

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN CHOOSING COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN THE GUSAR DISTRICT OF AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

Community-based tourism (CBT) is increasingly recognized as a sustainable and inclusive strategy that balances economic growth with social equity and cultural preservation. Despite rapid tourism growth in Azerbaijan, empirical research on tourists' behavioral intentions toward CBT, particularly in rural contexts, remains scarce. This study examines the determinants of tourists' participation in CBT experiences in the Gusar District by integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with the push-pull motivation framework. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 180 tourists (90 domestic, 90 international) who had prior CBT experience. Exploratory factor analysis identified five key motivational dimensions: cultural and community connection, novelty and adventure seeking, authenticity and environmental awareness, social influence and word-of-mouth and price sensitivity. Hierarchical regression revealed that attitude and perceived behavioral control were the strongest predictors of intention, with authenticity and community connection enhancing explanatory power. Word-of-mouth positively influenced intention, while price sensitivity negatively affected domestic tourists. Comparative analysis showed international tourists were motivated by authenticity and novelty, whereas domestic tourists were guided by social networks, community ties and cost considerations. The findings demonstrate the complementary predictive power of TPB and push-pull motivations and offer actionable insights for designing evidence-based CBT strategies, supporting sustainable, culturally embedded and community-oriented tourism development in rural Azerbaijani destinations.

Keywords

Community-based tourism, consumer behavior, theory of planned behavior, push-pull motivation, Gusar district.

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1. Introduction

Tourism development in Azerbaijan has expanded rapidly, contributing to economic growth and destination visibility. However, this acceleration has also generated concerns related to sustainability, social equity and the distribution of tourism benefits. In response, academic discourse increasingly highlights community-based tourism (CBT) as a viable strategy to mitigate negative impacts while ensuring meaningful local participation. CBT is regarded as an inclusive development approach that enables local communities to benefit directly from tourism activities and supports long-term sustainability objectives. As emphasized by Salmanova (2022), CBT can ensure that local

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community share in tourism-generated income while actively contributing to sustainable tourism development. CBT places local communities at the center of tourism planning, management and ownership structures, thereby reinforcing economic retention and social empowerment at the local level. Scholars argue that CBT represents an effective pathway toward sustainable development by integrating community participation with conservation of cultural and natural heritage (Jackson, 2025). Within this framework, tourism enterprises are owned, managed or co-managed by local community, promoting equitable benefit-sharing and strengthening community resilience. Fundamentally, CBT emphasizes empowerment, participatory governance and heritage conservation as core principles for achieving sustainable and locally embedded tourism development (Scheyvens, 1999).

Gusar district is located in the northern part of Azerbaijan, bordering Russia to the north and situated within the Caucasus mountain range. Gusar covers an area of approximately 1,500 km², with a population of around 102,800 people spread across 90 villages, most of which rely on agriculture as the backbone of their economy, including livestock, grain, potato and fruit production, along with small-scale processing facilities. The district is home to the Shahdag National Park, Shahdag Tourism Complex and ethnic Laza village which attracts both domestic and international tourists, particularly during the winter season. Although tourism is growing, many villages in Gusar are still not fully developed for visitors, which creates a great opportunity for CBT, that uses the area's unique culture and natural beauty. Gusar is predominantly inhabited by the Lezgin ethnic community, known for their distinct language, traditional music, dance, crafts and festive customs, which form a rich intangible cultural heritage. In addition to intangible assets, the district possesses tangible heritage such as historic mosques, mausoleum, museums and traditional mountain village architecture, all of which provide a culturally immersive experience for visitors. CBT in Gusar has been gradually developing as villagers seek alternative income sources and opportunities for cultural exchange. Many local residents rent their homes as guesthouses, offering authentic accommodation experiences to tourists while directly benefiting from tourism revenue. In addition to lodging, these community-run initiatives provide a range of services, including traditional home-cooked meals, guided cultural tours, craft workshops, nature hikes and participation in local agricultural activities.

