local brands can effectively realize repeat purchases and maintain a favorable relationship with their consumers.

The SOR model has been widely applied in tourism research. For example, M.J. Kim et al. (2021) [20] constructed a theoretical research framework that involves real experience, cognitive and emotional responses, attachment, and intention to visit to explore the impact of VR technology on tourism consumer behavior. On the topic of honeymoon tours, G. Chen et al. (2022) [16] revealed the relationships among the perception of a destination, the emotional experience, the level of impression, overall satisfaction, the intention to revisit, and the intention to recommend. Y. Song et al. (2022) [21] discussed the impact of public awareness of climate policies on low-carbon tourism in a study involving Chinese people as the participants. Şahin and Kılıçlar (2023) [22] analyzed the impact of the culinary experience on tourists' consumption emotions and experience. Other central scientific conceptions (constructs) used in these investigations to demonstrate the mediation between stimuli and behavior include emotions, motivations, attitudes, and reasoning [23].

In research on tourism destinations, a service encounter is considered a visible or invisible encounter between tourists, and a destination and is a typical stimulus from the external environment. Attitude is generally described as an individual's positive or negative appraisal of an object or an experience, and it can change with an encounter, which scholars have proven. In the SOR model, attitude serves as a mediator variable between a stimulus and a behavioral response [23]. Behavioral intention is the most immediate predictor variable for tourist behavior among multiple influencing factors and a straightforward reaction that reflects an individual's internal mental process. Based on the SOR model, the theoretical model of this research is constructed as follows (Figure 1):
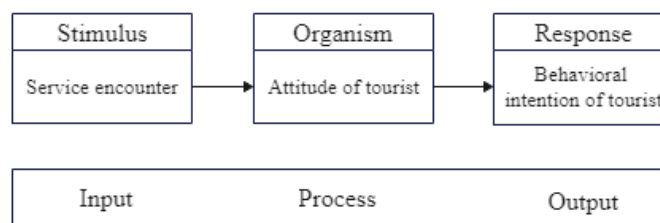

Figure 1. The conceptual model of this research.

2.2. Service Encounter

A service encounter has been widely validated in the field of service marketing, and research on service encounters has continuously expanded from the binary encounter category between service providers and consumers. In earlier studies, the interpersonal encounter was the core of the service encounter definition. For example, a service encounter was used to indicate "face-to-face interactions between a buyer and a seller in a service setting" [24], and a service encounter was defined as "the dyadic interaction between a customer and a service provider" [25]. However, with the develop-

ment of the business environment, attempts have been made to define service encounters from a broader perspective [10], and research on service encounters has also expanded from interpersonal service encounters to non-interpersonal service encounters. Lovelock (1992) [26] defined service encounters as both human and nonhuman encounters between customers and service providers and believed that physical environments, such as buildings, environments, and self-located equipment, are common nonhuman contact carriers; Hightower (2010) [27] views service encounters as the contact between customers and the environment, between customers and employees, and between customers and functional devices. With the continuous development of social technology, some new elements, such as artificial intelligence technology, have also gained attention in service encounters [28], and service encounter forms such as remote contact and telephone contacts have been widely used.

A service encounter plays an important role in improving service quality, and research on service encounters has expanded from the traditional retail industry to the tourism industry. However, unlike traditional retail, tourism involves many industries, such as food, accommodation, transportation, shopping, and entertainment. Service encounters rang from high-quality employee services in five-star hotels to shallow services provided by bus drivers and supermarket staff. Service encounters in the tourism industry span a massive range of industries [29], including tour guides, taxi drivers, police officers, shop owners, and other stakeholders, such as bar and restaurant attendants [30]. In the tourism industry, service encounters are often considered the moment of truth [31], helping customers distinguish between satisfactory and unsatisfactory services is the key to measuring service management level and affecting the long-term profitability of enterprises. In the tourism industry, research on service encounters not only focuses on interpersonal service encounters, such as dishonest and indifferent service contact by service personnel causing negative emotions among tourists [32], but also believes that service environment encounters are an important aspect of service encounters [33]. A good service environment encounter directly impacts tourists' consumption behavior and intentions. Scholars have also explored the application of modern technology in service encounters in the tourism industry. M. Li et al. (2021) [28] asserted that AI-enabled service encounters provide tourists with convenient, standard, and accurate services that earn their trust and satisfaction and encourage them to repurchase or recommend the product/service to others. Ayyildiz et al. (2022) [34] used attitude as an outcome variable of service encounters to gain insight into the attitudes of different groups toward service robots.

