

The Effect of Social Influence on Behavioral Intentions of Domestic Visitors to Serengeti National Park in the Norther Tourism Circuit, Tanzania

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Abstract

Though social influence is recognized as a determinant of behavioral intention in technology adoption contexts, its role in shaping domestic wildlife tourists' post-visit intentions remains underexplored particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where domestic tourism is underdeveloped despite heavy conservation investment. Grounded in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), this study examines the effect of social influence on the behavioral intentions of domestic visitors to Tanzania's premier wildlife destination. Therefore, this study assessed the effect of social influence on domestic visitors' behavioral intentions (revisit intention, willingness to recommend, and positive word-of-mouth) in a non-technology, voluntary tourism context. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 400 domestic visitors at exit gates of Serengeti National Park, Northern Tanzania. Social influence (compliance, internalization) and behavioral intention were measured using 5-point Likert scales. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4 with bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples). Construct validity (Fornell-Larcker, HTMT), reliability (CR, Cronbach's α), and predictive relevance (Q^2) were assessed. Social influence exhibited a statistically significant positive effect on behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.304$, $p < 0.001$). However, the model explained only 9.2% of variance ($R^2 = 0.092$), with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.102$) and weak predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.050$). Model fit was acceptable (SRMR = 0.069; NFI = 0.889). Although social influence significantly shapes domestic visitors' intentions to revisit, recommend, and speak positively about national parks, its explanatory power is modest. Other factors likely destination image, perceived value, facilitating conditions, and past experience appear to dominate intention formation in this context. The study extends UTAUT into Tanzania's wildlife tourism sector, providing preliminary evidence that the theory's social influence construct operates differently in voluntary leisure settings compared to mandatory technology adoption. It cautions against over-reliance on social-appeal marketing alone. It is recommended that destination managers should integrate social acceptance campaigns (peer testimonials, group travel incentives, university ambassador

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programs) alongside price reform, infrastructure investment, and service quality improvements to meaningfully grow domestic visitation.

Keywords: Social Influence, Behavioral Intention, Domestic Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, National Parks, UTAUT, Serengeti, Tanzania

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Introduction

Apart from its crucial contribution to the global GDP, tourism has been principal source of foreign currencies to developing countries including Tanzania. It has been a driving force towards economic soundness via jobs creation, income generation and forex earnings (UNWTO, 2022). Due to its availing sweetness, number of extreme creative destinations have emerged resulting into new stage of competition as international market is volatile hence people are becoming more aware and demanding. The market is also more reactive to calamities and have low and high business seasons (Ngondo et al., 2024). Such challenges expose developing countries such as Tanzania into more risk as they depend most on international markets, making integration with domestic tourism inevitable. Domestic tourism complements international tourism during recession by ensuring stable whole year businesses (Mkwizu, 2018; Mariki et al., 2011; Mato & Mosoma, 2022). Also it can be used as a

tool of leveraging tourism economic leakage (Anderson et al., 2013). Despite such attractiveness, Tanzania has not exploited its potential. While setting aside more than 35% of her land mass for conservation, the country is blessed with massive natural resources and also is positioned as one of the top 25 global biodiversity hotspots in terms of the number of endemics species (TANAPA, 2019).

The northern circuit which is among four tourism circuits in the country, welcomes more than 75% of all domestic arrivals to national parks and features six renown attractions namely; Serengeti, Tarangire, Lake Manyara, Arusha, Kilimanjaro and Mkomazi national parks. Moreover, Serengeti welcomes nearly 50% of all domestic visitors to the circuit and has also been several times winners of best safari destination in African accorded by world travel awards. In the same line, the government has addressed the drawbacks of domestic tourism so as to

increase the country's competitive edge leading to expansion of the market. Despite such efforts domestic tourism still lags behind as the government had five years' plan (2016-2020) to achieve two million domestic visitors to national parks but until end of the years 2025 had not achieved one million visitors (Ministry of natural resources & tourism, 2025). Number of factors have been empirically revealed to hinder domestic tourism in sub-Sahara Africa and Tanzania including; low disposable income, absence of travel motives, high costs of services, narrow tourism products, lack of information and lack of attention to residents as to foreigners to mention few. This is contrary to developed countries context where residents are more passionate to travel as domestic tourism explains at least 80% of entire tourism expenditure (Philipp, 2022; WTTC, 2019). The issue is that despite government efforts, domestic visitation remains low, and the role of social influence in shaping domestic visitors' future behavioral intentions in Tanzania's Northern Circuit national parks is empirically unknown.

Behavioral intention is a possibility to take an action or engage in certain behavior in the future (Zeithaml et al., 1996). An intent is a focal point and salient in forecasting human behavior (Oliver, 1980). The behavioral intention remain key in determining future possibility of customers to speak positive word of mouth, recommendation to other, repurchase/loyalty, spend more with the business and readiness to pay premium prices (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Also, the role of social influence in determining behavior cannot be undermined as both practices, theory and empirical evidences have revealed its vital part. It is revealed that human behavior is complicated and therefore its understanding requires intervening variables, crossover impact

and theoretical descriptions (Maskari, 2015). Ajzen & Fishbein (2000), revealed that, an intention to take part in a certain behavior is determined by the perception of society about being part of the behavior. Moreover, Venkatesh et al. (2016) stated that, the possibility of people to partake a certain action or behavior is subjected to social pressure. Despite its vital importance previous studies have been predominantly on information communication technology context leaving domestic wildlife tourism in Tanzania underexplored. The gap hinders advancement of effective marketing initiatives for promoting and enhancing domestic tourism in order to reduce dependency on foreign market especially at post pandemic era where all destinations have realized full recovery. Therefore, the study assesses the effect of social influence on behavioral intentions among domestic visitors to National Parks in Tanzania.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Wild life tourism in Tanzania