Understanding consumer behavior in the selection of CBT experiences is essential to the effectiveness and sustainability of this development strategy. In tourism research, consumer behavior refers to the decision-making processes and motivations that influence travelers' destination and activity choices (Moutinho, 1987). Within the CBT context, tourists are often motivated by preferences for authentic cultural interaction, direct engagement with local communities and environmentally responsible travel options. These motivations distinguish CBT from mass tourism and highlight the role of values, perceptions and personal beliefs in shaping travel intentions. Tourism choice behavior is commonly explained through established psychological frameworks, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the push-pull motivation model. TPB suggests that an individual's intention to engage in CBT is determined by attitude toward the experience, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Hu *et al.*, 2025; Ajzen, 1991). Complementing this, push-pull theory explains travel decisions as the result of internal motivations (e.g., learning, escape or community connection) and external destination attributes such as cultural authenticity and environmental quality (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Dann, 1977). In CBT settings, push motivations align with desires for

meaningful social and cultural engagement, while pull factors are represented by the unique authenticity and sustainability of community-based destinations (Joseph & Gillariose, 2025).

Despite the global interest in CBT and theoretical models, empirical research on actual consumer behavior in a specific CBT context like Gusar is scarce. This study addresses that gap by examining how domestic and international tourists differ in their motivations and how these relate to TPB and push-pull constructs. This study integrates the TPB and the push-pull motivation framework to examine both cognitive-intentional factors and motivational drivers. The key research questions are:

- What are the main motives (push and pull) influencing tourists’ decisions to participate in CBT in Gusar?
- How do attitudes, social norms and control beliefs influence their intention?
- Does word-of-mouth or price sensitivity significantly affect intention, beyond TPB and motivations?
- Are there significant differences between domestic and international tourists in terms of motivations, perceptions and behaviors?

Prior research on tourism consumer behavior in Azerbaijan is scant and virtually none has focused on CBT adoption in this region. The gap this study addresses is twofold: a contextual gap (applying established theories in a new geographical/cultural setting) and a content gap (examining CBT choice determinants, which have not been measured here before). This paper provides one of the first quantitative investigations linking established theories (TPB, push-pull motivations) to tourist choices in Azerbaijani CBT.

2. Literature review

In contrast to mass tourism, which often marginalizes host populations and concentrates economic benefits among external actors, community-based tourism (CBT) seeks to retain tourism revenues locally while promoting community empowerment and social equity (Telfer & Wall, 2000). Twining-Ward et al. (2007) further define CBT as a pro-poor tourism approach in which communities exercise managerial control over tourism activities.

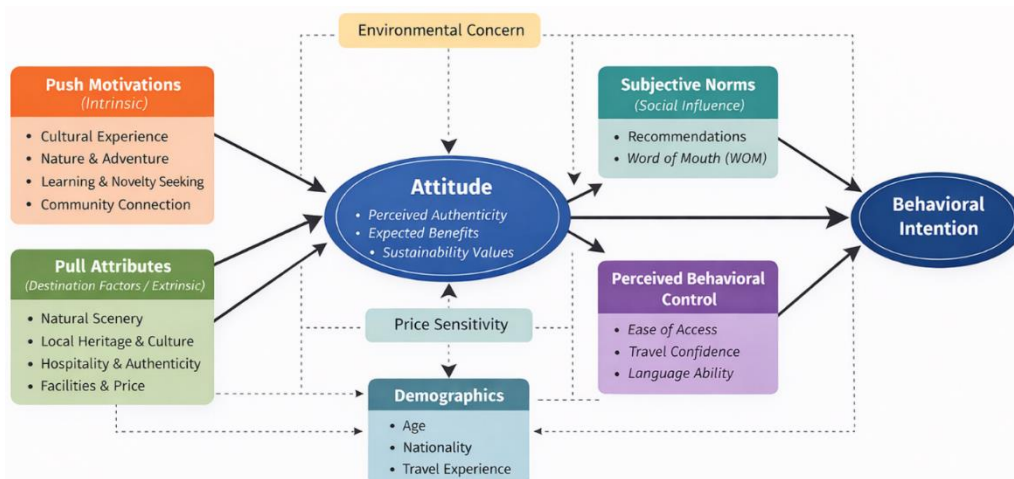


Figure 1. Extended conceptual model of factors influencing tourists’ choice of community-based tourism
Source: Compiled by the author based on TPB and Push-Pull Motivation Model