In research related to destination management, the service encounter of tourists at a destination is an important part of the tourism experience [13]. A destination providing a negative service encounter will lead to negative views for tourism purposes [35]. The digital construction of tourist attractions, as well as the use of mobile technology and innovative service encounter forms, impacts tourists' attitudes toward destinations, and public service encounters provided by destinations are an important aspect of destination service encounters that cannot be neglected [2]. Attitudes, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions of tourists are common outcome variables in service encounter research.

2.3. Attitude

In general, attitude is described as an individual's positive or negative appraisal of an object or an experience [36] or their perception of behavior and its outcomes [37]. Research on attitude stretches from social psychology to tourism and has gained much interest [38].

Scholars have focused on the formation of tourists' attitudes and their influencing factors, including the facilities and services provided at a destination [39,40], tourists' experiences [41], cultural differences [42,43], and values [31]. Many theories have been applied to explain the formation of attitudes and gain in-depth insight into tourists' attitudes, including social cognitive theory [44], reasoned action theory [9], and planned behavior theory [36].

Tourists' attitudes can change with their experience, although the change can be modest [45]. The findings of Nyaupane et al. (2008) [46] showed that American students who traveled to Fiji, Australia, and Europe changed their attitudes toward these destinations and the people there after the tour. F.S. Li and Wang (2020) [47] interviewed 34 Chinese tourists who visited North Korea to explore changes in their attitudes before and after the visit. Nekmahmud et al. (2022) [48] conducted a comparative analysis of European and non-European tourists' green purchasing and sustainable consumption. They concluded that different groups tended to have different travel attitudes. According to the study on the interactions between tourists by G. Zhou et al. (2023) [49], positive and impressive interactions influenced tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. A question can be raised: What changes tourists' attitudes? Contact is frequently mentioned, including in the studies by Fan et al. (2017) [50] and F.S. Li and Wang (2020) [47] who suggested that the greater the number of encounters, the more likely tourists' attitudes will change. Thus, attitude is changeable and can be impacted particularly by service encounters.

2.4. Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention has always been considered an important mediator between its determinants and actual behaviors. The establishment of reasoned action theory and planned behavior theory and their extensive use in practice research highlight the significance of intentions [36,51,52].

There is no unified definition of tourists' behavioral intention. While Fishbein and Ajzen (1977) [9] proposed that the behavioral intention of a tourist indicates the mere possibility of an action in the future. Meng and Choi (2018) [53] regarded the behavioral intention of a tourist as the opinion of a tourist about a resort and the behavior performed after the tour activity. Meng and Cui (2020) [8] considered behavioral intention as a tendency toward a destination and its products. In a comprehensive study, H. Song and Kim (2021) [54] proposed that behavioral intention can express likes or dislikes as presented by satisfaction, repeat purchases, word of mouth, loyalty, and even complaints.

The research community uses the intentions to revisit and recommend as the criteria for measuring tourists' behavioral intentions. While Julia (1997) [55] considered the intention to revisit to be a straightforward indicator, Ajzen (2002) [56] believed that behavioral intention is equivalent to the intention to revisit, which is the possibility of revisiting the same destination in the future. Moreover, according to Trinh and Ryan (2013) [57], tourists' behavioral intention can be understood as their inclination to revisit and share, which is agreed upon by many scholars, such as C.-F. Chen and Chen (2010) [58], Choe and Kim (2018) [59], Y. Lee et al. (2019) [60], Bayih et al. [61], Hashemi et al. (2023) [62], and Huang (2023) [63].

2.5. The Relationships among Service Encounters and Tourists' Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions

As mentioned earlier, as a highly encountered service industry, the tourism industry cannot avoid service encounters. The experience of tourists during service encounters will affect their evaluation and behavioral intentions toward the destination.

2.5.1. The Relationship between Service Encounters and Tourists' Attitudes

According to the concept of a service encounter, personal interaction between consumers and employees is a crucial element [24,64]. In many scenarios, consumers must interact with service personnel to get serviced [25]. There are frequent encounters between tourism service personnel and consumers [34]. Tourism is considered an encounter-intensive industry in which the performance of service personnel, including their dressing and helpfulness, can result in either a positive or negative mental state in tourists [65]. However, it should be noted that the service environment is also an important aspect that cannot be ignored during a service encounter. In addition to interpersonal interaction with service personnel, tourists also have service encounters with the service environment [10,66]. For example, the design and layout of a hotel can also influence tourists' attitudes. The suc-

cess of a restaurant depends directly on its atmosphere, which is closely related to the time and money tourists spend in the restaurant and their behavioral intentions after their meal [33]. According to Mendes et al. (2022) [67], the digitalization of and the use of mobile technologies in a tourist attraction can influence tourists' attitudes toward it.

