

Does Credible Tourism Information Build Destination Loyalty? The Mediating Role of Memorable Tourism Experience in Island Tourism

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of information credibility on destination loyalty through the mediating role of memorable tourism experience among tourists visiting Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Specifically, it investigates how the perceived credibility of tourism information contributes to the formation of memorable tourism experiences and subsequently strengthens tourists' loyalty to the destination. The study population comprised 2.451.269 tourists who visited Samosir Regency in 2025, from which a sample of 318 respondents was selected using accidental sampling. Respondents were recruited directly at the research sites based on their willingness to participate and their fulfillment of two eligibility criteria: having visited Samosir Regency at least three times and having previously obtained destination-related information through digital media. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the measurement and structural models, direct relationships, and mediation effects. This study proposes a conceptual mechanism in which memorable tourism experience mediates the relationship between information credibility and destination loyalty. By integrating these three constructs, the study advances the understanding of how credible tourism information can be translated into memorable experiences and sustained destination loyalty. The findings are expected to provide theoretical and managerial implications for destination managers in developing credible tourism communication strategies that align with tourists' actual experiences and foster long-term destination loyalty.

Keywords: Destination Loyalty, Information Credibility, Memorable Tourism Experience, Samosir, Tourism Communication

Introduction

Destination loyalty is widely recognized as a critical indicator of destination competitiveness and long-term tourism sustainability, as it reflects tourists' willingness to maintain enduring relationships with a destination through repeat visitation, recommendations, and positive word-of-mouth (Nasib & Salqaura, 2025). In an increasingly competitive tourist industry, destination success can no longer be evaluated merely on its capacity to attract first-time visitors (Nasib et al., 2026). Instead, destination managers must prioritize the provision of meaningful and memorable tourism experiences that stimulate return visitors and foster positive destination advocacy (Alimin et al., 2025). Recent tourism research indicates that location loyalty is determined by tourists' cognitive, emotive, and experiential assessments, with memorable tourism experiences having a vital role in promoting post-visit behavioral intentions (Putra et al., 2025). Accordingly, understanding the underlying mechanisms through which tourists acquire and preserve destination loyalty is vital for designing successful destination management strategies and preserving long-term competitiveness.

One psychological mechanism that has attracted increasing scholarly attention in tourism research is the memorable tourism experience (MTE) (Lao et al., 2023). MTE refers to a tourism experience that is perceived as meaningful, emotionally significant, and sufficiently salient to be retained in tourists' long-term memory and recalled after their visit. Unlike immediate evaluations of tourism experiences, MTE emphasizes the enduring cognitive and affective representations of experiences that persist beyond the actual visit (Singhdong & Peamchai, 2025). A systematic review conducted by (Scott, 2004) highlights the substantial development of MTE research while identifying persistent theoretical fragmentation, particularly concerning its antecedents, contextual determinants, and behavioral consequences. Existing literature further suggests that memorable tourism experiences emerge from the interaction of internal psychological processes and external destination-



related stimuli, positioning MTE as a critical psychological mechanism through which destination attributes and tourism-related information influence subsequent behavioral responses (Dore & Crouch, 2025). From this perspective, tourists' future behavioral intentions are shaped not only by their immediate experiences at a destination but also by the extent to which these experiences are encoded, retained, and subsequently retrieved from memory (Yan et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding the formation and behavioral implications of MTE provides an important theoretical foundation for explaining how tourism-related stimuli contribute to the development of sustained destination loyalty.

