Contents lists available at Science-Gate

International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences

Journal homepage: https://www.science-gate.com/IJAAS.html

Tourism experience and behavioral intention: A mediated model of host–guest interaction and enjoyment

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the effect of host–guest interaction on tourists' behavioral intentions through perceived enjoyment at the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist destination in North Sumatra, Indonesia. A quantitative survey method was used to collect data from 115 tourists who visited Puncak Siosar 2000 in 2025. The study analyzes both the direct and indirect effects of host–guest interaction on tourists' behavioral intentions, with perceived enjoyment as a mediating variable. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to examine the relationships among the variables. The results show that positive host–guest interactions have a significant effect on tourists' perceived enjoyment. In addition, perceived enjoyment mediates the relationship between host–guest interaction and tourists' behavioral intentions, including intentions to revisit and to recommend the destination to others. These findings provide important implications for tourism managers on the role of host–guest interaction in enhancing tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits.

1. Introduction

Tourism has become a global industry that has a big effect on the economy, cultural exchange, and social growth (Ying, 2024). This field is likely to keep having a big impact on both the national and international levels (Chung et al., 2024). Puncak Siosar 2000 in North Sumatra, Indonesia, is an example of a place that shows how important it is to understand the psychological factors that affect how tourists act. This place draws travelers from all over the world and offers experiences that make people want to come back, make friends, and make the place more appealing (Sihombing et al., 2025).

The World Travel and Tourism Council said that tourism will be a big part of Indonesia's GDP in 2024 (Putra et al., 2025). However, this industry has trouble keeping tourists coming back and getting them to stay longer, especially overseas tourists (Alimin et al., 2025). This shows how important it is

to make deep emotional connections to build long-term loyalty and make it more likely that people will come back to a place (Si et al., 2024).

Tourist behavioral intention is a fundamental concept in tourism research, indicating travelers' inclination to return to a site, endorse it to others, and disseminate favorable experiences, particularly in the digital age (Ali and Kim, 2024). The correlation between tourists' emotional impressions, including happiness and perceived fairness, and their behavioral intentions has garnered heightened scrutiny (Utomo et al., 2023). While numerous studies have examined the impact of tourism experiences on loyalty, there is a paucity of research addressing the mediating roles of brand love and perceived enjoyment in this context (Kim et al., 2025b).

Perceived enjoyment is one of the things that affects tourists' decisions to go to a certain place (Joe et al., 2022). Perceived enjoyment denotes the degree of pleasure and emotional fulfillment experienced by tourists during their visit to a place. This includes many parts of the vacation, such as talking to locals and enjoying the things you did while you were there. Tourists who had a lot of fun are more likely to want to go back to the same place and tell others about it, either in person or on social media.

Perceived enjoyment plays a crucial role in shaping tourist decisions because enjoyable experiences not only increase satisfaction but also strengthen emotional connections with the destination. The opportunity to enjoy enjoyable activities, adequate service quality, and a comfortable atmosphere will create a positive impression of the destination. This will ultimately influence tourists' intention to return and provide recommendations.

Prior studies have demonstrated that elevated perceived enjoyment can enhance tourists' emotional connection to a destination, therefore motivating them to recommend the location to others (Ruan et al., 2021). Previous studies have demonstrated that a favorable experience not only enhances tourists' intention to revisit but also bolsters the destination's positive image through word-of-mouth promotion. The enjoyment that tourists have is a big part of what makes them loyal and want to come again. Positive emotional experiences are crucial for making people devoted to a place for a long time (Mohamad et al., 2021). One of the main reasons tourists share their experiences online is that they enjoy them. Such behavior makes word-of-mouth advertising much more powerful (Nguyen, 2025).

However, other studies have shown that perceived enjoyment does not significantly influence behavioral intention (Li and Chen, 2019). Perceived enjoyment tends to be short-term and is often not strong enough to influence long-term traveler intentions. Many travelers choose destinations based on the variety of options available. Even if tourists enjoy the travel experience, they have, perceived enjoyment may not be enough to change their intention to revisit the destination, especially if there are alternative destinations that offer better value, both in terms of experience and price (Liu et al., 2024).