Wildlife tourism denotes trip made by people from home to other places for the purpose of involving into activities related/associated with wild animals. The activities can be watching birds, game viewing, photo taking and other that are designed in such a way to provide people with experience about general wildlife ecosystem (Curtin & Kragh, 2014). In Tanzania, wildlife tourism has been main and well known tourists' attractions, drawing attention of visitors from all over the world following their natural impressiveness and diversity. Located in East Africa and along the shore of the Indian ocean, Tanzania has 945,234 sq. km. Among the landmass, 942,832 sq. km is Tanzania mainland and 2,400 sq.km for Zanzibar archipelagos. At least 35% of

the country's land mass is protected under the management of ministry of natural resources and tourism. The country possesses one of extensive platform of protected areas in Africa that include 22 National Parks scattered all over the country within four tourism circuits (northern, southern, eastern and western). Among the four circuits, northern circuit features most of the popular attractions and has been welcoming most of the arrivals to national parks. The circuit features six national parks namely; Serengeti, Tarangire, Kilimanjaro, Lake Manyara, Arusha and Mkomazi national parks. Serengeti is located in Mara region, specifically Serengeti district which share boarder with Maasai Mara national park in Kenya and its 120 km from Tarime, the prime Mara town. The park welcomes nearly half of all domestic visitors to national parks in the circuit (256,414 in the year 2023) and has been the most popular and focal attraction in the country. It is famous for the endless grassy plains and the Great Migration, where millions of wildebeest and zebra move across the ecosystem. Tarangire is located in Manyara region, 100 km from the center of renown Arusha city. The park follows Serengeti in terms of number of domestic visitors' arrivals in the circuit as 137,029 visitors were recorded in the year 2023.

The park is known for giant baobab trees and large elephant herds that gather along the river during the dry season. Mount Kilimanjaro which is hosted in Kilimanjaro national park, is the highest roof in Africa and the highest free standing mountain in the word. It is located in Kilimanjaro region and 30 km from Moshi, the Kilimanjaro region prime town, welcoming 232,096 domestic adventurers in 2023. The park protects Africa's highest peak and the surrounding montane forest, popular for mountain climbing. Lake manyara national park is

located in Manyara region and 112 km from the famous Arusha city and it welcomed 59,290 domestic visitors in 2023. The park features a shallow soda lake, lush groundwater forests, flocks of pink flamingos, and unique tree-climbing lions. Arusha national park is located in Arusha region, 30 km from the city center and it welcomed 41,253 domestic visitors in 2023.

The park offers diverse landscapes from dense forests to the Momella Lakes, dominated by the rugged peaks of Mount Meru. The last is Mkomazi national park located in Kilimanjaro region, 170 km from Moshi town of Kilimanjaro region and it welcomed 5,842 domestic visitors in 2023. The park is known for its massive herd of protected wild dogs. Numbers of factors have been identified to influence arrivals to these parks such as; accessibility, accommodation, supportive infrastructure, adequate information, affordable prices, environment conservation and so on. It should be noted that, Mount Kilimanjaro has specific drive beyond these as it is the only hard adventure attraction in the circuit. Also, although the famous Ngorongro crater is in the norther circuit, it is not included in the list because it is managed under special conservation authority as it is not included in the country's national parks management (Ministry of natural resources & tourism, 2025). Although wildlife tourism has been predominantly promoted to international market, recently efforts have also been directed to domestic market as initiative to reduce dependence on foreign market. Therefore, studying the driving forces of domestic tourists' motives to those attractions is salient.

National Park

According to protected areas categories by International Union for

Conservation of Nature (IUCN), national park is grouped into category two among the six categories of protected areas. National parks are defined as large natural or natural spaces set apart to conserve largescale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities (Gray et al, 2022).

Domestic Visitor

A domestic visitor is a resident of a certain country who travels to a place other than his/her usual place but within the country's boundaries for different purposes such as leisure, business, education, or other. A domestic visitor is known as tourist when stays at least one night at the destination and excursionist when stays for less than 24 hours (UNWTO, 2022).

Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention primarily originated from the theory of planned behavior, extension of the theory of reasoned action, emphasizing that, human behavior and actions can be well explained through intention, interest or motive. An intent is a focal point and salient in forecasting human behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioral intention is a possibility to take an action or engage in certain behavior in the future based on previous experiences, evaluations, and perceptions (Zeithaml et al., 1996). In tourism setting, behavioral intention is influenced by several factors including; person perceived evaluation about direct or indirect service experience, trust, communication effectiveness destination image, perceived value and relationship quality (Barusman et al, 2021; Pujiastuti et al, 2017; Mushi et al, 2026).

The behavioral intention can be captured in several ways including intentions to speak positive word of mouth, recommendation to other, repurchase, spend more to the business and readiness to pay premium prices (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Repurchase or revisit denotes customer's willingness to stick with the business and keep transacting in the future; Recommendation occur when a customer make direct or indirect product endorsement to peer groups, family, friends and other in the society; while positive word of mouth occurs when a satisfied customer makes person to person and informal noncommercial favorable communication about our services or businesses (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Recommendation and word of mouth are very powerful means of business communication than formal paid promotions as people trust information from peer and friends than the broadcast. Revisit, recommendation and word of mouth together are also forms of loyalty in business. However, in this era of digitalization, recommendation and word of mouth has shifted from physical man to man to social media platforms. On the internet, electronic word of mouth works in different ways; customers' feedbacks and review of services provided by independent reviewer, customers recommendation and share of business information on social media posts, comprehensive user experience shared to different blogs and forums and user initiated content creation in forms of videos or photos. Electronic word of mouth matters a lot because of its credibility, reachability as it has not country boundaries and it's negative of positive comment is powerful in influencing travel decisions (Thio et al., 2025).