The significance of memorable tourism experience (MTE) becomes particularly evident when examining its relationship with destination loyalty (Tiwari et al., 2022). Tourists who perceive their destination experiences as unique, meaningful, enjoyable, and memorable are more likely to develop favorable post-visit evaluations and stronger loyalty-related behavioral intentions. Previous empirical studies have demonstrated the mediating role of MTE in explaining the relationships between various tourism-related factors and destination loyalty. For instance, (Tabaeeian et al., 2023) demonstrated that MTE mediates the relationship between dimensions of tourists' emotional solidarity with local residents and destination loyalty in the context of volunteer tourism. Similarly, research conducted in small-island destinations revealed that tourists' self-identification positively influences MTE, which subsequently mediates its relationship with destination loyalty [12]. More recent research has further highlighted the role of smart tourism technologies in shaping memorable experiences and strengthening destination loyalty, identifying MTE as a psychological mechanism through which technology-enabled tourism experiences translate into loyalty-related behavioral responses [12]. Additional empirical evidence across diverse destination settings reinforces the importance of memorable experiences in fostering tourists' long-term loyalty (Hatamifar, 2021). Collectively, these findings underscore the central role of MTE as a mediating mechanism in destination loyalty formation. Nevertheless, existing research has primarily examined antecedents associated with emotional relationships, tourist identification, technological advancement, destination fascination, social interaction, and experiential attributes. Consequently, the extent to which information credibility contributes to destination loyalty through the formation of memorable tourism experiences remains insufficiently understood, highlighting an important research gap that warrants further empirical investigation.

At the same time as tourism experiences have gained increasing academic interest, digitalization has radically revolutionized the ways in which travelers discover, assess and use information about destinations. Tourists are exposed to a huge amount of information before and during their trips, provided by destination management organizations, tourism service providers, internet travel platforms, social media users and other visitors. In this information rich world, information credibility has become a significant feature that influences tourists' evaluations and decision-making processes, as individuals have to evaluate the trustworthiness, accuracy, plausibility and dependability of the information associated to destinations. Previous tourism research has shown that information qualities may influence tourists' views and expectations prior to their actual destination experiences. For example, (Qiu et al., 2023) shown that information quality and source legitimacy are separate persuasive cues that inform pre-visit location images on social media. They also found that information quality is very relevant for destination image building while source trustworthiness affects the way that tourists process and evaluate the quality of the information supplied. Similarly, studies of online hotel evaluations have shown that perceived information reliability and source credibility affect perceived information utility, which in turn increases information adoption (Hatamifar, 2021). Taken together, these data indicate that information credibility is not only a traditional property of digital communication, but also a crucial cognitive appraisal used by tourists to evaluate, assess, and absorb destination-related information. Therefore, the relevance of information credibility in comprehending the impact of tourists' pre-visit informational evaluations on their subsequent destination experiences and loyalty-related behavioral intentions adds theoretical significance.

Nevertheless, there is a large conceptual gap between the literature of tourism information and the research of memorable tourism experiences (MTE). Previous research on digital tourist information has mostly focused on information uptake, perceived utility, destination image

development, online reviews, and pre-visit decision-making. For instance, (Afzal et al., 2024) explored the influence of perceived credibility and usefulness in hotel information adoption; (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022) assessed information quality and source credibility as predictors of pre-visit destination image creation. While these studies provide useful insights into the information-processing behavior of tourists, the main focus is on cognitive evaluations and behavioral responses before to visiting or during the decision-making process. Research on MTE, in contrast, has focused on experiential, emotional and relational antecedents. In particular, (Tyagi et al., 2024) discussed the significance of emotional solidarity in creating unforgettable experiences, (X. Zhou et al., 2024) studied the influence of tourist self-identification and (G. Zhou et al., 2022) analyzed the role of smart tourism technologies in MTE creation. Moreover, the systematic review by (Cortez et al., 2024) pointed to a higher need for theoretical integration of MTE with wider multidisciplinary views. Taken together, these data show that the possible influence of information credibility on the construction of memorable tourism experiences and hence destination loyalty is still under-researched. This gap underscores the need for a more integrated theoretical framework linking tourists' perception of destination-related information to their experiencing and post-visit behavioral responses.

