International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)
Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp.23-39, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)
https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21065935

Destination Image and Behavioural Intention of Domestic Visitors to National Parks in Northern Tourism Circuit, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Background: Domestic tourism plays a significant role in the tourism industry, accounting for more than 80% of tourism expenditure in many developed countries. Despite that, Tanzania has not exploited its potential although the government is working to induce more visitors but still lags behind.
Objective: This study examined the effects of cognitive and affective destination image on the behavioral intentions of domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania**.**
Method: The study employed a sequential mixed-methods design. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with 15 tourism stakeholders, followed by a survey of 400 domestic tourists. Data were analyzed using content analysis method and Smart PLS 4.
Results: There were significant positive relationships between; cognitive destination image and behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.208$, $p = 0.049$), affective destination image and behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.049$), cognitive destination image and affective destination image ($\beta = 0.519$, $p = 0.000$).
Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that cognitive destination image significantly influences domestic tourists' emotional responses and behavioral intentions toward national parks in Tanzania. Also, affective destination image significantly influences behavioral intentions of domestic tourists to national parks in Tanzania.
Contribution: The study addresses a significant gap in tourism literature by providing empirical evidence on the role of destination image in shaping domestic tourists' behavioral intentions within the context of wildlife tourism in Tanzania**.**
Recommendation: Destination managers should prioritize the development and promotion of positive cognitive destination attributes, as they significantly influence tourists' emotional responses and future behavioral intentions. Also marketing strategies that prioritize affections of domestic tourists as they significant influence behavioral intentions.

Keywords: Destination Image, Behavioral Intentions, Domestic Visitors, National Parks

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism constitutes a significant component of the global economy and is one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings for many developing countries, including Tanzania. It serves as an important engine of economic growth through job creation, income generation, and foreign exchange earnings (UNWTO, 2022). Owing to its economic importance, numerous innovative tourism destinations have emerged worldwide. At the same time, growing public interest in tourism has increased awareness and intensified competition, making the industry more dynamic and demanding. These developments pose challenges for destinations such as Tanzania that rely heavily on international tourism markets, thereby making the promotion of domestic tourism increasingly important.

Domestic tourism can complement international tourism during off-peak seasons and contribute to the stability and sustainability of the tourism industry (Mapingure et al., 2018). Despite this potential, Tanzania has not fully exploited its domestic tourism market. The country has allocated more than 40% of its landmass to conservation (TANAPA, 2019), and the government has implemented several initiatives to promote domestic tourism. Nevertheless, these efforts have yielded limited success, as the target of attracting two million visitors to national parks by the end of 2020 was not achieved (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2025). This performance contrasts sharply with that of many developed countries, where domestic tourism accounts for at least 80% of total tourism expenditure (Philipp, 2022; WTTC, 2019).

Given Tanzania's rich endowment of natural attractions, it was expected that these resources would provide a competitive advantage over comparable destinations and attract more domestic tourists. However, the relatively low level of domestic tourism suggests that insufficient attention may have been given to understanding the priorities and preferences of domestic visitors in shaping a favourable destination image.

Destination image has been identified as a critical determinant of behavioural intention because it reflects both the internal and external motivations that influence travel decisions. It plays a significant role in shaping visitors' decisions to travel and revisit destinations (Lopes, 2011). Although destination image has been widely examined in international tourism contexts, existing studies have focused predominantly on foreign visitors. Limited empirical attention has been given to domestic tourists, particularly those visiting wildlife destinations in Tanzania. Furthermore, little is known about the specific cognitive and affective destination image attributes that influence the behavioural intentions of domestic visitors to national parks. This knowledge gap limits the development of effective marketing strategies aimed at promoting domestic tourism participation.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

To analyze the effect of destination image on behavioral intention among domestic tourists to National Parks in Tanzania.