Additionally, the host-guest relationship is a factor that affects how visitors plan to behave (Chen et al., 2024). When visitors and hosts get along well, it can make tourists feel comfortable and happy, which can lead them to return to a place and tell others about it (Shi et al., 2024). Good social interactions not only make a visit more enjoyable, but they also make the emotional connection with the place stronger. Previous studies have demonstrated that enjoyable social interactions can enhance tourists' intentions to return and disseminate favorable experiences via recommendations, both directly and through social media (Putra and Jelantik, 2023).

Previous studies have demonstrated that high-quality social interactions can enhance tourist loyalty. Having fun with other people is a big part of getting tourists to want to come back to a place (Lu et al., 2024). Tourists are also more likely to tell others about their wonderful experiences when they have positive encounters with their hosts (Bi et al., 2024). Memorable social encounters can enhance the destination's image, fostering a favorable perception among tourists (Jiang et al., 2024). Also, solid social ties have a direct effect on whether tourists want to come back and tell others about the place (Wu et al., 2023).

However, in contrast to the research findings (Jiang et al., 2025), which indicated that interactions between hosts and guests did not significantly influence behavioral intentions, these findings indicate that inconsistent or inadequate interactions can reduce the impact of these interactions on behavioral intentions. If guests feel that interactions with hosts are inauthentic, limited, or irrelevant, then the relationship that is formed is not strong enough to influence tourists' decisions in choosing a tourist destination or returning to that place.

The facts at Puncak Siosar in 2000 show that the quality of host-guest interactions was affected by a lack of training in communication and service among residents, limited in-depth interaction, and language barriers, thus reducing the quality of the tourist experience. Inconsistent service and a lack of understanding of local culture also impacted perceived enjoyment and behavioral intentions, including the intention to revisit. Furthermore, the lack of variety in tourist activities, limited facilities, and attention to comfort and emotional aspects reduced the level of enjoyment. This has implications for low tourist loyalty and reduced potential for destination recommendations.

The urgency of this research lies in the lack of empirical studies conducted at the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist destination in North Sumatra Province, specifically on foreign tourists from Malaysia, China, and Singapore. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Tourism, is currently striving to increase the number of foreign tourists visiting to enjoy the natural beauty of North Sumatra Province. It is hoped that the feedback from this research will serve as a basis for the Indonesian government in establishing policies related to strategies for promoting international tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1. Host-guest interaction on perceived enjoyment

The interaction between hosts and guests is increasingly recognized as a critical dimension in tourism research, given its strong influence on tourists' perceived enjoyment (Shi et al., 2024). Rather than being a simple social exchange, such interaction creates emotional experiences that strengthen tourist satisfaction and destination attachment. Genuine, friendly, and attentive encounters foster a sense of comfort and involvement, which in turn generates lasting and memorable experiences. Consequently, host–guest interaction is not an ancillary aspect but a key determinant of tourist loyalty, expressed through intentions to revisit and positive recommendations.

Research indicates that high-quality host-guest relationships substantially elevate experiential

value, including satisfaction, emotional involvement, and personal meaning (Chen et al., 2024). This increased value leads to tourism citizenship behavior (TCB), which is when travelers help destinations by giving positive comments, following local rules, and promoting sustainable practices. Meaningful and deep connections can help people develop personal norms that encourage pro-environmental behavior, such as responsible waste management, resource efficiency, and eco-friendly tourism (Shi et al., 2024).

Moreover, the benefits of host–guest interaction also benefit local inhabitants (Chen et al., 2024). The Residents' Perceived Benefits of Host–Guest Interaction (RPBS) paradigm emphasizes aspects such as emotional enhancement, community pride, altruism, personal growth, and destination attractiveness (Jiang et al., 2024). For tourists, making real connections with local people makes their experiences more emotional and culturally authentic (Wu et al., 2023).