This conceptual distinction provides theoretically important opportunities to enhance knowledge of how information credibility leads to memorable tourism experiences (MTE) and destination loyalty (Kotamena et al., 2024). Information about a destination obtained before and during the trip may play a role beyond helping tourists to select a destination and reduce decision-making uncertainty. Credible information may also shape tourists' expectations and affect how they interpret, evaluate and remember their actual experiences at the destination (Priescu, 2022). Destination information perceived as credible and congruent with the realities experienced during visitation can play an instrumental role in reinforcing the congruency between tourists' expectations before travel and actual experiences, facilitating the cognitive and affective processes whereby tourism experiences are encoded, stored and retrieved as memorable (Su et al., 2022). In contrast, mismatches between stated information and actual destination experiences can lead to expectation disconfirmation, which may negatively affect tourists' perceptions of the place and decrease the memorability of their experiences. In this sense, information credibility may be a crucial informational antecedent of MTE, which in turn leads to the creation of destination loyalty (Cai et al., 2024). However, empirical research on this sequential association remains sparse, especially on the mediating effect of MTE in translating perceived information credibility to loyalty-related behavioral intentions. Therefore, the lack of theoretical integration between information-processing mechanisms and tourism-experience research emphasizes the need for a comprehensive framework that explains how credible destination information leads to memorable experiences and, consequently, to sustainable destination loyalty (Zarezadeh et al., 2023).

To address this research gap, the present study proposes an integrated conceptual framework in which information credibility serves as an informational antecedent, memorable tourism experience (MTE) functions as a mediating mechanism, and destination loyalty represents the subsequent behavioral outcome. This framework extends existing tourism research by broadening the conceptual role of information credibility beyond information adoption and pre-visit destination image formation to encompass its potential influence on the development of memorable post-visit experiences. Furthermore, the study contributes to the MTE literature by introducing tourists' cognitive evaluations of destination-related information as a potential antecedent of memorable experiences, thereby complementing previously examined factors such as emotional solidarity, tourist self-identification, smart tourism technologies, and other experiential attributes (Abdul Haji et al., 2022). By integrating information-processing mechanisms with experiential and behavioral perspectives, the proposed framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of how credible destination information may be translated into memorable tourism experiences and subsequently foster destination loyalty. This theoretical integration also responds to calls for greater interdisciplinary engagement in MTE research and further investigation into the underlying mechanisms through which memorable experiences are formed and influence tourists' subsequent behavioral responses (Alfarizi et al., 2025).

Therefore, this present research intends to explore the effect of information credibility on destination loyalty through the mediating effect of memorable tourism experience (MTE) among

visitors who visit Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Theoretically, the study attempts to fill the gap between the information-processing research and the literature on memorable tourism experiences and destination loyalty by explaining how tourists' cognitive evaluations of destination-related information may help form memorable experiences and then impact loyalty-related behavioral intentions. Furthermore, this study contributes to the current literature by considering the trustworthiness of information as an informational antecedent of MTE and investigating its indirect relationship with destination loyalty using an integrated conceptual framework. From a practical standpoint, the findings are anticipated to give destination managers and tourism stakeholders useful insights into how important it is to provide destination information that is credible, accurate and dependable, and that corresponds to the real experiences of the tourists. Consistency between communicated destination attributes and tourists' on-site experiences may not only facilitate informed travel decisions and strengthen destination evaluations but also contribute to the formation of memorable tourism experiences and the development of sustained destination loyalty.

Theoretical Review

Destination Loyalty

Destination loyalty represents tourists' commitment and favorable behavioral intentions toward a destination, commonly reflected in their willingness to revisit, recommend the destination to others, spread positive word-of-mouth, and maintain the destination as a preferred choice for future travel (Nasib, Julitawaty, et al., 2023). Loyalty is particularly important in tourism because destination competitiveness depends not only on attracting first-time visitors but also on developing long-term relationships with tourists. Recent tourism research indicates that loyalty is closely associated with tourists' cognitive and emotional evaluations of their experiences. (Nasib, Syaifuddin, et al., 2023a) demonstrated that memorable tourism experiences contribute to destination loyalty by transforming positive tourism encounters into stronger post-visit behavioral responses. Similarly, research on small island destinations indicates that memorable experiences are important in developing tourists' satisfaction and loyalty because tourists who retain positive memories of a destination are more likely to maintain favorable attitudes toward it (Nasib, Syaifuddin, et al., 2023c).