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THEORETICAL REVIEW

Wildlife Tourism in Tanzania

Wildlife tourism refers to travel undertaken primarily to observe, experience, photograph, or interact with wildlife in their natural habitats. Activities commonly associated with wildlife tourism include game viewing, birdwatching, nature photography, and wildlife conservation experiences (Curtin & Kragh, 2014).

Located in East Africa along the shores of the Indian Ocean, Tanzania covers approximately 945,234 km², with more than 40% of its landmass designated as protected areas (TANAPA, 2019). The country possesses one of the largest networks of protected areas in Africa, comprising national parks, game reserves, conservation areas, forest reserves, cultural heritage sites, and wetlands. These resources form the foundation of Tanzania's wildlife tourism industry and contribute significantly to its attractiveness as a tourism destination.

Tanzania's tourism resources are organised into four tourism circuits. Among these, the Northern Circuit hosts internationally renowned attractions and receives the largest share of visitors, accounting for at least 75% of domestic tourist arrivals (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2025). Although wildlife tourism in Tanzania has traditionally targeted international tourists, recent policy initiatives have increasingly emphasised domestic tourism as a strategy for promoting sustainability and reducing dependence on foreign markets.

Domestic Visitor

A domestic visitor is a resident of a country who travels to a destination outside his or her usual environment but within the country of residence for purposes such as leisure, business, education, or other personal reasons. A domestic visitor who spends at least one night at the destination is classified as a domestic tourist, whereas one who returns on the same day without an overnight stay is classified as a same-day visitor (excursionist) (UNWTO, 2022).

Destination Image

Destination image refers to the overall set of beliefs, impressions, ideas, perceptions, and feelings that individuals hold about a tourism destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Similarly, Crompton (1979) defines destination image as the sum of impressions, beliefs, and ideas associated with a destination.

Scholars generally agree that destination image comprises both cognitive and affective dimensions. The cognitive image represents tourists' knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions of a destination's attributes and resources that motivate visitation. In contrast, the affective image reflects tourists' feelings and emotional responses toward a destination (Pike, 2007).

Destination image is also closely related to conative image, which reflects tourists' future behavioural responses based on their perceptions of the destination. Conative image includes

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intentions to revisit, recommend the destination to others, and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication (Gartner, 1994). Moreover, cognitive destination image is considered an antecedent of affective image, implying that favourable evaluations of destination attributes evoke positive emotional responses toward the destination (Pike, 2007).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), posits that behavioural intention is the most immediate predictor of actual behaviour. Behavioural intention refers to an individual's willingness to perform a future behaviour based on prior experiences, evaluations, and perceptions (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

According to TPB, behavioural intention is determined by three key factors:

- **Attitude:** The degree to which an individual evaluates a behaviour positively or negatively.
- **Subjective norms:** The perceived social pressure from significant others to perform or not perform the behaviour.
- **Perceived behavioural control:** The perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour.

The TPB extends the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by incorporating perceived behavioural control as an additional determinant of behavioural intention. Within the customer loyalty framework, behavioural intention represents conative loyalty, reflecting the likelihood that customers will continue purchasing or using a service. It is commonly manifested through intentions to revisit, recommend the destination, engage in positive word-of-mouth communication, purchase additional services, and pay premium prices (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003).

Guided by the TPB, this study assumes that favourable cognitive evaluations of Tanzania's national parks influence visitors' affective responses toward the destination, which subsequently shape behavioural intentions such as revisit intention, recommendation intention, and positive word-of-mouth communication.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Destination Image and Behavioural Intention

Destination image plays a critical role in tourists' travel decision-making and destination selection (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Numerous studies have established a positive relationship between destination image and tourists' behavioural intentions.

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For example, Jerónimo Viana et al. (2021) found that cognitive image significantly influences tourists' behavioural intentions, including revisit intention, recommendation intention, and positive word-of-mouth, among visitors to Timor-Leste, an island nation in Southeast Asia. Similarly, Nurazizah and Marhanah (2020) reported that cognitive image significantly influences tourists' intentions to revisit Yogyakarta, a major tourism destination in Indonesia.