H1: Host-guest interaction has a significant effect on perceived enjoyment.

2.2. Host-guest interaction on behavior intention

For a long time, researchers have known that host-guest relationships are a key factor in how tourists behave, especially when it comes to wanting to come back and giving good reviews (Tabaeeian et al., 2023). The quality of relationships fostered through hospitality, cultural authenticity, and customized care from hosts has been demonstrated to enhance tourists' favorable opinions of a location and elevate behavioral intentions. Fang et al. (2025) substantiated that both functional and hedonic interactions within an ecotourism framework can elevate perceptions of service quality and generate memorable experiences that encourage intentions to return. Khaki et al. (2024) highlighted the role of place attachment as an important mechanism in linking interaction quality with tourist loyalty. Warm and authentic social interactions foster emotional and cultural closeness, which then strengthens tourists' psychological bonds with the destination. This bond encourages tourists to revisit and spread recommendations. Furthermore, Qu et al. (2024) indicated that interactions between hosts and guests influence tourists' tolerance behavior by enhancing their subjective well-being. Positive interactions create a sense of comfort, happiness, and fulfillment of socio-psychological needs, which makes tourists more accepting of the destination's limitations without reducing satisfaction (Tung et al., 2021).

Also, Gomes et al. (2025) discovered that interactions that are kind and compassionate help to improve the brand image of the homestay. People who travel and feel valued are more likely to stay loyal, come back, and post good evaluations. The cultural aspect is also very important. Yurao et al. (2024) showed that using local dialects makes people feel more at ease and connected to their neighborhood, which makes the encounter feel more real. Because of this, travelers not only enjoy their trip, but they also want to promote sustainable practices and tell others about the place they went (Liu-Lastres and Cahyanto, 2021).

H2: Host-guest interaction has a significant effect on behavioral intention.

2.3. Perceived enjoyment on behavior intention

Studies on perceived delight have demonstrated that this emotional response significantly influences tourists' behavioral intentions. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that enjoyment is an affective aspect that enhances favorable views toward a place, thereby affecting intentions to revisit and the willingness to offer good recommendations. In this context, Tabaeeian et al. (2023) demonstrated that tourists' perceived satisfaction derived from memorable experiences in ecotourism markedly enhances revisit intentions, surpassing the impact of functional dimensions of service quality.

Furthermore, in a study on emotional value and pro-environmental behavior, Chen et al. (2021) argued that the higher the perceived enjoyment experienced by tourists during interactions with hosts and local attractions, the stronger their personal norms and willingness to revisit and behave in a supportive manner toward the destination. This confirms that enjoyment is not only a momentary hedonic result but also a psychological mechanism that connects experiences with future behavioral intentions.

In the realm of subjective well-being, Jiang et al. (2025) found that enjoyment is closely related to increased subjective well-being, which mediates the relationship between tourism experience and tolerance behavior. Tolerance behavior as a dimension of behavioral intention reflects tourists' willingness to overlook a destination's shortcomings and still support it in the future. This finding confirms that enjoyment is a core emotional construct that shapes tourists' long-term loyalty and repeat visit behavior.

Meanwhile, Shi et al. (2024) emphasized that emotional dimensions such as emotional lift and local pride that arise from perceived enjoyment are closely related to tourists' behavioral loyalty. This strengthens the argument that enjoyment, once internalized as part of tourists' emotional experience, directly triggers behavioral intentions, including repeat visits and positive recommendations.

H3: Perceived enjoyment has a significant effect on behavioral intention.

2.4. Host-guest interaction on perceived enjoyment and behavioral intention

Recent research has established that social interactions between hosts and guests significantly

affect immediate satisfaction, shape perceived enjoyment, and ultimately influence behavioral intention. Tabaeeian et al. (2023) discovered that host–guest interactions within an ecotourism framework greatly influence perceived service quality and relationship quality, subsequently enriching memorable tourism experiences and fostering tourists' intentions to return. This finding suggests that interactions aimed at both service functions and hedonic features can yield profound emotional gratification. Likewise, Khaki et al. (2024) substantiated that emotional attachment to a destination (place attachment) enhances the correlation between host–guest contact and the intention to revisit. This shows that the stronger and better the interaction, the more it will affect how loyal a tourist is in the future.