In this study it is assumed that, favorable evaluation of social acceptance

by domestic visitors to national parks, will also induce their behavioral intentions namely revisit, recommend and positive word of mouth.

Social Influence

Venkatesh et al. (2022) social influence puts focus on the degree at which individual thinks people who are important and respected believe that he/she should use new technology. As far as UTAUT is concerned, social influence is represented as subjective norms in the TRA and TPB. Despite different labels both mean that, individual behavior is determined by how other perceive taking part into behavior. Although social influence is said to be insignificant in voluntary technology use circumstances, it is also revealed to be salient when the aim is to influence perception around technology. With regard to voluntary circumstances, social influence is salient at primary stage of adoption, experience and use while shrinks in sustained adoption (Barki & Hartwick, 1994). Social influence determines behavior in three ways: compliance, internalization, and identification. In compliance; society influence a person to change intent to align with society pressure. People are ready to align to society's expectation under circumstance that, society can reward desired or punish non desired behaviors. For example, Tanzania as a collectivism society, people are interdependent, harmony and share group goals and responsibilities. In such circumstance, people are expected to comply to group norms. Identification; a person becomes willing to engage in a behavior in order to feel perceived sense of connection to certain group. At this stage the person essence of being look like the reference group is crucial. Internalization has also been manifested in Tanzania especially among the growing generation in their motive to participate

in activities practiced by a certain admired group. This includes wearing expensive clothes and expensive phones to look rich, desire to visit destinations that considered by a certain reference group such as political leaders, rich people and other influencers.

Internalization; involves actual adaption of behavior that align to person values and beliefs. Values and beliefs become important frame for screening what can either be accepted or rejected (Venkatesh et al., 2022). As far as internalization is concerned, the growing Muslim community in Tanzania has their specific values related the belief. Example, beach tourism would probably grow among Muslim community in Tanzania provided that wearing policy change to full body covering dresses and hijab. Internalization and identification are more related to change individual's belief pattern or enforcing person to react to latent social status gain (Barki & Hartwick, 1994). On top of that, when people are making decisions they are greatly influenced by social circle which in grouped into primary and secondary circle. Primary circle includes people who are close to like parents, friends, spouse, peer and so on while secondary group includes social media influencers, bloggers, colleagues. However, it is further extended that, while primary group stands as final decision maker and financial screener, secondary group still remain the main source of action or behavior inspiration (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Due to the advancement of information communication technology, form of social influence has also shifted from traditional man to man into digitalized through social media platforms.

Electronic social influence works in several ways; feedbacks and review of services provided by socially important and influencers reviewers,

recommendation and share of business information on social media posts, comprehensive users experience shared to different blogs and forums and user initiated content creation in forms of videos or photos. Electronic recommendations and word of mouth play vital role in social influence as they are credible due to personal trust, reachability as it has not country boundaries and direction of comments is powerful in influencing travel decisions (Thio et al., 2025). Woman care a lot on what other say and so they are more determined by social influence when. However, the impact diminishes when experience increases. Moreover, older workers are more sensitive to social pressure and social influence is so salient when it comes to first time technology use but the effect shrinks when experience increases (Venkatesh et al., 2016). In this study, it is assumed that social influence is key factor to achieve high behavioral intention among domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania.

Social Influence and Behavioral Intention

Social influence refers to the extent people's behavior is determined by sounding people and environment. The people include respected and important other such as peers, friends, family, spouse, supervisors, parents and other member (Strzelecki, 2023). Ajzen & Fishbein (2000) and Venkatesh et al. (2016) revealed that the likelihood of people to partake in a certain behavior depends on the way society perceive being part of the behavior. Different scholars have documented on the vital role of social influence in shaping intentions to people's behavior. Person behavior is highly affected with the actions of surrounding people and environment (Rutatola et al., 2024). People will fairly perceive a behavior after

noticing that other people perceive it right to engage (Strzelecki, 2023). It is extended that society greatly influence how other people behave. In this context people creates favorable response to the society just to conform their thinking (Razak et al., 2019). Thio et al (2025) found that, tourists who come across social media that post Bali's local dishes are more willing to recommend the destination to other. It extended that tourists are more influenced by social media posts as it increases approval perception. Also Yasir et al (2021) revealed that there is a positive relationship between both restaurant and customers' social media generated information and intention to visit the restaurant. People are more willing to visit and recommend restaurants that they get to know through social medias. Moreover, Jeon et al (2018) concluded that electronic social influence significantly and positively affects people behavioral intentions in bed and breakfast services. The study extended that people are more willing to include to their list those bed and breakfast that have been well discussed on social media during lodging services decision making and selection processes.

Kamarudin et al (2022) found that social influence has a positive influence on tourism and hospitality students' carrier intentions. The students' intentions to pursue the carrier is high when it is favorably perceived by society. Study by Arrieta et al. (2019) revealed that, if tourism related bloggers want to raise number of followers through being recommended they should thrive to ensure favorable and high social influence. Also it was disclosed that, the effect of self-efficacy on the intention to engage in tourism entrepreneurship activities is high with presence of favorable social influence (Santos & Liguori, 2019). Thus from that ground

social influence can leverage the behavioral intentions of domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania. The more favorable social influence perceived by domestic visitors, the more intentions to revisit, recommendation and positive word of mouth. Domestic visitors will have greater possibilities of revisiting, recommending and talking positive provided that they have favorably evaluated social acceptance. It is essential to admit that the effect of social influence on behavioral intentions has mostly explored in information technology context. Little is known about the role of social influence on inducing domestic visitors' loyalty intentions to national parks in Tanzania. With increasing attention of behavioral studies, and with the practical increase in virtual communities that bring societies views together, there is need for study to address the role of social influence in marketing the domestic wildlife tourism in Tanzania.