Public services are crucial for destinations as they reflect the provision of high-quality and accurate services and the creation of shared value by destination managers [68]. A destination attempts to integrate commercial services and non-commercial experiences and operates like a merged company [13]. Tourists use a lot of public facilities at a destination, such as a tourist service center, public transport, and service networks of public information. Such non-commercial service encounters with the public environment impact tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions [2]. In the research by M. Zhou et al. (2019) [2] on service encounters in destinations, service encounters were divided into two dimensions: enterprise service encounters and public service encounters.

When researching the dimensions of destination service encounters, referring to the research results of M. Zhou et al. (2019) [2] and the important role of interpersonal service encounters in service practices, service encounters were further divided into three dimensions: service encounters of service personnel (SESPs), service encounters of the tourism enterprise service environment (SESEs), and service encounters of a destination's public service environment (SEDPs). Based on this conceptualization, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a). *SESPs have a significant positive impact on tourists' attitudes.*

Hypothesis 1b (H1b). *SESEs have a significant positive impact on tourists' attitudes.*

Hypothesis 1c (H1c). *SEDPs have a significant positive impact on tourists' attitudes.*

2.5.2. The Relationship between Service Encounters and Tourists' Behavioral Intentions

Service encounters between tourists and destinations affect tourists' attitudes toward destinations and their subsequent behaviors [50]. Attitude is often regarded as a mediator variable to measure the relationship between service encounters and behavioral intentions [23]. The administrators of a destination can focus on tourists' attitudes because it is an important indicator of their behavioral intentions to revisit and recommend that reflects their loyalty to the destination [61]. Intention to revisit is a tourist's interest in returning to a specific destination [69]. Intention to recommend, also known as word-of-mouth communication, refers to tourists' intentions to share their experiences with friends and relatives [70]. In our research, service encounters from the perspectives of SESPs, SESEs, and SEDPs can influence intentions to revisit and recommend. Thus, to examine the correlations between service encounters and tourists' behavioral intentions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a). *SESPs have a significant positive impact on tourists' intention to revisit.*

Hypothesis 2b (H2b). *SESEs have a significant positive impact on tourists' intention to revisit.*

Hypothesis 2c (H2c). *SEDPs have a significant positive impact on tourists' intention to revisit.*

Hypothesis 2d (H2d). *SESPs have a significant positive impact on tourists' intention to recommend.*

Hypothesis 2e (H2e). *SESEs have a significant positive impact on tourists' intention to recommend.*

Hypothesis 2f (H2f). *SEDPs have a significant positive impact on tourists' intention to recommend.*

2.5.3. The Relationship between Tourists' Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions

As a core concept in social psychology, attitude is considered a crucial element in determining an individual's behavior, as proposed in the theory of planned behavior. On the other hand, the research community has focused on attitude because of the emphasis on satisfaction in studies on tourism consumer behavior [71]. Some scholars suggested that the concept and research scope of satisfaction should be further expanded to give it a more precise definition and to better analyze tourists' demands. Thus, tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions are introduced as new variables to advance research on tourism where tourists' attitudes are often considered a predictor variable of their behavioral intentions. In this research, behavioral intentions are divided into intentions to revisit and to recommend. The following hypotheses on the correlations between tourists' attitudes and their behavioral intentions are proposed:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a). *Tourists' attitudes have a significant positive impact on their intention to revisit.*

Hypothesis 3b (H3b). *Tourists' attitudes have a significant positive impact on their intention to recommend.*