Studies have also demonstrated the importance of affective image. Gorji et al. (2023) found that affective image significantly influences tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend Iran as a tourism destination, while Papadimitriou et al. (2018) reported a significant positive effect of affective image on revisit intention among city tourists in Greece. Furthermore, Xu et al. (2018) established that cognitive image significantly influences affective image among Hong Kong tourists visiting Taiwan.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that a more favourable destination image increases tourists' likelihood of revisiting a destination, recommending it to others, and engaging in positive word-of-mouth communication. Previous research also suggests that destination image is shaped by tourists' experiences, information sources, and personal evaluations of destination attributes.

Despite these important contributions, most empirical studies have focused on international tourists and urban tourism destinations. Limited attention has been given to domestic visitors in wildlife tourism settings, particularly within Tanzania's national parks. This gap constrains understanding of how destination image influences the behavioural intentions of domestic tourists. Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationships among cognitive image, affective image, and behavioural intention among domestic visitors to Tanzania's national parks.

Overall, existing evidence suggests that the more favourable the destination image perceived by tourists, the stronger their intention to revisit the destination, recommend it to others, and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, a clear and favourable destination image is largely shaped by tourists' experiences and evaluations of the destination. Therefore;

H1: Cognitive destination image has a positive influence on tourists' behavioral intentions.
H2: Affective destination image has a positive influence on tourists' behavioral intentions.
H3: Cognitive destination image has a positive influence on affective destination image.

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Conceptual framework

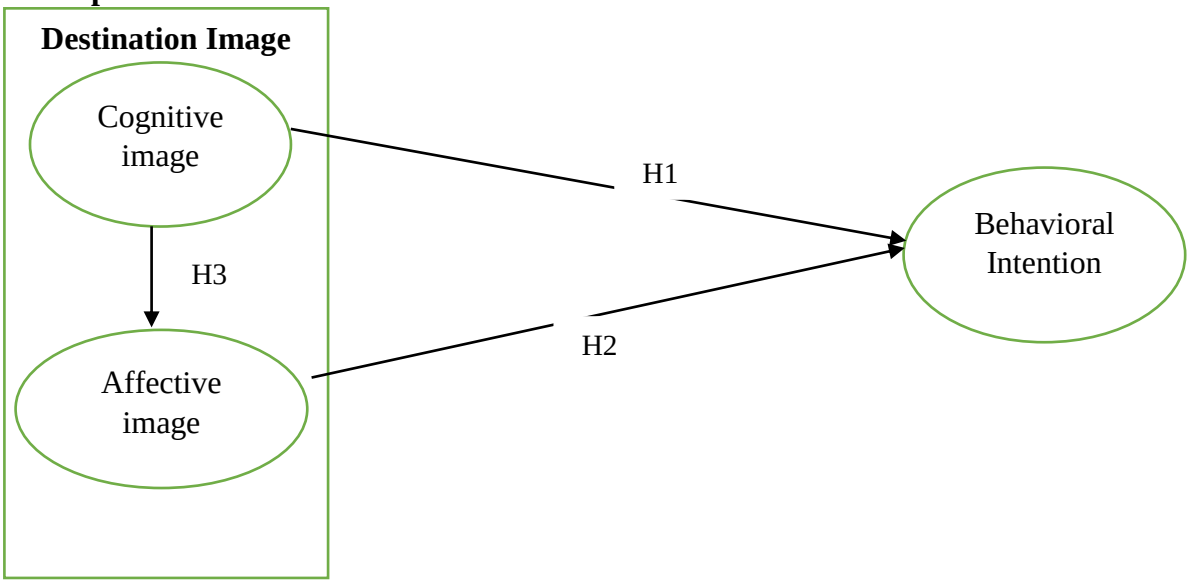

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
Source: Author (2026)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Study Area, and Sample Size