H1: *Social influence has positive effect on behavioral intentions of domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania.*

Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003, 2016) as its theoretical framework. The theory was considered to be the best as Venkatesh et al., (2016) reviewed eight technology acceptance models to come with a single model that integrates determinants from the competing groups that influence behavioral intentions. It included the theory of reasoned action (TRA), the technology acceptance model (TAM), the motivational model (MM), the theory of planned behavior (TPB), a model combining the technology acceptance model and the theory of planned behavior (C-TAM-TPB), the model of PC

utilization (MPCU), the innovation diffusion theory (IDT), and the social cognitive theory (SCT). The UTAUT resulted into four factors determining behavioral intentions to use new technology and four moderators. The determinants are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions while gender, age, voluntariness, and experience being presented as main moderators. Performance Expectancy: is explained as the extent a person believes that employing the system will lead attain work performance. Effort Expectancy: is the extent of easiness connected or associated with the system use. Facilitating Conditions: it denotes the degree at which supporting environment has been set to remove system use barriers. UTAUT is limited by inability to explain behavioral intention in other non-technology settings. However, it is revealed that, the theory works better in collectivism society than individualism society. In that case, Tanzania is also collectivism society where people are interdependent, live in harmony and share group goals and responsibilities.

Although the UTAUT has four determinants, this study opted the role of social influence on behavioral intention in wildlife tourism in Tanzania in order to address the contribution of society in shaping behavior especially in the growing social media use and influence. Moreover, the theory has four moderators to the relationship. However, the moderators were not considered in this study in order to focus purely on how strongly social influence directly impact behavioral intention. Also, the fact that the study was conducted in non-compulsory context, the moderators might be redundant. In the context of Tanzania's Northern Circuit national parks, social influence operates through normative mechanisms in collectivist

Tanzanian society and positively shapes domestic visitors' revisit, recommendation and positive word of mouth intentions. While UTAUT has been extensively validated in technology adoption studies, its application to domestic wildlife tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa remains scarce. This study addresses that theoretical gap by assessing the effect of social influence on behavioral intentions of domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania.

Conceptual framework

The figure below represents independent and dependent variables of the study. It is postulated that social influence (independent variable) directly and positively influences behavioral intention (dependent variable), operationalized through three dimensions: revisit intention, willingness to recommend, and positive word-of-mouth.

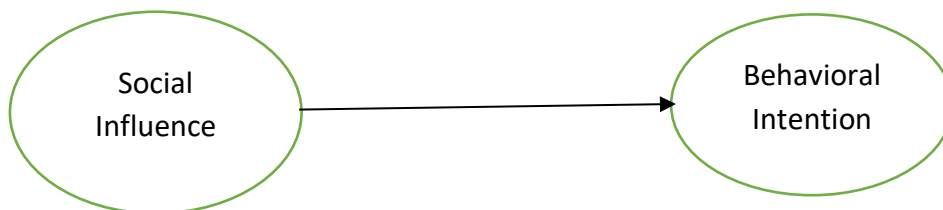


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Survey data (2026)

Methodology

The study was conducted in the Northern Tourism Circuit of the country that features 6 among 22 National Parks in the country. The circuit was considered best because it welcomes most of domestic tourists (75%) to National Parks in the country. Among the 6 national parks in the circuit, Serengeti national park welcomes at least 50% of domestic arrivals to the circuit (Ministry of natural resources & tourism, 2025). Therefore, specifically the study sampled from Serengeti National Parks among the 6 in the circuit.

The study featured a cross section research design and positivism paradigm. The cross-section design was featured during quantitative data collection as it focuses on collecting data to examine the variables of the study at a specific point of time. However, it is cautioned that, the design is limited in establishing cause-effect relationship as data is gathered at one specific point of time (Saunders et al., 2019). Also,

positivism paradigm was featured due to objective, measurable and generalizable of findings ability through empirical observation and testing of hypothesis.

Non-probability and specifically convenient sampling method was employed since respondents could not be known before visited (Etikan, 2017). To unsure validity of survey tool four stages were involved during questionnaire development; design, pre testing, pilot study and post pilot questionnaire refinement (Kline et al., 2016). The data was collected using structured questionnaire as survey tool since it is recommended to visitors with destination experience (Papadimitriou et al., 2018). Data was gathered from a sample of 400 from a population of 256,414 domestic visitors who visited Serengeti National Park in the year 2023 (Ministry of natural resources & tourism, 2025).

The sample size was calculated using Yamane (1967) formula due to its ability to cutter for large population while

incorporating level of precision. Also the data was collected at exit time/gates in order to let the visitors gain experience with the services since experience is paramount for first time visitors (Lopes, 2011). The structured questionnaire was managed through self-administered and assisted administered techniques involving self-filling and assisting those who were in need.

The survey tool had social influence as independent and behavioral intentions as dependent variables. Social influence was captured by three indicators; compliance, identification and internalization (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Then five-point Likert scale was used to capture domestic visitors' likelihoods. On the other side, the dependent variable was captured through intention to revisit, intention to recommend and intention to speak positive words about destination (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003). However, intention to revisit the destination was clustered into intentions to revisit surveyed national park and revisit to other national parks. Five-point Likert scale was used to assess domestic visitors' likelihood. The five-point Likert scale was considered due to its ability simplify respondent decisions as the boundary between the categories is more distinctive than seven-point scale.

In order to ensure content validity, the survey tool was generated following a thorough review of previous literatures. Some research experts who also lecture at university level accessed the tool to check technical issues such as content (Kennedy, 2022). Then a pilot test was administered to 20 domestic visitors leading to some few refinements on wording and grammars. Also, construct validity was assessed through discriminant and convergent validity. On the other hand, reliability of the study was assessed through internal

consistency reliability and composite reliability.