In summary, the conceptual model and hypotheses of this study are summarized as follows (Figure 2):
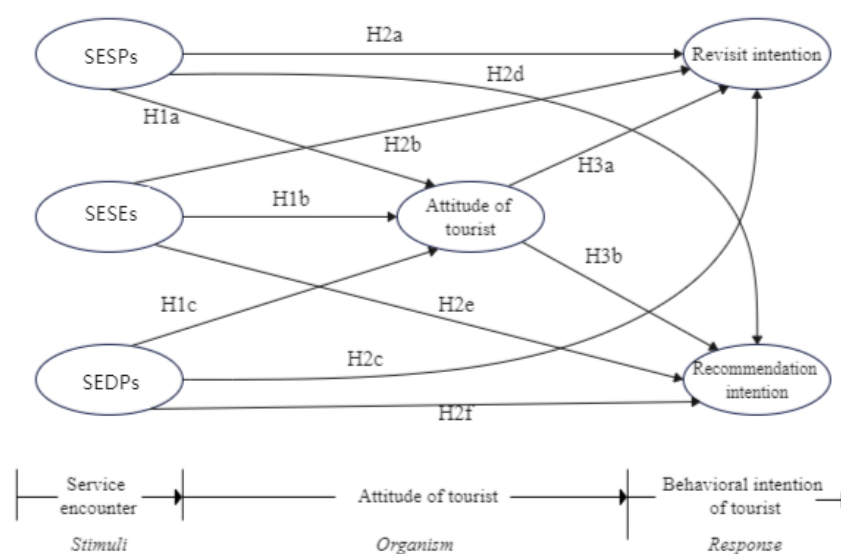
Note: SESPs=service encounter of service personnel, SESEs=service encounter of tourism enterprise service environment, SEDPs=service encounter of destination's public service environment

Figure 2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses of this research.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

After years of development, the scale and speed of China's tourism industry have greatly improved [72], and the tourism industry has become a pillar industry of the country's national economy. According to the *Statistical Bulletin of National Economic and Social Development of China in 2022*, the number of domestic tourists reached 2.53 billion with a tourist revenue of CNY 204,440 billion. The significant tourism demand has expedited the construction of tourism services in destinations. However, it is notable that destinations in China have failed to pay sufficient attention to tourists' demands for service encounters [2], and such supply–demand imbalance has constrained the development of destinations. China is the world's top-ranked tourism market with the most tourist

consumers, which means that China's tourism industry is becoming increasingly influential due to its internal social economy and global tourism development.

Guilin is a famous destination in China. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, Guilin has been among the first batch of tourist cities open to foreigners. According to the official website of the Guilin Government, in 2022, Guilin received 1.07 billion domestic tourists, and the domestic tourism revenue was CNY 12,773.9 billion and accounted for 52.44% of the city's GDP. The economic achievement has made Guilin one of the top tourist cities in China. Because of Guilin's current status of tourism development and its unique position in the history of Chinese tourism development, this study chose Guilin as the destination.

A total of 1064 questionnaires were distributed from 21 May to 30 May, and from 15 July to 20 July 2023, and 1053 questionnaires were retained after eliminating unreasonable responses, including questionnaires that were not filled out and questionnaires that were filled out perfunctorily with the same answer. The efficiency of the response rate was 98.97%.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: (1) social and demographic characteristics of tourists, such as gender, age, monthly income, and educational level; (2) according to the hypotheses, the service encounters of tourists at their destination were divided into three dimensions: SESPs, SESEs, and SEDPs. Among these dimensions, SESPs was measured with 9 items, SESEs was measured with 16 items, and SEDPs was measured with 14 items; (3) attitudes of tourists towards the destination; and (4) behavioral intentions of tourists, including tourists' revisit intention and recommendation intention. Please see Appendix A for the specific questionnaire and item sources.

3.3. Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

Testing the reliability and validity of the measures used for the model is essential [73]. Reliability analysis was conducted to verify the reliability, stability, and consistency of the questionnaires filled out by the respondents with Cronbach's alpha as its primary test index. Validity analysis included content and structural validity analysis to examine the conformity of the measurement results with the expected goals. The scale designed in this research was based on existing items, which had been evaluated and modified by experts. After the development of the research scale, it was approved by 5 experts in the tourism field via IOC and showed a certain degree of validity in terms of content. KMO and Bartlett's tests are good tools for testing the validity of a questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis

In this study, confirmatory factor analysis (EFA) was used to analyze service encounters' dimensions. The maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method for the structural equation mold (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. For the choice of MLE, we referred to the research by Seger-Guttmann et al. (2023) [74] and Bayih et al. (2020) [61]. Before EFA, we used the KMO and Bartlett to test whether the variables were suitable for EFA. Before MLE, we tested the variables' normality and model fit to ensure the reliability of the model test conclusions.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Characteristics

According to the data presented in Table 1, male and female respondents accounted for 52.04% and 47.96%, respectively. The respondents were mainly between 29 and 48 years old (59.73%) and were well-educated, with 73.22% having at least obtained a bachelor's degree or an associate degree. Overall, 24.12% of the respondents had a monthly income of CNY 2000–4999, followed by CNY 5000–7999 (38.56%) and CNY 8000–14,999 (20.23%), accounting for 82.91% of the total respondents.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the samples.