The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, whereby qualitative data were collected and analyzed first to identify destination image attributes specific to wildlife tourism, followed by a quantitative survey to test the relationships among destination image dimensions and behavioral intentions. At first, qualitative data was collected from fifteen tourism stakeholders who were purposively selected, comprising three destination managers, three tourism experts, three hotel managers, three tour operators, and three tour guides with aim of updating existed measurement scale as destination image is unique, volatile and subjective (Echtner, C. M., 1991). The existed measurement scale was combined with the qualitative study outcomes to create a survey tool for quantitative data. Cross section design was featured in quantitative data collection by collecting data at specific point of time. Moreover, the data was collected from Northern Tourism Circuit specifically Serengeti National Park. Although the circuit hosts only 6 among 22 National Parks, it welcomes at least 75% of the domestic arrivals to National Parks in the country. In the northern circuit, Serengeti National Park hosts more tourists than the rest. Based on the population of domestic visitors to Serengeti National Park during the study period (N = 256,414 in the year 2023) as reported by United et al. (2025), Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error yielded a minimum sample size of 400 respondents. Therefore, 400 domestic tourists who visited Serengeti National Park were sampled.

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Sampling Design and Data Collection

The study engaged non probability technique in sampling. In collecting qualitative data, purposive sampling method was adopted. Also due to the fact that domestic visitors were not known before the time of visitation, convenience sampling was employed. Structured questionnaire was used as survey tool to capture quantitative data. In ensuring validity/reliability, four stages were engaged in questionnaire development; design, pre testing, pilot study and post pilot questionnaire refinement (Kline et al., 2016). The tool was developed following thorough literatures review. The existed scale was updated with attributes obtained from qualitative study findings. The updated scale was presented to some experts for refinement purpose. Then pilot study was administered involving 20 domestic tourists from close National Park (Johanson & Brooks, 2010). Finally, the feedbacks from all previous phases were used to improve the survey tool into full scale. The study collected data at exit gates as tourists have a complete image after visiting.

Scale of Measurements

The survey tool had independent (destination image) and dependent variables (behavioral intention). Independent variable was captured by cognitive and affective image. Cognitive image scale was reflected by a total of 51 indicators, 42 from literatures and 9 from qualitative study findings (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999)**.** Then five point Likert scale was engaged to capture level of agreement. For affective image, the study adopted four items developed by Baloglu & McCleary (1999)**.** The measurement was captured in five-point bipolar thematic differential scale. Also behavioral intention, the dependent variable was measured by three attributes; revisit, recommendation and speak positive about destination (Bowen & Zeithaml et al., 1996). However, revisit was divided into revisit to the surveyed national park and revisit to other national parks. Five point Likert scale was engaged to capture level of agreement.

DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis method was engaged to analyze qualitative data and smart PLS version 4 was engaged for quantitative data analysis. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using Smart PLS 4 was employed because the study aimed to predict behavioral intention and examine complex relationships among latent constructs. 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.

RESULTS

Qualitative findings

The qualitative study found nine new attributes measuring destination image. Among the attributes, internet access acquired validly measurement weight of 7 and above outer loading and emerged salient in measuring destination image.

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Respondents Demographic Characteristics

The study collected data from 400 respondents with the following demographic characteristics;

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)

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Response Rate

Among the 400 questionnaires distributed, all 400 were valid and usable, representing a response rate of 100%.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Table 2 designates that all constructs exhibit acceptable measurements weight. After running PLS algorithm, other indicators were dropped because of unsatisfactory loading weights. The outer loadings of remaining indicators were generally satisfactory, including internet access, the product of qualitative study. Majority values overhead 0.70 while ADI1 (0.6750), CDI12 (0.6490), CDI31 (0.6840) and RevisitB3 (0.6500) measured slightly below the threshold, but considered adequate since the constructs retained sufficient CR and AVE (Memon et al., 2020). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) range from 1.2352 to 3.0103, beneath the critical inception point of 5, demonstrating that, multi-collinearity is not present. Also the variables established adequate reliability and validity measurements model. The internal consistency reliability by Cronbach's Alpha sort from 0.7119 to 0.9141 demonstrating achievement that exceed suggested 0.70 minimum threshold, implicating the high reliability of the indicators in measuring the study constructs. Values of Composite Reliability (CR) measured 0.8221 to 0.9280 outstanding minimum requirement of 0.7 (Hair, Ringle, et al., 2019). Also, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) measure ranged 0.5368 to 0.5642, exceeding minimum requirement of 0.5, implicating the construct captures more variance from its assigned indicators.