From a tourist behavioral perspective, Jiang et al. (2025) broadened the understanding of the important role of host–guest interaction by demonstrating that quality social interactions can enhance tourist tolerance through the mediation of place attachment and subjective well-being. The results of this study confirm that the emotional closeness between tourists and destinations built through relationships with hosts will strengthen deep psychological bonds. When tourists feel emotionally connected to the places they visit, a sense of ownership and attachment arises that increases the likelihood of tourists accepting the shortcomings or limitations of the destination. Furthermore, the quality of these interactions encourages the creation of emotional pleasure that increases satisfaction and translates into positive behaviors such as a willingness to recommend the destination to others and a stronger intention to revisit in the future.

Additionally, Xiang et al. (2024) underscored that the host–guest relationship not only enhances the significance of visitors' emotional experiences but also fortifies personal norms that are a crucial connection to pro-environmental conduct. Hosts who are warm, friendly, and honest can help travelers feel more at ease and emotionally connected to the place they are visiting. This scenario leads to a lot of perceived delight, where tourists get a lot of pleasure not just from physical services or facilities, but also from social interactions that are important to them. The pleasure that is created then becomes a strong psychological driving force, making tourists more likely to do things that are good for the environment, like protecting it, taking part in activities that are good for the environment, and showing loyalty by planning to come back and making positive recommendations.

H4: Host-guest interaction has a significant effect on behavioral intention through perceived enjoyment.

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with a structured survey technique as the primary method of data collection. The research location is centered on the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist attraction in North Sumatra, Indonesia. This study focuses on foreign tourists who are visiting the destination in 2025. We used the purposive sampling technique to select 115 foreign tourists for this study. Furthermore, these 115 foreign tourists were selected from Malaysia, China, and Singapore. The reason for the selection was based on the large number of tourists from these three countries.

The data gathering involved administering a questionnaire formulated using theoretical indicators corresponding to each variable in the research model. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure each item in the questionnaire, with "strongly disagree" at one end and "strongly agree" at the other. There were three key factors in the questionnaire: host-guest interaction, perceived enjoyment, and behavioral intention. Each variable had seven indicator statements that were used to measure how people felt about it.

Based on Table 1, it can be observed that the Host-Guest Interaction (X1) variable is measured using seven indicators, coded as HGI1, HGI2, HGI3, HGI4, HGI5, HGI6, and HGI7. The Perceived Enjoyment (M) variable is measured with seven indicators, identified by the codes PE1, PE2, PE3, PE4, PE5, PE6, and PE7. Finally, the Behavioral Intention (Y) variable is assessed with eight indicators, namely BI1, BI2, BI3, BI4, BI5, BI6, BI7, and BI8.

The questionnaire consists of X elements, with each element operationalized via recognized scales from the literature. This study analyzed the constructions of Host-Guest Interaction (X), Perceived Enjoyment (M), and Behavioral Intention (Y). These validated scales ensure that the constructions are measured consistently with prior research, hence enhancing the instrument's reliability. To determine if the tool is real and works, the following tests will be done:

a. Construct Validity

1. Convergent Validity: The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) will be used to evaluate this. When the AVE value is greater than 0.50, it means that more than half of the variance of its indicators is explained by the construct. This means that construction has acceptable convergent validity.
2. Discriminant Validity: The Fornell–Larcker criterion will be used to investigate this. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds its correlation with other constructs, hence confirming the empirical distinctiveness of each construct.

b. Reliability

1. Cronbach's Alpha: This test will be used to check for internal consistency. If the value of Cronbach's

Alpha is higher than 0.70, it means that the indicators consistently measure the same thing.