Destination loyalty therefore represents more than repeated visitation (Nasib, Syaifuddin, et al., 2023b). It also encompasses tourists' psychological preference, willingness to recommend, and intention to maintain their relationship with a destination. Recent evidence confirms that tourism experiences supported by smart tourism technologies can enhance destination loyalty when these experiences become memorable (Matyusupov et al., 2024). This relationship is particularly relevant to destinations where cultural, natural, and social experiences constitute the primary tourism offering. Yu et al. (2026) further conceptualized destination loyalty through tourists' willingness to remain loyal to a destination, revisit it, recommend it to others, communicate positive opinions, and consider returning in the future. Consequently, strengthening destination loyalty requires destination managers to understand not only what tourists experience during their visits but also how these experiences remain in their memories and shape subsequent behavioral intentions.

Memorable Tourism Experience

Memorable tourism experience (MTE) refers to a tourism experience that is positively remembered and recalled after a trip has ended (Al Sulaiti, 2022). MTE has emerged as an important concept in tourism research because tourists do not retain every component of their travel experiences equally; rather, experiences that are meaningful, distinctive, emotionally engaging, and personally relevant are more likely to remain in long-term memory (Cheng, 2023). A systematic development of MTE literature shows that the concept has expanded from simply explaining tourism experiences toward examining its antecedents, psychological mechanisms, and post-visit behavioral consequences (Eck, 2022). This makes MTE particularly important for understanding why some destination experiences generate stronger behavioral responses than others.

MTE also provides an important mechanism through which tourism stimuli are translated into destination loyalty. (Eck, 2022) found that memorable tourism experiences play a mediating role in

explaining destination loyalty, demonstrating that positive interactions experienced during travel can become memorable and subsequently influence tourists' behavioral responses. Research focusing on small island destinations similarly demonstrates the importance of MTE in developing destination loyalty (Yesiana Ihda Kusnayain, 2025). More recently, (Jawabreh et al., 2024) found that MTE significantly mediates the relationship between smart tourism technologies and destination loyalty, indicating that destination-related stimuli may not automatically create loyalty unless tourists transform them into memorable experiences. (Syafri et al., 2023) also established a positive relationship between MTE and destination loyalty, positioning memorable experiences as a central mechanism through which destination-related conditions are transformed into subsequent loyalty. Thus, tourists who develop stronger and more positive memories of their visits are expected to demonstrate greater intentions to revisit, recommend, and remain loyal to the destination (Kusnayain et al., 2025).

H1: Memorable tourism experience has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty.

Information Credibility

Information credibility refers to the extent to which information is perceived by individuals as believable, accurate, reliable, and trustworthy. Its role has become increasingly important in tourism because digital technology has fundamentally changed the way tourists search for and evaluate destination information. Before visiting a destination, tourists can obtain information from social media, destination websites, online reviews, travel videos, influencers, and user-generated content. However, the abundance of digital information does not necessarily guarantee its usefulness because tourists must first determine whether the information can be trusted. Research on online tourism information demonstrates that information characteristics and source credibility play important roles in shaping tourists' pre-visit perceptions and information-processing behavior (Li et al., 2023). Similarly, Zarezadeh et al. (2023) showed that contemporary tourists employ multiple online information-search strategies when planning travel, emphasizing the growing importance of reliable information in tourism decision-making.