Content	N	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Gender			
Male	548	52.04	52.04
Female	505	47.96	100
Age			
18–28	233	22.13	22.13
29–40	343	32.57	54.70
41–48	286	27.16	81.86
49–55	105	9.97	91.83
56–65	67	6.36	98.19
Above 65	19	1.8	99.99
Personal Monthly Income			
Less than 1000 CNY	43	4.08	4.08
1000–1999 CNY	85	8.07	12.15
2000–4999 CNY	254	24.12	36.27
5000–7999 CNY	406	38.56	74.83
8000–14,999 CNY	213	20.23	95.06
More than 15,000 CNY	52	4.94	100
Education			
Middle school and below	81	7.69	7.69
High school	201	19.09	26.78
Undergraduate degree	673	63.91	90.69
Master's/PhD	98	9.31	100

4.2. The Results of Reliability and Validity Testing

Based on the test results, the KMO of the 49 items tested in the questionnaire was 0.900, and the significance probability was 0.0000, indicating good structural validity. All 49 items' Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above 0.900, indicating good reliability, stability, and consistency.

4.3. The Results of EFA

EFA was applied to analyze the dimensions of service encounters. According to the results, the KMO of the 39 items measuring service encounters was 0.903, and the significance probability was 0.0000, indicating the items were suitable for EFA. For SESPs, "service attitude", "service skill", and "service response" were identified as the common factors of the nine variables, as the eigenvalues were greater than 1; these common factors explained the majority of variance (69.091%). For SESEs, "service atmosphere" and "physical environment" were identified as the common factors of the sixteen variables under the same principle, and these common factors also explained most of the variance (65.264%). For SEDPs, "destination software service environment" and "destination hardware service environment" were identified as the common factors that explained most of the variance (61.960%). Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) of each dimension was greater than 0.5, ranging from 0.606 to 0.681, and the factor loading of each variable was greater than 0.7, thus showing convergent validity [54]. The research result of EFA are as follows (Table 2):

Table 2. Results of EFA with primary data.

Construct	Variable	SL	CR	AVE
	Service attitude factor		0.865	*0.68*
	The employees are friendly to me.	0.849		
	The employees are willing to help me.	0.818		
	I can see from the employees' attitudes that they understand my needs.	0.807		
	Service skill factor		0.857	0.666
SESPs	The employees know their jobs well.	0.848		
	The employees can answer my questions quickly.	0.774		
	The employees can use their knowledge to meet my needs.	0.825		
	Service response factor		0.865	0.681
	The employees undertake actions to address my needs.	0.848		
	The employees give quick responses to my needs.	0.793		
	I can see from the employees' behavior that they understand my needs	0.834		
	Service atmosphere factor		0.927	0.68
	The enterprises have a pleasant smell.	0.885		
	The lighting is excellent in the enterprises.	0.834		
	The enterprises are clean.	0.823		
	The temperature in the enterprises is pleasant.	0.831		
	The background music is appropriate.	0.827		
	The background noise level in the enterprises is acceptable.	0.742		
	Physical environment factor		0.942	0.619
	The enterprises have more than enough space for me to be comfortable.	0.847		
SESEs	The physical facilities in the enterprises are comfortable.	0.796		
	The enterprises' interior layout is pleasing.	0.771		
	The signs used (i.e., bathroom, enter, exit, smoking) in enterprises are helpful to me.	0.787		
	The restrooms are appropriately designed.	0.783		
	The parking lot has more than enough space.	0.775		
	The color scheme is attractive.	0.787		
	The materials used inside the enterprises are pleasing and of high quality	0.791		
	The architecture is attractive.	0.765		
	The style of the interior accessories is fashionable	0.765		
	Destination software service environment factor		0.902	0.606
	The destination is clean.	0.853		
	The air in the destination is fresh.	0.739		
	The destination has a pleasant landscape.	0.755		
	The destination has good public security.	0.757		
	The urban planning of the destination is reasonable.	0.767		
	The human landscape is in harmony with the natural landscape.	0.795		
	Destination hardware service environment factor		0.928	0.616
SEDPs	The public facilities (toilets, waste containers, rest facilities, safety facilities) are more than enough.	0.830		
	The public facilities (transportation, toilets) are comfortable	0.777		
	The public facilities (toilets, rest facilities) are clean.	0.766		
	The public facilities (transportation, toilets, safety facilities, tourism public information) are convenient.	0.801		
	The destination has smooth traffic.	0.766		
	The public facilities (transportation, trash can) are unique.	0.778		
	The public facilities (toilets, rest facilities) are not damaged.	0.778		
	The destination uses informatization and intelligent facilities (application, virtual reality, augmented reality, interactive facilities, etc.).	0.779		