2. Composite Reliability (CR): This step will make the scales even more reliable. A CR value higher than 0.70 shows that the indications for each construction are reliable.

The data will be analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS software. SEM-PLS is a great way to look at complicated relationships between hidden variables, including Host-Guest Interaction (X), Perceived Enjoyment (M), and Behavioral Intention (Y). This is especially true when the data aren't normally distributed, which is a common issue in social science research. This is how the analysis will be set up:

1. Bootstrapping Procedure: To make sure that the model's linkages are strong, bootstrapping will be used to test the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

2. Path Coefficients: The strength and direction of the relationships between Host-Guest Interaction (X), Perceived Enjoyment (M), and Behavioral Intention (Y) will be examined. Both direct and indirect effects will be assessed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these constructions interact.

3. Model Fit: The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and R-squared (R^2) figures will let us determine how well the model fits. An SRMR score of less than 0.08 suggests that the model accurately describes the data, which is a good fit. We will use the R^2 numbers to see how well the model fits the data. We will specifically examine the fraction of variance in Behavioral Intention (Y) elucidated by Host-Guest Interaction (X) and Perceived Enjoyment (M).

Table 1: Variable measurement scale

Variable	Code	Statement
Host-guest interaction (X)	HGI1	I received friendly treatment from the local hosts.
	HGI2	I had meaningful conversations with local service providers.
	HGI3	The locals showed interest and respect toward tourists.
	HGI4	I felt welcomed and appreciated during my visit.
	HGI5	My interaction with the host enriched my travel experience.
	HGI6	The host offered useful suggestions and assistance during my visit.
	HGI7	I gained insights into the local culture through my interaction with the host.
Perceived enjoyment (M)	PE1	I felt happy and emotionally satisfied during my visit.
	PE2	I enjoyed the activities offered at Puncak Siosar.
	PE3	The visit was a pleasant and memorable experience.
	PE4	I felt relaxed and entertained during the trip.
	PE5	The overall experience exceeded my expectations.
	PE6	I had fun throughout the visit.
	PE7	I would enjoy doing similar activities again.
Behavioral intention (Y)	BI1	I intend to revisit Puncak Siosar in the future.
	BI2	I will recommend this destination to others.
	BI3	I will share my positive experiences on social media.
	BI4	I will encourage others to visit Puncak Siosar.
	BI5	I will prioritize this destination over similar places in the future.
	BI6	I am likely to attend future events held in Puncak Siosar.
	BI7	I will follow updates about Puncak Siosar on social media or websites.
	BI8	I will remain loyal to this destination for future vacations.

4. Results

This research utilizes statistical testing to develop the route analysis model through the PLS-SEM methodology. Two of the most common statistical tests used in Partial Least Squares analysis that are part of the outer model evaluation are validity and reliability tests. These tests look at the factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) to ensure that the tools for measuring are good enough. Table 2 displays the outcomes of the convergent validity test, employing factor loadings and AVE values. The results of this evaluation represent an initial phase for further statistical analysis in the upcoming inner model assessment.

Based on Table 2 above, all indicators in this study demonstrate values that meet the eligibility criteria, thus confirming that the instrument used is convergently valid. All constructions have composite reliability values above 0.7, indicating that the measuring instrument in this study has adequate reliability and can provide stable and consistent measurement results. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha value for each variable is also above 0.6, further confirming that the questionnaire used is reliable and can be trusted to measure the intended constructs. The next stage of the analysis process is to conduct hypothesis testing using the constant bootstrapping method in the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) approach. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires to 115 respondents selected as the research sample.

4.1. Hypothesis results

Table 3 shows that host-guest interaction has a significant effect on perceived enjoyment with a path coefficient of 0.621, a t-statistic of 9.847, and a p-value of 0.000. This finding confirms that positive interactions between hosts and guests, such as friendliness, helpfulness, and good communication, can increase tourists' feelings of pleasure and emotional satisfaction. This is in line with the view

that social interaction is a crucial element in creating a pleasant tourism experience.