Table 2: Outer loading, VIF, Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE

Variables	Items	Outer Loadings	VIF	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Affective Destination Image	ADI1	0.675	1.2352	0.7119	0.8221	0.5368
	ADI2	0.736	1.3866			
	ADI3	0.772	1.4186			
	ADI4	0.743	1.4402			
Cognitive Destination Image	CDI11	0.737	2.3306	0.9141	0.9280	0.5642
	CDI12	0.649	2.2205			
	CDI2	0.729	2.2199			
	CDI26	0.726	1.9961			
	CDI27	0.731	2.2708			
	CDI3	0.77	2.5532			
	CDI31	0.684	2.1185			
	CDI37	0.809	2.1788			
	CDI46	0.729	3.0103			
	CDI48	0.759	2.6597			
Behavioral Intention	PWOM	0.748	2.6665	0.8696	0.8953	0.5509
	RECOM1	0.776	2.6061			
	RECOM2	0.726	2.3375			
	RECOM3	0.814	2.7779			
	RevisitA3	0.756	1.7362			
	RevisitB1	0.711	2.0976			
	RevisitB3	0.65	2.0825			

Source: Survey data (2026)

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Table 3 depicts examination of construct discriminant validity and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations for affective destination image (ADI), behavioral intention (BI) and cognitive destination image (CDI). Values on the diagonal depict square roots of the average variance extracted. Basing on the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the values must be greater than correlation between the constructs and among other constructs. The diagonal values are 0.732 for ADI, 0.741 for BI and 0.751 for CDI, higher enough to implicate that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs, hence sufficient discriminant validity. Also, HTMT value depicted beneath the diagonal shows more proof of discriminant validity. The values measure from 0.312 to 0.637 below the maximum edge of 0.8 by Henseler et al. (2015). It statistically depicting that, ADI, BI and CDI are empirically separate from one another.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait Monotrait ratios of correlations

Constructs	Affective Image	Behavioral Intention	Cognitive Image
Affective Image	**0.732**	0.315	0.515
Behavioral Intention	0.384	**0.741**	0.2794
Cognitive Image	0.637	0.312	**0.751**

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 4 depicts model fit indices for saturated and estimated model. The Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) values 0.078 for saturated and 0.078 estimated model are lower than the suggested maximum of 0.08, signifying satisfactory model fit by Hu & Bentler (1999). The Normed Fit Index (NFI) values of 0.846 surpass the minimum tolerable level of 0.80 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 4: Model Fit Indices

Index	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.078	0.078
Chi-square	700.300	700.300
NFI	0.846	0.846

Source: Survey data (2026)

Table 5 depicts the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the dependent constructs. It revealed that, ADI has R^2 value 0.269, adjusted R^2 0.267, which implicate around 26.9% of variation in ADI is expounded by its predictor variables. BI has R^2 value 0.126, adjusted R^2 0.122, signifying that explanatory variables accounted for 12.6% of the variance in behavioral intention, suggesting that other factors beyond destination image may also influence domestic tourists' future behavioral responses.

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Table 5: Coefficient of determination (R2)

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
ADI	0.269	0.267
BI	0.126	0.122

Source: Survey data (2026)

Structural Model Assessment

Table 6 depicts structural model findings after running bootstrapping. The table displays path coefficients, T statistics, level of significance, effect size and resulting decisions. The findings depicted significant positive effect of cognitive destination image on behavioral intention (β = 0.208, T = 1.968, p = 0.049), with small effect size (f^2 = 0.036), supporting H1. Affective destination image has significant positive influence on behavioral intention (β = 0.199, T = 1.973, p = 0.049), also with small effect size (f^2 = 0.033), supporting H2. Cognitive destination image has a significant positive effect on affective destination image (β = 0.519, T = 12.351, p = 0.000), with relatively large effect size (f^2 = 0.368), supporting H3.