The effectiveness of CBT largely depends on meaningful community participation and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms. Scheyvens (1999) argues that CBT initiatives are only successful when local residents possess genuine decision-making power and benefit fairly from tourism-generated income, a view supported by empirical findings highlighting CBT's role in fostering local entrepreneurship and social capital (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). From the demand side, tourists engaging in CBT are typically motivated by cultural authenticity, meaningful host-guest interaction and perceived social and environmental responsibility (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005). These motivations extend beyond functional consumption attributes to include moral satisfaction and pro-social values, aligning with behavioral theories that emphasize the role of cognitive, affective and normative influences in tourism decision-making (Ajzen, 1991). Consequently, CBT consumption is increasingly associated with responsible travel behavior, supported by perceived authenticity, consumer trust and positive word-of-mouth communication that reduces risk and enhances destination appeal, particularly in rural and emerging destinations (Moutinho, 1987).

Understanding consumer behavior is central to tourism research, as it explains why tourists select particular destinations, products or experiences. Tourist decision-making is shaped by a complex interaction of psychological, social and contextual factors, including individual needs, motivations, prior experiences and external marketing stimuli (Solomon, 2018). Within the context of CBT, analyzing consumer behavior is especially important because tourists' choices directly influence community livelihoods, local empowerment and the long-term sustainability of tourism initiatives. Middleton and Clarke's (2001) model of tourist behavior provides a comprehensive framework for examining these decision-making processes by conceptualizing tourism consumption as a multi-stage and high-involvement activity. The model explains tourist choice as the outcome of interactions between stimulus inputs, buyer characteristics, decision processes, purchase outcomes and post-consumption evaluations. Stimulus inputs include marketing communications such as advertising, brochures, public relations activities, personal selling and peer recommendations, all of which shape tourists' awareness and perceptions of competing tourism products (Middleton & Clarke, 2001; Kotler *et al.*, 2017). Buyer characteristics (encompassing demographic, economic, social and psychographic attributes, as well as prior learning and experience) influence how these stimuli are interpreted. The decision process integrates both rational considerations, such as price, product attributes and accessibility and non-rational influences, including emotions, perceptions, social norms and habitual behavior. Importantly, the model highlights the role of post-consumption feedback, such as satisfaction, word-of-mouth communication and revisit intentions in shaping future travel behavior and reinforcing destination image, making it particularly relevant for understanding repeat visitation and advocacy in CBT contexts.

Tourist motivation research has long relied on the push-pull framework to explain why individuals decide to travel and how they select destinations. Push motivations originate from internal psychological needs, such as escape, relaxation, socialization, learning or self-actualization, whereas pull factors relate to destination-specific attributes, including natural scenery, cultural attractions, facilities and services. Baloglu and Uysal (1996), for example, demonstrated through canonical correlation analysis that internal desires and destination appeal operate jointly in shaping tourist behavior, supporting the global applicability of the push-pull model. Subsequent research reiterates that push

factors generate the desire to travel, while pull factors translate that desire into a specific destination choice (Salsabila & Alversia, 2020).