Furthermore, perceived enjoyment had a positive and significant effect on behavioral intention, with a coefficient of 0.539, a t-statistic of 7.215, and a p-value of 0.000. This result shows that the more fun tourists have, the more likely they are to return, suggest the place, and share good news about it. So, how much fun tourists think they are having is a big part of why they stay loyal.

Table 2: Convergent validity

Variable	Code	Outer loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Host-guest interaction (X)	HGI1	0.754	0.881	0.906	0.553
	HGI2	0.744			
	HGI3	0.723			
	HGI4	0.817			
	HGI5	0.760			
	HGI6	0.744			
	HGI7	0.800			
Perceived enjoyment (M)	PE1	0.820	0.857	0.89	0.538
	PE2	0.754			
	PE3	0.803			
	PE4	0.770			
	PE5	0.750			
	PE6	0.775			
	PE7	0.739			
Behavioral intention (Y)	BI1	0.857	0.93	0.943	0.674
	BI2	0.869			
	BI3	0.881			
	BI4	0.867			
	BI5	0.817			
	BI6	0.794			
	BI7	0.802			
	BI8	0.763			

Table 3: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Result
Host-guest interaction → perceived enjoyment	0.621	9.847	0.000	Significant
Perceived enjoyment → behavioral intention	0.539	7.215	0.000	Significant
Host-guest interaction → behavioral intention	0.314	3.426	0.001	Significant
Host-guest interaction → perceived enjoyment → behavioral intention	0.335	5.418	0.002	Significant

There was also a direct influence of host-guest interaction on behavioral intention, with a coefficient of 0.314, a t-statistic of 3.426, and a p-value of 0.001. This shows how well visitors get along with their hosts, not only making their stay more enjoyable but also affecting how they plan to behave. Tourists who feel welcomed and cared for are more inclined to come back, even if they don't think they had a good time.

The mediation study indicates that perceived enjoyment strongly mediates the impact of host-guest interaction on behavioral intention, evidenced by a coefficient value of 0.335, a t-statistic of 5.418, and a p-value of 0.002. This means that interactions between hosts and guests have both direct and indirect effects, the latter of which comes from making people feel more enjoyable. This demonstrates that emotional experience is a key psychological process that connects social connection with tourists' plans to do anything.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. The effect of host-guest interaction on perceived enjoyment

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, it shows that host-guest interaction has a significant direct effect on tourists' perceived enjoyment at the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist attraction, where the path coefficient value is 0.621, the t-statistic is 9.847, and the p-value is 0.000. This finding is in line with previous research, which shows that meaningful interpersonal interactions can strengthen tourists' emotional experiences, especially in culturally based tourist locations (Qu et al., 2024). Harmonious relationships between residents and tourists can increase emotional satisfaction, especially in the context of non-formal services such as family accommodation or local tour guides (Gomes et al., 2025). Active involvement between hosts and tourists is an important element in forming emotional closeness and a positive image of a destination. This closeness also plays a role in creating a greater sense of comfort and enjoyment during the trip (Wang et al., 2024).

However, this differs from the research results (Muler González and Galí Espelt, 2021), which state that not all interactions between hosts (hosts/service providers) and guests (tourists) are warm, friendly, or authentic. If the interaction is formal, limited, or even perceived as merely an obligation, tourists do not experience additional enjoyment. Furthermore, tourists from various cultural backgrounds have different expectations regarding social interactions. Some value local hospitality more, while others prioritize privacy. If these expectations are not met, host–guest interaction becomes irrelevant to tourist enjoyment.

The management implications of this research indicate that local governments should significantly encourage the provision of training for local tourism operators in communication, hospitality, and cultural knowledge to boost tourists' enjoyment and

emotional engagement. Community-based cultural activities, like local attractions, special foods, and traditional storytelling, can make the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist attraction a better place to visit. Also, making the site open and welcoming would make travelers think of it as a place they want to go back to and tell others about. Pleasant social interactions not only increase satisfaction but also form a crucial basis for cultivating enduring tourist loyalty.