The survey data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) through its smart PLS version 4 because the aim of the study was to predict behavioral intentions as it is recommended when the study objectives are predictive in nature. Moreover, PLS is termed to be more appropriate for complex regression analysis, also appropriate to small sample size with data characteristic that does not require normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2012). Measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, variance inflation factor, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and average variance extracted. Also structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, t values, p-values, coefficient of determination (R^2), Stone-Geisser Q^2 and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

The respondents' ethical approval was considered in this study. They were made aware that the study is purely academic, their involvement is voluntary and assured maximum confidentiality.

Results

Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

The study sought to establish the demographic characteristics and tourism-related experiences of the respondents to provide an understanding of the composition of the study sample. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to potential respondents, of which 400 were successfully completed and returned for analysis. This represented a response rate of 100%. All questionnaires were valid and usable, with no missing responses. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	190	47.5
	Male	210	52.5
	Total	400	100
Marital status	Married	113	28.2
	Separated	19	4.8
	Divorced	14	3.5
	Never married	250	62.5
	Widowed	4	1
	Total	400	100
Education	Informal education	2	0.5
	Primary	9	2.3
	Secondary	122	30.5
	Technical	32	8
	University	235	58.8
	Total	400	100
Occupation	Employed	91	22.8
	Student	179	44.8
	Self-employed	108	27
	Unemployed	21	5.3
	Retired	1	0.3
	Total	400	100
Age	18 – 35	257	64.3
	36 – 45	117	29.3
	46 – 60	25	6.3
	Above 60	1	0.3
	Total	400	100
Experience to surveyed national park	First time	168	42
	More than once	232	58
	Total	400	100
Experience to other national parks	No	103	25.8
	Yes	297	74.3
	Total	400	100
Tour organization	Individual	35	8.8
	Group	361	90.3
	Other	4	1
	Total	400	100

Source: Survey data (2026)

The respondents were relatively balanced by gender, with males accounting for 52.5% and females 47.5%. Most respondents were aged 18–35 years (64.3%), had university education

(58.8%), and had never married (62.5%). In terms of occupation, students constituted the largest group (44.8%), followed by self-employed respondents (27.0%) and employed respondents

(22.8%). Regarding tourism experience, 58.0% had visited the surveyed national park more than once, while 74.3% had experience visiting other national parks. Group tours were dominant, accounting for 90.3% of respondents, compared with 8.8% who travelled individually. Overall, the respondents were predominantly young, university educated, and experienced in national park tourism, with group travel being the most common tour arrangement.

Descriptive Statistics

Social Influence

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that social influence was highly rated by the respondents, with mean scores ranging from 4.455 to 4.548, all above the neutral midpoint, suggesting a strong positive perception of the influence of friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, and spouses on visiting Tanzania national parks.

Table 2: Social influence

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation
People who influence my behavior (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse) think that I should visit Tanzania national parks	4.487	0.583
People who are important to me (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse) prefer me to visit Tanzania national parks	4.508	0.57
People whose opinions I value (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse) believe that I should visit Tanzania national parks	4.463	0.542
People who influence my behavior (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse) have visited Tanzania national parks	4.455	0.55
People who are important to me (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse) have visited Tanzania national parks	4.473	0.587
People whose opinions I value (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse) have visited Tanzania national parks	4.525	0.529
I like to visit Tanzania National Parks because of their similarity with my values and the values of people who influence my behavior (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse).	4.54	0.564
I like to visit Tanzania National Parks because of their similarity with my values and the values of people who are important to me (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse).	4.548	0.59
I like to visit Tanzania National Parks because of their similarity with my values and the values of people whose opinions I value (friends, family, supervisors, instructors, coworkers, spouse).	4.548	0.564

Source: Survey data (2026)

The highest mean scores (M = 4.548) were recorded for the similarity between respondents’ values and those of important people and people whose opinions they value, while the lowest mean (M = 4.455) related to whether people influencing respondents’ behaviour had visited Tanzania national parks. The standard deviations ranged from 0.529 to 0.590, indicating relatively

low variability in responses and a high degree of agreement among respondents. Overall, the findings suggest that social networks and valued individuals play an important role in shaping respondents’ intentions to visit Tanzania national parks.

Behavioral Intentions

The findings show that behavioral intentions toward Tanzania national parks were strongly positive, with mean scores ranging from 4.545 to 4.910, all above the neutral midpoint, indicating high levels of intention to revisit, recommend, and speak positively about the national parks. The highest mean score was recorded for speaking positive things to other people about the national park (M = 4.910, SD = 0.370), followed by encouraging friends and relatives to visit (M = 4.890, SD = 0.378) and intention to revisit the same national park (M = 4.860,

SD = 0.407). The lowest mean was for visiting other national parks within the next two years (M = 4.545, SD = 0.792). The standard deviations ranged from 0.370 to 0.798, indicating relatively low variability and considerable agreement among respondents. Overall, the results suggest that respondents demonstrated strong behavioural intentions, particularly in terms of positive word-of-mouth, recommendations, and future visits. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for behavioral intention.

Table 3: Behavioral intention

Statements	Mean	Standard deviation
I intend to visit again this national park in the future	4.86	0.407
I will visit again this national park within the next 2 years	4.56	0.798
There is high possibility for me to visit again this national park in the near future	4.78	0.571
I intend to visit again other national parks in the future	4.795	0.559
I will visit again other national parks within the next 2 years	4.545	0.792
There is high possibility for me to visit again other national parks in the near future	4.73	0.669
I will recommend the national park to other people	4.855	0.452
I will encourage friends and relatives to visit the national park	4.89	0.378
When asked about a holiday destination I will recommend the national park	4.843	0.45
I will speak positive things to other people about the national park	4.91	0.37

Source: Survey data (2026)

Constructs and Items of the Study Coding

Table 4 presents the coding of the study constructs and their respective items used during the data analysis process. The

coding facilitated the identification and analysis of the individual items measuring social influence and behavioral intention.