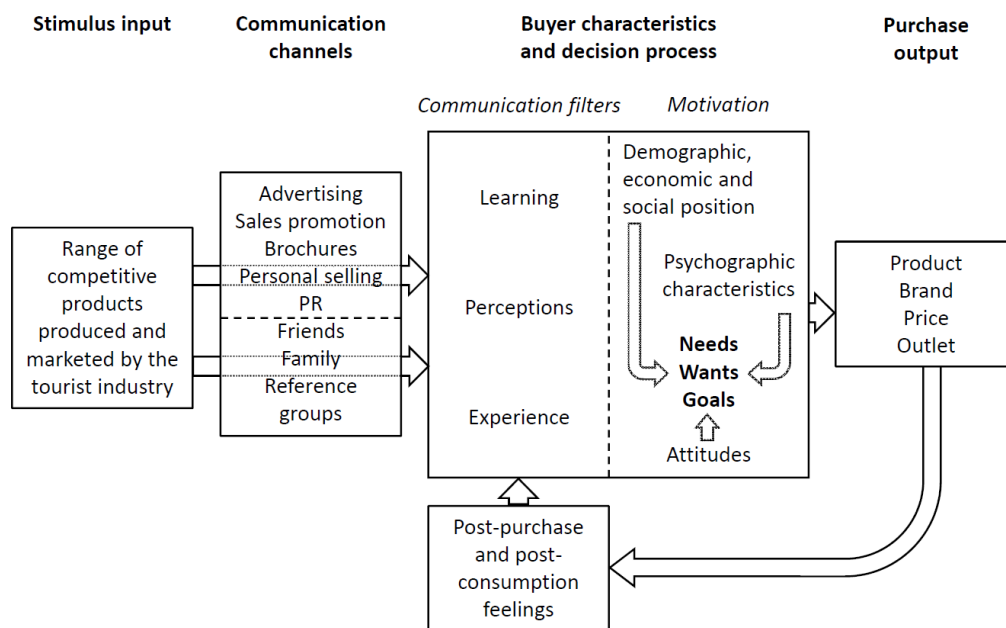


Figure 2. Middleton and Clarke's model of tourist consumer behavior
Source: Middleton and Clarke (2001)

Within the context of CBT, push-pull motivations take on distinct characteristics. Push factors often include a desire for cultural immersion, meaningful interaction with host communities, authenticity and social or environmental responsibility, while pull factors are associated with rural landscapes, traditional architecture, ecological quality and community-managed facilities. Empirical evidence from CBT initiatives across regions indicates that tourists are simultaneously pushed by intrinsic values related to learning and contribution and pulled by the unique cultural and environmental attributes of community destinations (Songklin, 2025). These motivational dynamics can be further explained through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioral intention is determined by attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In tourism research, TPB has proven effective in predicting sustainable and pro-environmental travel behaviors. Studies show that push motivations influence travel intentions directly and indirectly through attitude, while perceived behavioral control plays a critical role in shaping intention by reflecting tourists' perceived ability to access and participate in tourism activities (Salsabila & Alversia, 2020; Hu *et al.*, 2025).

Beyond the core constructs of the TPB and motivational drivers, several additional consumer-related factors play a significant role in shaping tourism decision-making, particularly within the context of CBT. One of the most influential factors is perceived authenticity, which has become a central consideration as tourists increasingly seek meaningful and genuine cultural experiences. Rather than consuming staged attractions, many travelers aspire to engage with what they perceive as "real" local traditions and everyday practices (MacCannell, 1973; Poria *et al.*, 2003). Empirical studies demonstrate that perceived authenticity enhances tourist satisfaction and positively influences revisit and recommendation intentions. For example, Nguyen and Hoang (2023) found that learning- and exploration-oriented motives were particularly strong among young CBT

participants in Vietnam. Environmental concern also significantly influences tourism choices, as travelers with higher levels of environmental awareness are more inclined to select sustainable and eco-friendly tourism options (Jackson, 2025). Given that CBT typically emphasizes local resource preservation and environmentally responsible practices, tourists' general environmental concern can strengthen their intention to participate in community-based experiences. In addition, price sensitivity represents a critical yet ambivalent factor in CBT consumption. While community-based accommodations such as homestays and guesthouses are often more affordable than conventional hotels lower prices may also be interpreted as indicators of limited comfort or inadequate facilities in rural areas. Research suggests that perceived risks related to safety, hygiene, language barriers and service quality can further amplify these concerns, particularly among international tourists (Boo *et al.*, 2009; Kah *et al.*, 2022). Finally, word-of-mouth (WOM) plays a decisive role in CBT decision-making due to the intangible nature of tourism services and the limited presence of CBT destinations in mainstream marketing channels. Both personal recommendations and electronic word-of-mouth through online review platforms substantially influence travel intentions (Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Murphy *et al.*, 2007).

3. Methodology

This research employed a quantitative, survey-based design to examine factors influencing tourists' choices of community-based tourism (CBT) experiences in the Gusar district of Azerbaijan. A cross-sectional survey was chosen as the primary method, allowing for statistical examination of relationships between variables such as motivations, attitudes and intentions. The study is positioned within a post-positivist paradigm, using numeric measurements and inferential analysis to test the theoretical framework described. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 180 tourists, comprising 90 domestic and 90 international visitors, all of whom had prior experience participating in CBT products and activities in the region. Surveys were administered at key CBT sites and local accommodations, ensuring participants had direct exposure to the tourism experiences under investigation. Respondents were approached in-person and invited to complete the questionnaire voluntarily, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. This approach allowed for the collection of both socio-demographic information and experiential data, capturing variations in motivations and behavior across domestic and international tourist segments.