4.2.2. The influence of host-guest interaction on behavioral intention

Based on the results of the hypothesis test it shows that host-guest interaction directly has a significant effect on the behavioral intention of tourists at the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist attraction. This finding confirms that the social aspect of the tourism experience not only provides momentary satisfaction but also contributes significantly to the formation of loyalty and long-term tourist behavior (Li et al., 2025). Interpersonal interactions established with the local community can create a deep sense of emotional attachment while increasing satisfaction during the visit (Kim et al., 2023). This emotional bond is an important factor that encourages tourists' intention to return to the same destination.

However, Chen et al. (2024) stated that host-guest interaction does not always have a direct impact on behavioral intention, because tourists usually place more emphasis on key aspects such as facilities, attractions, price, and accessibility than on social relationships. Often, the influence of these interactions appears indirectly through mediators such as satisfaction, perceived enjoyment, or destination image. Differences in tourist characteristics also cause some to place more emphasis on personal experiences than on interactions with hosts. In addition, the heterogeneity of interaction quality and cultural factors, as well as the purpose of the visit, makes the influence less strong (Nguyen, 2025).

The managerial implications of this study suggest that the management of Siosar should actively involve local communities as tourism ambassadors. This can be achieved by training culturally knowledgeable local guides, promoting local attractions such as Karo traditional music and culinary products, and creating interaction spaces, including MSME stalls, souvenir markets, and community information centers. In addition, individuals working in informal tourism sectors, such as parking attendants and jeep drivers, should receive basic hospitality training. Digital marketing strategies should emphasize the friendliness and hospitality of local people, rather than focusing only on natural scenery.

By prioritizing authentic social and cultural experiences, Siosar 2000 can differentiate itself from other tourist destinations in North Sumatra while supporting sustainable and community-based tourism.

4.2.3. The influence of perceived enjoyment on behavioral intention

Based on the results of the hypothesis test it shows that directly perceived enjoyment has a significant effect on the behavioral intention of tourists at the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist attraction. These findings strengthen previous research, which confirms that enjoyment is one of the main intrinsic drivers in forming the behavioral intention of tourists (Hong et al., 2025). Positive emotional experiences during tourist visits have been shown to play a significant role in increasing the desire to return to the destination (Kim et al., 2019). The element of pleasure not only creates momentary pleasure but also builds a strong emotional bond between tourists and the destination (Kim et al., 2025a).

However, this study is inconsistent with the findings (Liu et al., 2025b), which show that perceived enjoyment does not always contribute directly to behavioral intention. This is because the pleasure felt by tourists tends to be temporary and reflects more emotional aspects than rational considerations (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2025). Furthermore, perceived enjoyment alone is not enough to encourage the formation of behavioral intention, because tourist decisions are generally more determined by rational factors, such as utility value and perceived risk level (Luo et al., 2021).

The implications of this research finding demonstrate that the management of the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist destination needs to create a pleasant tourist experience not only visually but also emotionally. Managers should design interactive activities, provide comfortable facilities, and maintain a friendly and pleasant atmosphere throughout the visit. Traditional Karo music, thematic and aesthetic photo spots, and educational activities about local culture and nature can enhance tourists' enjoyment. Furthermore, the friendliness of the local population, a clean environment, and responsive service contribute to the formation of perceived enjoyment, which impacts positive tourist behavior.

4.2.4. The influence of host-guest interaction on behavioral intention through perceived enjoyment

Based on the results of the hypothesis test it shows that social interaction has a significant direct effect on the behavioral intention of tourists through perceived enjoyment at the Puncak Siosar 2000 tourist attraction. This finding is in line with various previous studies that show that the quality of social interaction has an important role in strengthening the affective aspect of the tourist experience (Yurao et al., 2024). The feeling of pleasure (perceived enjoyment) functions as a mediator in bridging the relationship between social experience and behavioral intention to revisit (Li et al., 2024). When tourists experience positive interactions with the

local community, a deep emotional bond is formed, which indirectly increases the sense of satisfaction and happiness during the trip. This has a positive impact on the formation of tourist loyalty. In addition, quality social interaction also contributes to the formation of a positive destination image and a pleasant tourist experience, which ultimately encourages tourists' intentions to revisit the destination (Xiang et al., 2024).