Table 4: Items coding

Social Influence	Compliance	COMP1
	Compliance	COMP2
	Internalization	INTERN3
Behavioral Intention	Revisit to the surveyed national park	RevisitA3
	Revisit to other national parks	RevisitB1
	Recommendation	RECOM1
	Recommendation	RECOM2
	Recommendation	RECOM3
	Positive word of mouth	PWOM

Measurement model assessment

Figure 2 below depicts factor loadings, coefficient of correlation and

determination as measurement model values for independent and dependent variables respectively.

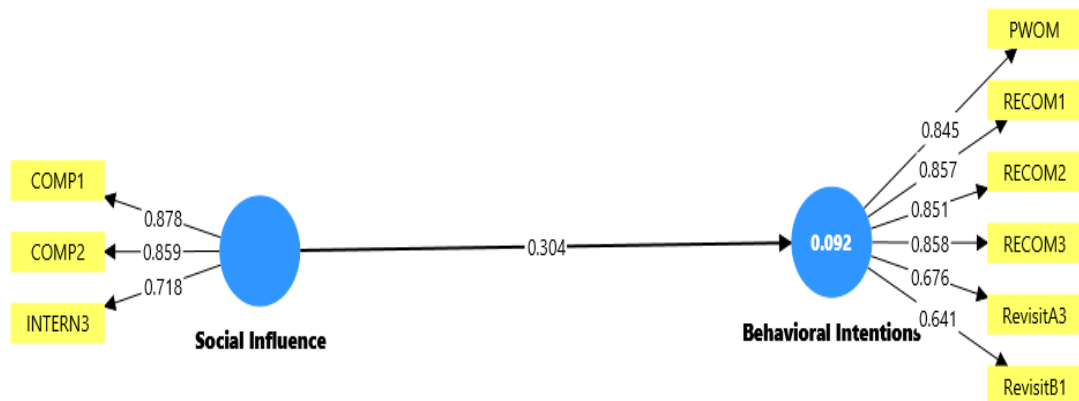


Figure 2: Measurement model

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 5 depicts that the attributes of the construct acquired adequate measurement weights. Most indicators have outer loading above 0.7 with few attributes measuring slightly below (RevisitB1 and RevisitA3) the threshold. However, it is considered satisfactory since CR and AVE was maintained sufficient, proving indicators validity (Memon et al., 2020). Also identification, among the indicators of social influence was omitted during data analysis because of insufficient measurement weight (outer loadings). On top of that, variance

inflation factor (VIF) are all below 5 depicting that there is no multi-collinearity. The constructs also exhibit valid reliability. Internal consistency is proved by Cronbach's Alpha ranging above minimum recommended limit of 0.7, with the value of social influence below behavioral intentions due to having few items. Composite Reliability (CR) values range above minimum limit 0.7 as suggested by Hair et al. (2017). Consequently, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) ranged above required threshold 0.5 proving satisfactory convergent validity.

Table 5: Outer loadings VIF, Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE

Variables	Items	Outer Loadings	VIF	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Social Influence	COMP1	0.878	1.884	0.756	0.778	0.679
	COMP2	0.859	1.913			
	INTERN3	0.718	1.281			
Behavioral Intention	PWOM	0.845	2.651	0.880	0.906	0.629
	RECOM1	0.857	2.606			
	RECOM2	0.851	2.337			
	RECOM3	0.858	2.758			
	RevisitA3	0.676	1.582			
	RevisitB1	0.641	1.472			

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 6 depicts evaluation of discriminant validity by the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations for social influence (SI) and behavioral intention (BI). The diagonal depicts square root of AVE for the constructs. The Fornell–Larcker criterion requires these value to be greater than both correlations among the constructs and with other in the model. From the table the values are 0.793 and 0.821, greater than correlation among them, implication that individual construct bonds with own indicators than

with the rest of constructs hence satisfactory discriminant validity. Also, HTMT presented off the diagonal signifies supplementary proof of discriminant validity. The values 0.304 and 0.361 are below 0.85 threshold recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). The small correlation (0.361) implicates that the constructs (SI and BI) are highly dissimilar and measure different concepts. Therefore, the two criteria for assessing discriminant validity are met as it validates structural model assessment.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait Monotrait ratios of correlations

Constructs	BI	SI
Behavioral Intentions	0.793	0.361
Social Influence	0.304	0.821

Source: Survey data (2026)
Below the diagonal (bold) elements is the heterotrait–monotrait ratios of the correlation values. Above the diagonal elements is the correlations between the construct’s values (fornell–Larcker criterion).

Table 7 depicts saturated and estimated values specifically for model fit indices. Standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) saturated value 0.069 and estimated value 0.069 are beneath required ceiling 0.08 signifying suitable

model fit as supported by Hu & Bentler (1999). Moreover, normed fit index (NFI) 0.889 and 0.889 are bigger than required floor limit 0.8 recommended by (Hu & Bentler (1999). Generally, the tests portray satisfactory model fit.

Table 7: Model Fit Indices

Index	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.069	0.069
Chi-square	184.640	184.640
NFI	0.889	0.889

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 8 exhibits coefficient of determination (R^2) for endogenous variables of the model. It reveals that behavioral intentions (BI) has 0.092 and 0.090 R^2 and adjusted R^2 respectively, signifying that predictor variable explains

about 9.2% variation on BI. According to Hair et al (2019), the variation is weak implicating that other factors beyond social influence may influence domestic visitors’ behavioral intentions to the destination.