The questionnaire included four sections:

Demographics & Trip Profile: Questions about age, gender, education, country of residence and details of the trip (e.g. first time in region or repeat, length of stay, travel companions).

Travel Motivations: A series of Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) probing the respondent's motivations and values related to travel and CBT.

Information Sources & Social Influence: This section captured how the tourists heard about attractions in the region and whose recommendations they value. It included a multiple-choice question on primary information sources (friends/family, social media, travel agency, etc.) and a Likert item to gauge word-of-mouth impact.

CBT Choice and Intention: A brief description of a CBT experience in the region was provided (e.g., staying overnight in a local homestay in a mountain village, with guided cultural activities conducted by villagers) to ensure all respondents shared a

common understanding. Participants were then asked to indicate their likelihood of choosing such a CBT experience on their trip using a 5-point scale (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely).

4. Data analysis

The sample comprised 180 tourists, evenly split between domestic (n = 90) and international visitors (n = 90). Domestic tourists were predominantly aged 25-44 (62%) with a slight female majority (54%). Most domestic respondents had completed tertiary education (71%) and traveled with family or friends (68%). International tourists were similarly concentrated in the 25-44 age range (59%), with 52% male and primarily first-time visitors to the Gusar region (73%). Average length of stay was 3.6 nights for domestic tourists and 4.2 nights for international tourists. Both segments reported high level of familiarity with local CBT products. Domestic tourists primarily participated in village homestays, cultural workshops and short tours, while international tourists combined cultural experiences with nature-based activities such as hiking and eco-tours.

Table 1. Demographics of respondents (n = 180)

Variable	Domestic (n=90)	International (n=90)	Total (n=180)
Age 18–24	15%	18%	16.5%
Age 25–34	38%	35%	36.5%
Age 35–44	24%	24%	24%
Age 45+	23%	23%	23%
Male	46%	52%	49%
Female	54%	48%	51%
Tertiary education	71%	68%	69.5%
First-time visitor	40%	73%	56.5%
Average length of stay (nights)	3.6	4.2	3.9

Source: Survey data collected by the author (2026)

a) Travel motivations: Push and Pull factors

To examine the first research question regarding tourists' motives, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.82 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1254.6$, $df = 78$, $p < 0.001$), indicating suitability for factor analysis. Five factors with eigenvalues above 1.0 were extracted, explaining 68.4% of the total variance:

1. Cultural and Community Connection (items: community interaction, cultural learning, supporting locals) - 22.7% variance, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$;
2. Novelty and Adventure Seeking (items: exploring new places, adventure, experiencing uniqueness) - 15.2% variance, $\alpha = 0.81$;
3. Authenticity and Environmental Awareness (items: authentic experience, environmental concern, eco-friendly practices) - 12.8% variance, $\alpha = 0.79$;
4. Social Influence and Word-of-Mouth (items: peer/family recommendations, social media reviews) - 10.9% variance, $\alpha = 0.76$;
5. Price Sensitivity (items: affordability, perceived cost-effectiveness) - 7.1% variance, $\alpha = 0.73$.

Factor loadings for all items exceeded 0.55, confirming that these constructs reliably represent tourists' motivational drivers for CBT participation. Table 2 summarizes the factor loadings.

Table 2. Factor loadings for CBT motivations

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Cultural learning	0.82	0.21	0.18	0.11	0.05
Community interaction	0.80	0.19	0.22	0.14	0.07
Support local economy	0.77	0.24	0.15	0.18	0.06
Adventure	0.18	0.81	0.21	0.13	0.08
Novelty seeking	0.21	0.79	0.19	0.15	0.11
Authenticity	0.19	0.20	0.83	0.11	0.09
Environmental concern	0.17	0.18	0.79	0.12	0.10
Word-of-mouth	0.14	0.19	0.11	0.81	0.13
Social media influence	0.11	0.17	0.14	0.78	0.09
Price sensitivity	0.09	0.12	0.10	0.11	0.83

Source: Survey data collected by the author (2026)

b) Attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control

To address the second research question (how do attitudes, social norms and control beliefs influence CBT intention?) descriptive statistics and correlations were examined.