The results of this study are inconsistent with the results of research (Liu et al., 2025a), which stated that perceived enjoyment does not play a significant role in mediating the interaction between hosts and guests on behavioral intentions due to several factors. Perceived enjoyment is more emotional and temporary, which only provides short-term satisfaction, not long-term behavioral intentions such as revisiting or recommending a destination (Kwong and Li, 2020). Then, rational factors such as price, quality of facilities, and security are more dominant in influencing tourist intentions. In addition, other variables such as satisfaction or destination image often play a bigger role as mediators. Finally, differences in tourist characteristics also influence the extent to which perceived enjoyment can shape tourist behavioral intentions (Wei et al., 2020).

The findings of this study demonstrate that the enhancement of behavioral intentions among tourists at Puncak Siosar 2000 is substantially affected by the quality of social interactions between tourists and the local community. Positive and engaging interactions can boost how much fun tourists think they had, which makes them more likely to want to come back and tell others about the place. So, administrators of tourist destinations need to train local tourism workers, such as vendors, jeep drivers, and homestay owners, on how to provide good service and talk to tourists. It is also important to provide culture-based tourism activities, such as food tours that focus on Karo cuisine, traditional music performances, or stories about the eruption of Mount Sinabung. It's also important to make places where people may engage, including souvenir shops, rest parks with ethnic touches, and food vendors with a theme.

5. Conclusion

This study provides clear evidence that host-guest interactions play a significant role in enhancing tourists' perceived enjoyment, which in turn has a strong and direct impact on their behavioral intentions. The study highlights that while the interaction itself influences behavioral intentions, its strongest influence is mediated through perceived enjoyment, which emphasizes the emotional aspect of loyalty formation. These findings highlight the importance of creating enjoyable and emotionally enriching experiences that can drive revisit intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations, particularly at Puncak Siosar 2000.

From a practical point of view, the destination managers in Puncak Siosar 2000 should work on having experiences that are emotionally engaging and show how friendly the locals are. They may make the resort stand out as a place worth visiting and remembering by focusing on cultural activities like folklore tours and cooking classes. This method will help establish long-term loyalty, which will lead to more trips and a stronger bond with the place.

This study enhances tourism development by illustrating that emotional happiness is a significant determinant of tourist behavior. Subsequent study is anticipated to build upon these findings by integrating additional variables, including location connection and perceived authenticity, which may elucidate the emotional mechanisms underlying tourist loyalty.

List of abbreviations

AVE	Average variance extracted
BI	Behavioral intention
BI1–BI8	Indicators of behavioral intention
CR	Composite reliability
DRTPM	Directorate of research, technology, and community service
GDP	Gross domestic product
HGI	Host-guest interaction
HGI1–HGI7	Indicators of host-guest interaction
M	Mediating variable (perceived enjoyment)
MSME	Micro, small, and medium enterprises
PE	Perceived enjoyment
PE1–PE7	Indicators of perceived enjoyment
PLS	Partial least squares
PLS-SEM	Partial least squares structural equation modeling
RPBS	Residents' perceived benefits of host–guest interaction
SEM	Structural equation modeling
SEM-PLS	Structural equation modeling based on partial least squares
SRMR	Standardized root mean square residual
TCB	Tourism citizenship behavior
TPB	Theory of planned behavior
X	Independent variable (host-guest interaction)
Y	Dependent variable (behavioral intention)

through the Regular Fundamental Research Grant Program, which greatly facilitated the implementation of this research.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical research standards. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. No personally identifiable information was collected, and respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were fully preserved.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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