Note: SL = standardized loadings; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

4.4. The Results of Hypothesis Testing

The kurtosis and skewness tests were also used to assess the normality of the data. From the perspective of the skewness and kurtosis of samples, the maximum values were −1.080 and 1.198, respectively, and the result values were in line with the normal distribution according to the test criteria of Curran et al. (1996) [75] and Henly (1993) [76]

who suggested the benchmark of +/−2 for skewness and +/−8 for kurtosis. The overall model fit indices indicated an acceptable model fit for the dataset: chi-square/df = 2.734 (<5), RMSEA = 0.041 (<0.08), CFI = 0.938 (>0.9), and IFI = 0.938 (>0.9).

After analyzing the relationships among service encounters, tourists' attitudes, and behavioral intentions, as shown in Table 3 and Figure 3, it was found that:

Table 3. Results of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesized Path			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*p*-Value	Supported
H1a Attitude	←	SESPs	0.547	0.152	8.156	***	Yes
H1b Attitude	←	SESEs	0.358	0.107	5.458	***	Yes
H1c Attitude	←	SEDPs	0.076	0.123	1.546	0.122	No
H2a Revisit intention	←	SESPs	0.482	0.163	7.226	***	Yes
H2b Revisit intention	←	SESEs	0.275	0.103	4.715	***	Yes
H2c Revisit intention	←	SEDPs	0.268	0.152	4.716	***	Yes
H2d Recommendation intention	←	SESPs	0.53	0.183	7.412	***	Yes
H2e Recommendation intention	←	SESEs	0.287	0.11	4.778	***	Yes
H2f Recommendation intention	←	SEDPs	0.142	0.126	3.158	0.002 **	Yes
H3a Revisit intention	←	Attitude	0.281	0.058	5.243	***	yes
H3b Recommendation intention	←	Attitude	0.267	0.061	4.882	***	yes

Note: S.E. = standard error; C.R. = critical ratio; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.
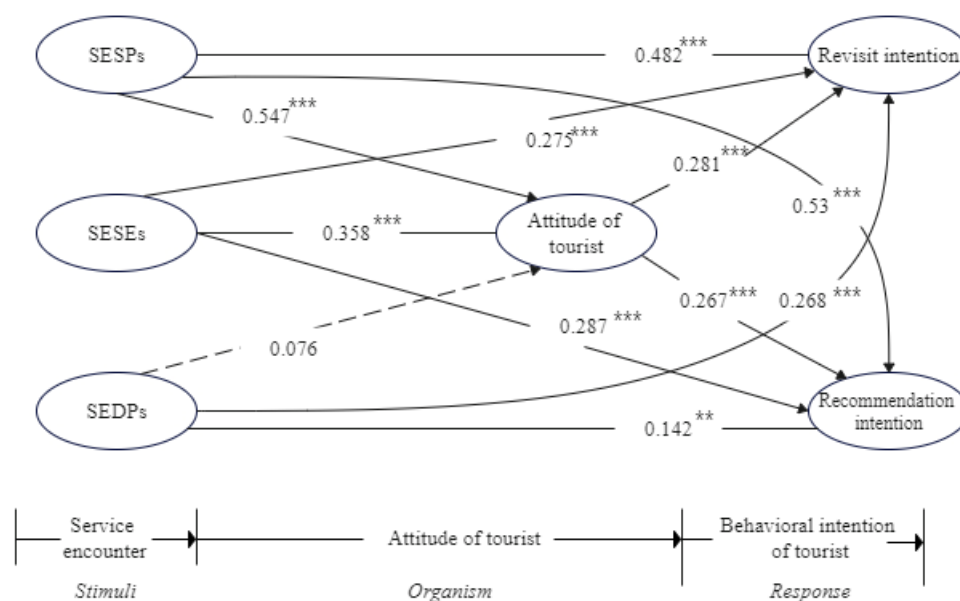
Note: SESPs=service encounter of service personnel，SESEs=service encounter of tourism enterprise service environment，SEDPs=service encounter of destination's public service environment
*p<0.05;**p<0.01;***p<0.001

Figure 3. Hypothesis testing results.