- Attitude toward CBT: High overall ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.48$), higher among international tourists ($M = 4.50$) than domestic ($M = 4.20$).
- Subjective norm: Moderate ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.54$), with domestic tourists influenced more by peers ($M = 3.90$) than international tourists ($M = 3.80$).
- Perceived behavioral control: High ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.52$), with international tourists reporting greater ease in accessing CBT ($M = 4.15$) versus domestic tourists ($M = 3.85$).

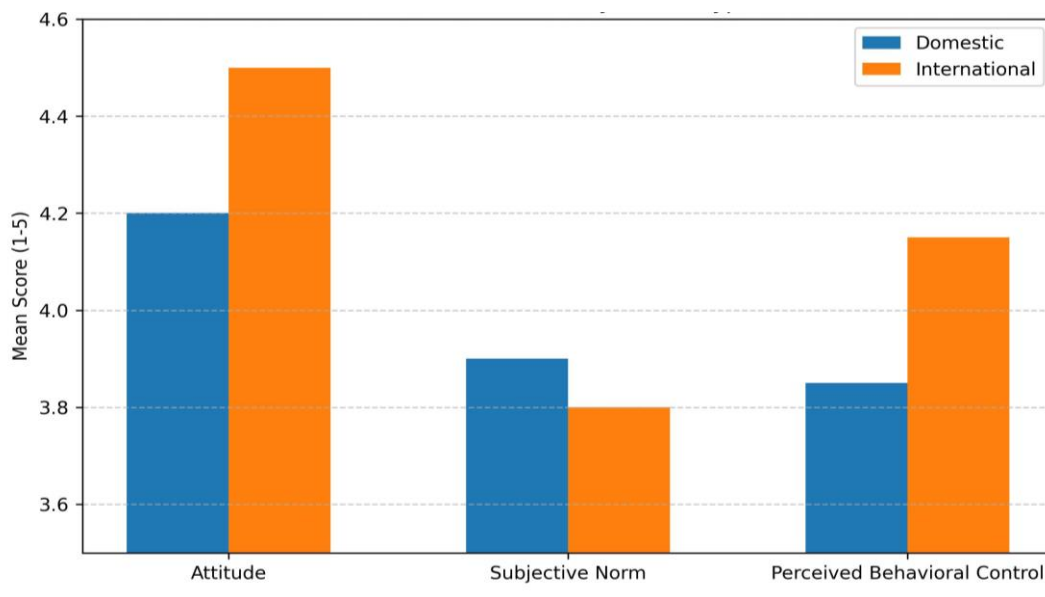


Figure 3. Mean TPB scores by tourist type
Source: Survey data collected by the author (2026)

Correlation analysis showed attitude ($r = 0.71$), PBC ($r = 0.64$) and subjective norm ($r = 0.42$) significantly correlated with intention (all $p < 0.01$). These results support TPB predictions that attitude and PBC are stronger predictors of intention than subjective norm. Figure 3 illustrates these variations, highlighting key predictors of intention to participate in community-based tourism (CBT).

c) Word-of-mouth and price sensitivity

The third research question examined the influence of external factors, specifically word-of-mouth (WOM) and price sensitivity, on tourists' intention to participate in community-based tourism (CBT). Correlation analysis indicated that WOM was positively associated with intention ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$), particularly among domestic tourists who rely heavily on recommendations from family and community networks. In contrast, price sensitivity was negatively related to intention ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that perceived costs may deter participation, especially for domestic visitors.