Table 8: Coefficient of determination (R2)

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
Behavioral Intentions	0.092	0.090

Source: Survey data (2026)

Structural model assessment

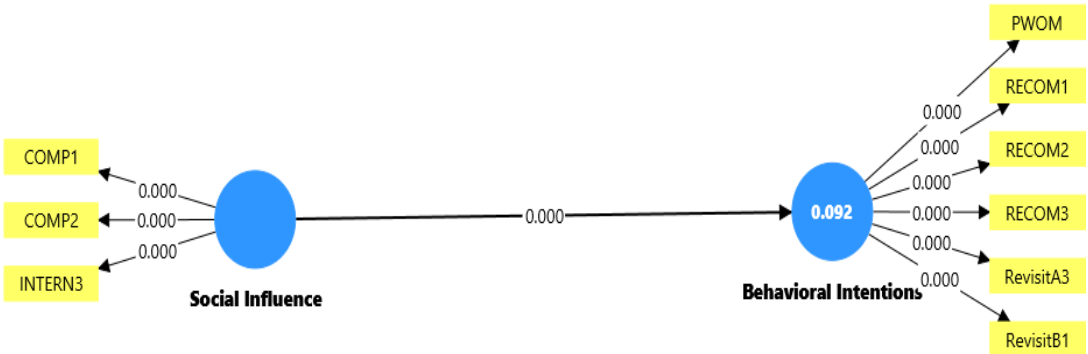


Figure 3: Structural model
Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 9 below depicts the outcomes of structural model namely path coefficients (β) T statistics, significance levels, and f square/effect sizes (f^2). The outcomes depict that social

influence (SI) possesses significant positive effect on behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.304$, $T = 3.728$, $p = 0.000$), supporting H1 although with small effect size ($f^2 = 0.102$) (Cohen’s, 1988).

Table 9: Results of the structural model

Hypothesis	Relation	Path coefficient(β)	T statistics	P values	F-Square	Decision
H1	SI -> BI	0.304	3.728	0.000** *	0.102	Supported

Significance level *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Source: Survey data (2026)

On top of that, the finding on table 10 shows Q^2 predict value is greater than zero, indicating that the model has

predictive relevance for the endogenous construct, although the predictive power is low.

Table 10: Stone-Geisser Q^2

	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE
Behavioral Intentions	0.050	1.065	0.577

Source: Survey data (2026)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the effect of social influence on behavioral intention among domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania. The study tested one hypothesis, **H1: Social**

influence has a positive effect on behavioral intention. The findings revealed that social influence had a statistically significant positive effect on behavioral intention, indicating that domestic visitors’ intentions are

influenced by social acceptance through mechanisms such as internalization and compliance. This finding highlights the relevance of social appeal in marketing activities aimed at promoting domestic wildlife tourism, particularly in encouraging visitors to visit, revisit, recommend, and speak positively about national parks. The finding is consistent with Thio et al. (2025), who established that tourists exposed to social media posts featuring Bali's local dishes were more willing to recommend the destination to others. Similarly, Yasir et al. (2021) reported a positive relationship between restaurant- and customer-generated social media information and intention to visit restaurants. Jeon et al. (2018) further found that electronic social influence significantly and positively affected behavioral intentions in bed-and-breakfast services. In the tourism and hospitality education context, Kamarudin et al. (2022) found that social influence positively influenced students' career intentions, with intentions being higher when pursuing a career was favorably perceived by society. Rutatola and Chagalima (2024) likewise reported a significant positive influence of social influence on procurement suppliers' behavioral intentions to use a new procurement system in Tanzania.

The positive relationship observed in the present study is further supported by Arrieta et al. (2019), who found that bloggers seeking higher numbers of followers and recommendations need to create positive and favorable social influence. Santos and Liguori (2019) similarly demonstrated that the effect of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intention was stronger in the presence of high social influence. Despite the statistically significant relationship established in this study, the practical predictive contribution of social influence was weak, as reflected in the

low coefficient of determination and small effect size. This suggests that behavioral intention among domestic visitors is shaped by other factors, including perceived value, destination image, satisfaction, facilitating conditions, effort expectancy, price, and accessibility.

The relatively small effect of social influence may partly be explained by the characteristics of the respondents and the voluntary nature of national park visitation. Venkatesh et al. (2016) observed that the influence of social factors tends to diminish with experience, which may be relevant given that a considerable proportion of respondents had previous national park experience. Although approximately 90% of respondents travelled in groups, group travel does not necessarily imply that post-visit behavioral intentions are determined primarily by social influence. The decision to visit may have been made collectively, while intentions to revisit, recommend, or engage in positive word-of-mouth may subsequently be evaluated at an individual level. This interpretation is consistent with Venkatesh et al. (2016), who noted that social influence tends to be weaker in voluntary rather than compulsory contexts. The large proportion of students in the sample may further contribute to the weak predictive effect because students may have distinct peer networks and financial constraints that influence their tourism decisions independently of social expectations.

These findings suggest that while social influence contributes significantly to behavioral intention, its predictive strength in voluntary domestic wildlife tourism is limited. The results therefore provide support for extending the UTAUT perspective beyond technology adoption to voluntary tourism contexts, while recognizing that social influence may have a relatively small effect when

visitors have prior experience, make decisions collectively, or face financial and accessibility constraints. In the context of high-profile national parks such as Serengeti, destination awareness may already be sufficiently established, reducing the extent to which social influence is necessary to generate visitation intentions. Furthermore, travel distance and associated costs from major cities such as Dar es Salaam and Arusha may exert stronger influences on behavioral intention than social pressure. Nevertheless, Venkatesh et al. (2016) indicate that social influence can remain salient when the objective is to shape perceptions, suggesting that socially oriented marketing strategies may still be useful when combined with interventions addressing value, accessibility, cost, and destination experience.