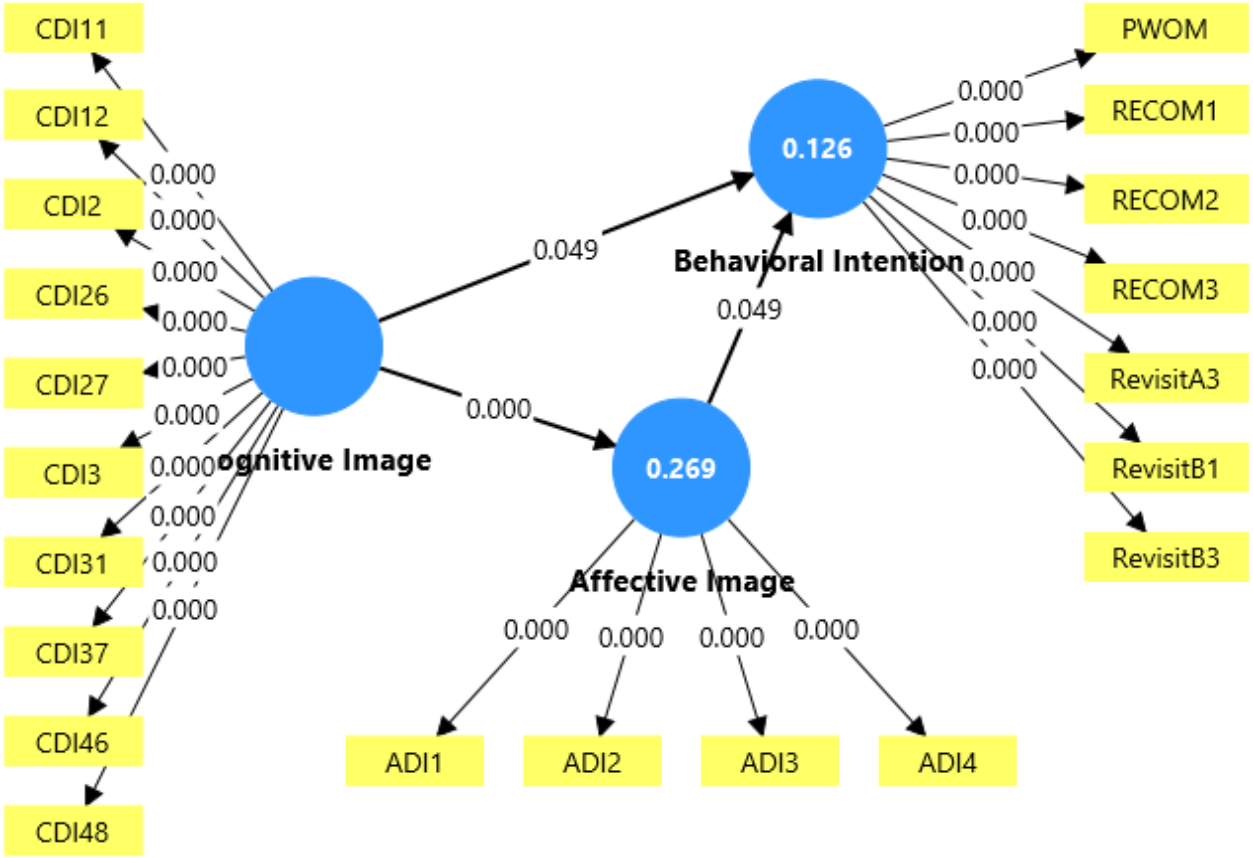

Figure 1 structural model

Source: Survey data (2026)

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Table 6: Results of the structural model

Hypothesis	Relation	Path coefficient(β)	T statistics	P values	F-Square	Decision
H1	CDI -> BI	0.208	1.968	0.049**	0.036	Supported
H2	ADI -> BI	0.199	1.973	0.049**	0.033	Supported
H3	CDI -> ADI	0.519	12.351	0.000***	0.368	Supported

Significance level *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Source: Survey data (2026)

On top of that, the findings on table 7 show Q^2 predict values are greater than zero, indicating that the model has predictive relevance for each specific endogenous constructs.