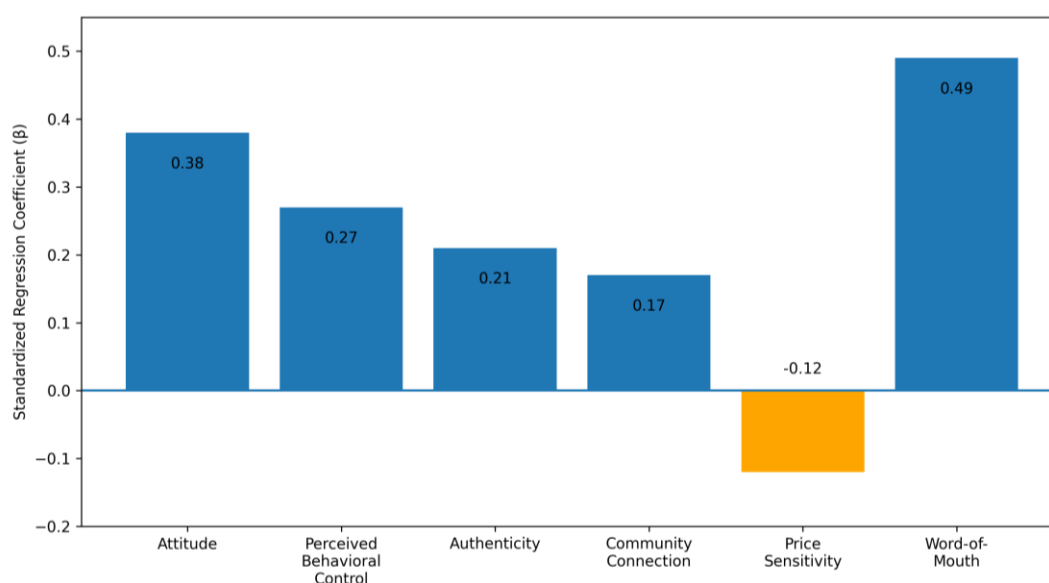


Figure 4. Predictors of CBT intention

Source: Survey data collected by the author (2026)

Hierarchical regression analysis including all predictors (TPB constructs, push-pull factors, WOM and price sensitivity) explained 62% of the variance in CBT intention ($R^2 = 0.62$, $F(9,170) = 32.45$, $p < 0.001$). Below, Figure 4 presents the standardized regression coefficients (β) of key predictors influencing tourists' intention to participate in CBT in Gusar district.

d) Domestic and international differences

The fourth research question explored differences between domestic and international tourists. To examine group differences, independent-samples t-tests/group comparison were conducted on key motivational, TPB and consumer behavior variables (Table 4). International tourists scored significantly higher on novelty motivation (mean difference = 0.4, $p < .01$) and perceived authenticity (mean difference = 0.5, $p < .001$) compared to domestic tourists. They also rated environmental concern slightly higher, though this difference was marginal ($p = 0.09$). Conversely, domestic tourists scored higher on community connection (mean diff = 0.25, $p < .05$), word-of-mouth influence (mean diff = 0.35, $p < .05$) and price sensitivity (mean diff = 0.55, $p < .01$), reflecting

stronger reliance on social networks and budget considerations. No significant differences were observed for TPB constructs such as attitude toward CBT, subjective norm or perceived behavioral control.

Table 3. Mean comparisons between domestic and international tourists (5-point Scales)

Variable	Domestic Mean	International Mean	t	p
Novelty Motivation	3.70	4.10	-3.50	<.01
Authenticity Perception	3.85	4.35	-5.10	<.001
Environmental Concern	4.10	4.25	-1.70	0.09
Community Connection	4.25	4.00	2.50	<.05
Price Sensitivity	3.45	2.90	3.90	<.01
Word-of-Mouth Influence	3.75	4.10	-2.60	<.05
Attitude toward CBT	4.05	4.15	-1.10	0.27
Subjective Norm	3.70	3.80	-0.80	0.42
Perceived Behavioral Control	3.95	4.05	-1.00	0.32

Source: Survey data collected by the author (2026)

These results indicate that international tourists are primarily drawn by pull factors such as authenticity and novelty, while domestic tourists are relatively more influenced by push factors, social networks and price sensitivity. The TPB variables (attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control) did not differ significantly across groups, suggesting that the basic cognitive framework of TPB applies equally to both domestic and international visitors.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, targeted strategies are necessary to strengthen community-based tourism (CBT) in Gusar District, optimize local benefits and enhance visitor satisfaction. Recommendations are directed at key stakeholder groups (tourism destination authorities, CBT operators and local entrepreneurs and policymakers) to ensure sustainable, culturally authentic and economically inclusive development.