First, the relationship between service encounters and tourists' attitudes shows that SESPs and SESEs positively influence tourists' attitudes. Therefore, hypotheses H1a and H1b are supported. The impact of SEDPs on tourists' attitudes is insignificant, as indicated by a *p*-value of 0.122. This suggests that hypothesis H1c is not supported. It is important to mention that the coefficient of influence of SESPs on tourists' attitudes is greater than that of SESEs on tourists' attitudes. So, interpersonal service encounters continue to play a significant role in shaping tourists' attitudes towards service encounters at their destination.

Second, from the relationship between service encounters and tourists' behavior intentions, it can be found that SESPs, SESEs, and SEDPs positively impact tourists' intentions to revisit. Therefore, H2a, H2b, and H2c are supported. It is also evident that SESPs, SESEs, and SEDPs positively influence tourists' intentions to recommend, so H2d, H2e,

and H2f are supported. Based on the above, positive service encounters positively impact the behavioral intentions of tourists. Tourists are more inclined to revisit a destination and recommend it to others when they have a positive experience with the service encounter at that destination.

The third, from the relationship between tourists' attitudes and behavior intentions, the former positively impacts the latter, which means that tourists' attitudes influence tourists' intentions to recommend and revisit destinations. Therefore, H3a and H3b are supported. The research results showed that scholars believe that tourist attitude can be considered a pre-test variable for tourist intentions, which has been validated in this research.

5. Discussion

Using a questionnaire survey on domestic tourists traveling to Guilin and analysis methods such as EFA and SEM, the dimension of service encounters among tourists at the destination was analyzed, and the interrelationships among service encounters, tourists' attitudes, and behavioral intentions were verified. Through the analysis, the findings are as follows:

First, the SOR model was validated. In this research, service encounters were used as an external environmental stimulus (S), attitude as an internal organism (O), and behavioral intention as an individual behavioral response (R). The SOR model, a widely used theoretical model in environmental psychology, was once again validated. The research results indicate that SOR theory applies in this study, and attitude can mediate between stimulus and behavioral response.

Second, service encounters have multiple attributes. Service encounters should be diverse rather than restricted solely to in-person interactions between customers and service personnel. In this research, SESPs, SESEs, and SEDPs also belong to the important content of service encounters. Service encounters encompasse various attributes and represent the combination of both tangible and intangible aspects of service encounters. This perspective aligns with the viewpoints of scholars like Lovelock (1992) [26], Hightower (2010) [27], Larivi è re (2017) [10], and other researchers. The various attributes of service encounters can assist destination managers in identifying critical areas for enhancing service quality.

The third is service encounters' impact on tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. The utilization of SEM research reveals that service encounters, particularly interpersonal ones, influence tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the hypothesis regarding the influence of public service encounters on tourist attitudes, as indicated by the research findings, lacks validity. This outcome was unexpected for the author given that public service encounters have become a significant component of service encounters [2]. There exist multiple reasons. Firstly, a possible explanation for this result might be the limited sample size, and due to time and economic constraints, it was not possible to survey a larger sample size. Secondly, it might be related to selecting a single destination with more tourists targeting natural sightseeing attractions. As an external environment stimulus, a service encounter can influence tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Although the impact of public service encounters may be relatively weak, it is still a crucial aspect that should not be overlooked. It should be given considerable attention and be considered a significant focus for destinations in the future.

From the perspective of service encounters, studying tourists' attitudes toward destinations and their behavioral intentions is not easy. The tourism industry is a comprehensive industry that involves catering, hotel, transportation, travel, shopping, entertainment, and other services and is filled with enterprises of different scales, including listed, individual, state-owned, and private enterprises, thereby posing a challenge for analyzing service encounters. Service encounters cannot be avoided in tourism activities, and this makes service encounters particularly important for destinations' sustainable development. This study explores service encounters in destination management and integrated service encounters of interpersonal services with service encounters of public and enterprise ser-

vice environments at a destination, evaluates service encounters from tourists' perspectives, and explores the relationships among tourists' service encounters at the destination and their attitudes and behavioral intentions. The findings of this study have certain theoretical value and practical significance.