Table 7: Stone-Geisser Q^2

Constructs	Q^2predict	RMSE	MAE
Affective Image	0.255	0.879	0.501
Behavioral Intention	0.079	1.016	0.57

Source: Survey data (2026)

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to assess the influence of destination image on behavioral intention among domestic visitors to national parks in Tanzania. Specifically, it aimed to assess the influence of: cognitive destination image (CDI) on behavioral intention (BI), affective destination image (ADI) on behavioral intention (BI) and cognitive destination image (CDI) on affective destination image (ADI). **H1:** The relationship between CDI and BI was significantly positive. The significance of cognitive destination image suggests that domestic tourists are primarily influenced by tangible destination attributes such as wildlife diversity, accessibility, safety, and tourism infrastructure including internet access induced from qualitative study findings. These attributes appear to shape future behavioral intentions. This is in line with Viana et al. (2021), Pujiastuti et al. (2017) and Park et al. (2017). **H2:** The relationship between ADI and BI was significant positive. The significance indicates that domestic tourists are also influenced by intangible destination attributes such as feelings and emotions in shaping their behavioral intentions as supported Gorji et al. (2023), Papadimitriou et al. (2018) and Ragab et al. (2020). **H3:** The relation between CDI and ADI was significant positive implicating that intangible destination attributes are influenced by tangible attributes. Domestic tourists feelings and emotions towards destination are predominantly influenced by tangible destination attributes in agreement with Xu et al. (2018), De Nisco et al. (2015), Kim & Kwon (2018)and Fu et al. (2016). The findings fully support the theory of planned behavior by demonstrating that cognitive and affective evaluations of destination attributes significantly shape behavioral intentions. It suggests that both rational and emotion assessments are influential among domestic wildlife tourists.

CONCLUSION

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The study found that cognitive destination image significantly influences both behavioral intention and affective destination image among domestic visitors to Serengeti National Park. Also, affective destination image significantly predicts behavioral intention. These findings indicate that domestic tourists are more likely to revisit, recommend, and speak positively about national parks when they favorably perceive destination attributes (tangible and intangible). Also, favorable emotions of domestic tourists are invoked by positive evaluation of tangible destination attributes. The results suggest that both cognitive and affective evaluations of destination play important role in shaping loyalty intentions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tanzania national parks should prioritize improvements in destination attributes that directly shape visitors' cognitive and affective evaluations in the following order; internet access, underground formations, affordable prices for shopping, destination unusual tradition and custom, quality and variety of accommodations, beautiful lakes and rivers, affordable prices for food and accommodation, quality of infrastructure, opportunities for sports and outdoor activities and appealing local food cuisine and variety of foods that induce pleasant, exciting, arousing and relaxing environment. Marketing campaigns targeting domestic tourists should emphasize these tangible destination attributes. Furthermore, internet connectivity within and around national parks should be strengthened, given its emerging importance in destination evaluation. Future studies should investigate additional factors such as tourist satisfaction, destination attachment, and perceived value, and should extend the analysis to other tourism circuits in Tanzania.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge Ms. Cherish Furahisha and Mr. Said Said for assisting us with data collection. We equally appreciate the MOI University Library staff for their cooperation and support.

Sources of funding

The study was not funded.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure

The authors declare that no generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing, analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

Data availability statement
The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

Citation
Mushi, M.L., Matiku, S., & Kiage, O. (2026). Destination image and behavioral intention of domestic visitors to national parks in northern tourism circuit, Tanzania. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research,4(2), 23-39*

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