Group	Recommendation	Description / Rationale
Tourism Destination Authorities	<i>Segment Marketing by Tourist Type</i>	Design separate campaigns for domestic and international visitors. Domestic tourists respond to authenticity, community engagement and social WOM; international tourists prioritize novelty, authentic experiences and ease of visit.
	<i>Enhance Accessibility and Information</i>	Improve road signage, public transport links and online booking systems for CBT products. Offer detailed maps, guides and village information. This increases tourists' perceived behavioral control and reduces barriers, especially for international visitors.
	<i>Leverage Word-of-Mouth and Reviews</i>	Facilitate online reviews, testimonials and user-generated content. Encourage domestic tourists to share on local community platforms and international tourists on travel blogs.
	<i>Data-Driven Market Segmentation</i>	Use tourist surveys and feedback to monitor motivations, intentions and satisfaction. This enables targeted marketing, product adaptation and evaluation of CBT development impact over time.
CBT Operators &	<i>Develop Authentic & Motivational Experiences</i>	Offer community workshops, homestays, cultural performances, guided nature treks and traditional craft activities. Focus on pull factors like authenticity and environmental beauty for international tourists and push factors like cultural learning for domestic tourists.

	<i>Capacity Building and Training</i>	Provide training in hospitality, customer service, foreign languages and digital literacy. Well-trained hosts increase tourists' positive attitudes.
	<i>Strategic Pricing & Bundling</i>	Introduce tiered pricing, seasonal discounts or multi-activity packages. This addresses domestic tourists' price sensitivity and encourages international tourists to purchase higher value bundled CBT experiences.
	<i>Quality Assurance & Authenticity Standards</i>	Establish clear quality standards for homestays, guides and activities. Certified authentic experiences increase trust, reinforce positive attitudes and reduce perceived risk, which is essential for both domestic and international segments.
Policymakers & Tourism Management Bodies	<i>Policy Support for Local Participation & Fair Revenue Sharing</i>	Develop regulations to ensure equitable benefit distribution, community co-management and local involvement in CBT planning. Strengthens community connection, a significant push factor for domestic tourists.
	<i>Infrastructure & Service Support</i>	Invest in reliable transport, signage, communication networks and safety standards for CBT villages. Reduces barriers and enhances perceived behavioral control for all tourists.
	<i>Certification & Branding of CBT Products</i>	Introduce national or regional CBT certification schemes, highlighting authenticity, sustainability and community benefit.
	<i>Conservation Incentives</i>	Support projects that maintain natural landscapes, cultural sites and traditional crafts. Market these initiatives to attract eco-conscious and authenticity-driven tourists.
	<i>Monitoring and Evaluation Systems</i>	Establish databases to track tourist behavior, satisfaction, price responsiveness and repeat visitation. Allows evidence-based adjustments to CBT strategy and policy, improving long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

7. Conclusion

This study contributes to the scholarly understanding of community-based tourism (CBT) by empirically investigating the determinants of tourists' behavioral intentions in the Gusar District, Azerbaijan, through the integrated lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and push-pull motivational constructs. The findings underscore the centrality of cognitive-intentional factors, particularly attitude toward CBT and perceived behavioral control, as primary predictors of tourists' intention to engage in community-led tourism experiences. These results substantiate the applicability of TPB in rural, emerging tourism destinations, confirming that tourists' evaluations of the desirability and feasibility of CBT strongly influence their behavioral decisions.

Beyond TPB, the study demonstrates the significance of intrinsic motivational drivers, notably authenticity and community connection, which reinforce the experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of CBT. International tourists exhibit a pronounced preference for pull factors such as novelty, adventure and authentic cultural engagement, whereas domestic tourists demonstrate stronger responsiveness to push factors, social influence and cost considerations. This distinction highlights the necessity of market segmentation strategies to tailor CBT offerings and communication channels to heterogeneous visitor profiles while maintaining a unified framework for sustainable tourism development.

The influence of word-of-mouth as a facilitator and price sensitivity as a constraint emphasizes the role of both social and economic factors in shaping CBT participation. Positive recommendations and digital reviews can amplify engagement, particularly in destinations with limited formal marketing channels, whereas perceived affordability and

value represent key determinants for domestic participation. Consequently, policymakers and destination managers should prioritize interventions that enhance authenticity, ensure equitable community benefit-sharing, improve accessibility and service quality and strategically communicate value propositions.

Collectively, this research advances the literature on CBT by addressing a contextual and empirical gap in Azerbaijan, demonstrating that the integration of TPB and push-pull motivations provides a robust framework for explaining tourists' engagement in community-driven tourism experiences. The findings offer actionable insights for evidence-based tourism planning, supporting culturally embedded, economically inclusive and environmentally sustainable tourism pathways.

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