Conclusion

This study assessed the effect of social influence on the behavioral intentions of domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania, with particular focus on Serengeti National Park in the Northern Tourism Circuit. The findings demonstrate that social influence has a statistically significant but practically modest positive effect on behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.304$, $t = 3.728$, $p < .001$), supporting the proposition that visitors' future intentions are partly shaped by the views, expectations, and experiences of socially important individuals. However, the relatively small effect size and low explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.092$) indicate that social influence accounts for only 9.2% of the variation in behavioral intention, suggesting that it is an important but not dominant determinant of domestic visitors' intentions to revisit, recommend, and speak positively about national parks. The remaining variation is likely associated with other destination- and visitor-related factors, including

destination image, perceived value, service quality, accessibility, price, park facilities, and previous tourism experience.

The respondent profile, characterized by a high proportion of young visitors aged 18–35 years (64.3%), students (44.8%), and group travellers (90.3%), further suggests that social influence may operate differently across visitor segments. Group travel may incorporate social expectations directly into the tourism experience, thereby reducing the distinct influence of social factors on subsequent individual behavioural intentions. Nevertheless, the substantial proportion of first-time visitors (42%) indicates that social influence may remain relevant during the initial decision to visit, consistent with the theoretical proposition that social influence can be more salient when individuals have limited prior experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that social influence should be incorporated into strategies for promoting domestic wildlife tourism, but its role should be complemented by interventions addressing the broader factors that more strongly determine visitors' behavioural intentions.

Recommendations

Theoretical Recommendation

Future theoretical models of domestic park visitation should integrate social influence with other important determinants of behavioural intention, such as destination image and perceived value, to improve explanatory power. Given the relatively modest explanatory contribution of social influence in the present study, future applications of UTAUT to voluntary leisure tourism could incorporate relevant UTAUT2 constructs, particularly hedonic motivation and price value.

Empirical Recommendation

The study extends empirical application of social influence beyond its predominant use in information and communication technology contexts to the relatively under-explored area of domestic wildlife tourism in Tanzania. The significant positive relationship between social influence and behavioural intention suggests that favourable social perceptions, social approval, and alignment with valued individuals can contribute to visitors' intentions to visit, revisit, recommend, and speak positively about national parks.

Policy Recommendations

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism and TANAPA should consider targeted measures to improve the affordability and accessibility of national parks for domestic visitors, particularly during low-demand periods. Subsidized or promotional domestic rates during low seasons could encourage visitation and improve the utilization of park facilities. Given the relatively high proportion of young respondents and students in the study, national school and university visitation programmes should be strengthened to facilitate educational and recreational visits to national parks. Public-private partnerships involving TANAPA, tour operators, educational institutions, and other tourism stakeholders should further be encouraged to develop affordable domestic tourism packages and reduce the overall cost of park visits.

Practical Recommendations

Destination and park managers should incorporate social influence mechanisms, including identification, internalization, compliance, social approval, and positive word-of-mouth, into domestic tourism marketing strategies. Practical initiatives could

include group booking incentives, university ambassador programmes, student travel clubs, and partnerships with credible campus and social-media influencers to reach younger domestic visitors. Managers could further use visitor testimonials, shareable destination content, photo competitions, and social-media campaigns to encourage positive word-of-mouth and strengthen visitors' willingness to recommend and revisit national parks. For visitors with previous park experience, these social strategies could be complemented by personalized loyalty and repeat-visitor programmes designed to encourage continued engagement with national parks.

Given that 90.3% of respondents travelled in groups, group-oriented packages and booking arrangements may be particularly useful in encouraging domestic visitation. At the same time, destination managers should not rely on social influence campaigns alone. Since social influence explained only 9.2% of the variance in behavioural intention, marketing interventions should be complemented by measures that improve affordability, accessibility, infrastructure, service quality, and the overall visitor experience.

Limitation of the study

Although convenience sampling is fast, inexpensive, and simple to implement, it may limit the generalizability of research findings because participants are chosen based on easy availability rather than random selection. Also, the study used cross sectional design that may not establish causality because they measure exposure and outcome at the exact same. On top of that, the study collected data from Serengeti national park among the six national parks in the circuit which may hinder generalizability to other parks. Also the study may encounter single-

source self-report data limitation that creates a primary setup for common method bias (CMB), which is the artificial inflation or deflation of relationships between variables caused by using the same measurement technique or respondent.

Future Studies

Future research should consider longitudinal research designs to provide stronger evidence of causal relationships between social influence and behavioural intention. Probability sampling, particularly simple random sampling, should be employed where feasible to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of findings. Future studies could further examine the mediating roles of factors such as destination image and visitor satisfaction, as well as the moderating effects of visitor experience, age, and gender, to establish whether the relationship between social influence and behavioural intention varies across different visitor groups. Comparative studies involving multiple national parks across Tanzania's Northern Tourism Circuit would provide broader contextual evidence and facilitate comparisons across different park settings.

Future research should further investigate the measurement structure of social influence by examining whether compliance, identification, and internalization constitute distinct dimensions or can appropriately be modelled as a higher-order construct in the context of domestic wildlife tourism. Empirical studies could additionally examine how these dimensions interact with destination image, perceived value, service quality, accessibility, price, and previous tourism experience to provide a more comprehensive explanation of domestic visitors' behavioural intentions.

Finally, future studies could extend the UTAUT framework by

incorporating other relevant determinants, particularly effort expectancy and facilitating conditions, to improve the explanatory power of models of domestic wildlife tourism behaviour. Such extensions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence domestic visitors' intentions to visit, revisit, recommend, and engage in positive word-of-mouth about national parks.

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