6. Conclusions

The research results indicate that service encounters play an essential role in the sustainable development of destinations and can impact tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. That is, service encounters affect tourists' evaluation of destinations, their intentions to recommend destinations, and their intentions to revisit. Despite the rapid development of the tourism industry and the widespread use of nonhuman contact services, such as robots, interpersonal encounters remain an important dimension of service encounters; it can be seen that the correlation coefficients reflecting the influence of SESPs on tourists' attitudes and behavior intentions are greater than those of SESEs and SEDPs on tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, the important role of SESEs and SEDPs in service encounters must be addressed. In China, research on a large number of "popular tourist check-in points" that attract tourists due to their unique design and style and tourist destinations that are popular due to their complete service facilities has confirmed this conclusion very well.

Based on the significant impact of service encounters on destinations, destination managers should consider service encounters as an essential part of their work. Firstly, it is crucial to strengthen the screening and training of service personnel to improve their service attitudes, skills, and responses. Secondly, it is imperative to include tourist enterprises within a destination's management scope and to manage their service behaviors under benign requirements with quantitative indicators according to their specific service contents. Thirdly, it is necessary to construct a destination public service system for overall planning and design over service encounters, with the key points of different services emphasized.

This research explores service encounters at a destination in China, encompassing destination public services into the scope of service encounters, which has certain innovations. As mentioned above, there are also certain shortcomings in the research process, such as the limited sample size and the selection of a single destination. In future research, we will expand the research sample size and destination types, analyzing destinations such as theme parks, historical and cultural destinations, and coastal tourist destinations. We will use more extensive sample data to analyze whether there are differences in service encounters among different types of destinations and whether there are differences in the relationships among service encounters, tourist attitudes, and tourist behavioral intentions. Meanwhile, during the sample recruitment process, a sample of overseas tourists was recruited to analyze the potential impact of cross-cultural conflicts on service encounters.

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Appendix A

Table A1. The Sources of Items.

Constructs	Items	Sources
SESPs	The employees are friendly to me. The employees are willing to help me. I can see from the employees' attitudes that they understand my needs. The employees know their jobs well. The employees can answer my questions quickly. The employees can use their knowledge to meet my needs. The employees undertake actions to address my needs. The employees give quick responses to my needs. I can see from the employees' behavior that they understand my needs	Brady, M.K. and Cronin, J.J. (2001) [77]
SESEs	The enterprises have a pleasant smell. The lighting is excellent in the enterprises. The enterprises are clean. The temperature in the enterprises is pleasant. The background music is appropriate. The background noise level in the enterprises is acceptable. The enterprises have more than enough space for me to be comfortable. The physical facilities in the enterprises are comfortable. The enterprises' interior layout is pleasing. The signs used (i.e., bathroom, enter, exit, smoking) in enterprises are helpful to me. The restrooms are appropriately designed. The parking lot has more than enough space. The color scheme is attractive. The materials used inside the enterprises are pleasing and of high quality. The architecture is attractive. The style of the interior accessories is fashionable.	Hightower, R., Jr. et al. (2002) [78]
SEDPs	The destination is clean. The air in the destination is fresh. The destination has a pleasant landscape. The destination has good public security. The urban planning of the destination is reasonable. The human landscape is in harmony with the natural landscape The public facilities (toilets, waste containers, rest facilities, safety facilities) are more than enough. The public facilities (transportation, toilets) are comfortable The public facilities (toilets, rest facilities) are clean. The public facilities (transportation, toilets, safety facilities, tourism public information) are convenient. The destination has smooth traffic. The public facilities (transportation, trash can) are unique. The public facilities (toilets, rest facilities) are not damaged. The destination uses informatization and intelligent facilities (application, virtual reality, augmented reality, interactive facilities, etc.).	Zhou, M.F. et al. (2019) [2]
Attitude	Guilin leaves a good impression Guilin is satisfactory to me Guilin leaves a positive impression I like Guilin	Reitsamer, B.F. et al. (2016) [38]
Revisit	I hope to visit this site again I desire to revisit this destination I plan to revisit this site	Bayih, B.E. and Singh, A. (2020) [61]
Recommendation	I will speak positive things about this site to others I will release positive information on social media I will recommend this site to others	

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