Credible information can reduce uncertainty and enable tourists to establish more realistic expectations regarding destination attractions, services, accessibility, culture, and other tourism attributes. Mohamed and Jaafar (2026) explain that credible information is perceived as accurate, dependable, evidence-based, and originating from trustworthy sources. Their empirical findings demonstrate that information credibility significantly contributes to information adoption and subsequent behavioral intention. Although these findings were developed primarily within information-processing and consumer decision contexts, they provide a conceptual basis for extending information credibility into the tourism experience domain. When credible destination information corresponds with the actual conditions experienced during a visit, tourists may perceive greater consistency between their pre-visit expectations and actual tourism experiences, thereby increasing the likelihood that the experience will be positively encoded and remembered.

H2: Information credibility has a significant positive effect on memorable tourism experience.

Information credibility may also contribute directly to destination loyalty. Credible destination information can reduce perceived uncertainty, strengthen confidence in destination-related decisions, and establish more realistic expectations regarding what tourists will encounter. When the information communicated by a destination is perceived as trustworthy and subsequently confirmed through actual visits, tourists may develop stronger confidence in the destination and become more willing to revisit and recommend it. Previous research has primarily connected credible tourism information with outcomes such as information adoption, destination image, and behavioral intention rather than directly with destination loyalty (Li et al., 2023; Mohamed & Jaafar, 2026). This suggests an opportunity to extend the behavioral consequences of information credibility beyond pre-visit decision-making toward post-visit relationships between tourists and destinations. For repeat tourists in particular, continued consistency between credible information and actual destination conditions may reinforce positive evaluations and contribute to stronger loyalty.

H3: Information credibility has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty.

The relationship between information credibility and destination loyalty may nevertheless be more appropriately understood through the experiences that tourists actually retain from their visits. Information credibility operates primarily at the information-evaluation stage, whereas destination loyalty represents a post-experience behavioral response. MTE can therefore function as a psychological mechanism connecting these two stages. Credible information may establish realistic and trustworthy expectations, but loyalty is more likely to develop when those expectations are subsequently translated into meaningful and memorable experiences. Existing research supports the mediating role of MTE between various tourism-related antecedents and destination loyalty. Jiang et al. (2022) identified MTE as a mechanism linking tourists' emotional relationships with destination stakeholders to loyalty, while Matyusupov et al. (2024) demonstrated that MTE mediates the relationship between smart tourism technologies and destination loyalty. These findings suggest that MTE can transform external or cognitive stimuli into enduring behavioral responses.

However, existing research has largely examined MTE through destination-based antecedents, technological stimuli, emotional relationships, and tourist–destination interactions. In contrast, information credibility research has primarily focused on information adoption and behavioral or purchase intentions. Mohamed and Jaafar (2026), for example, positioned information adoption as the mediator connecting information credibility with purchase intention. Meanwhile, Yu et al. (2026) examined affective atmosphere as an antecedent of MTE and subsequently destination loyalty. These two research streams provide an opportunity for theoretical integration. In the present study, MTE is proposed as the mechanism through which credible tourism information is translated into stronger destination loyalty. Accordingly, credible information is expected to enhance tourists' memorable experiences, which subsequently encourage revisit intentions, recommendations, positive word-of-mouth, and continued preference for the destination.

H4: Memorable tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between information credibility and destination loyalty.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach to investigate the influence of information credibility on destination loyalty through memorable tourism experience as a mediating variable. The quantitative approach facilitates hypothesis testing and provides an appropriate framework for examining structural relationships among the constructs in the proposed research model. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, in which data were collected from tourists during a specific research period in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. A structured questionnaire was used to measure tourists' perceptions of information credibility, memorable tourism experience, and destination loyalty. This approach is appropriate because all three constructs represent tourists' perceptions, evaluations, experiences, and behavioral intentions that can be quantitatively measured through multiple indicators.

Target Population and Sampling

The population of this study comprised tourists visiting Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia, with 2,451,269 tourist visits recorded in 2025 serving as the population reference. A total of 318 tourists were selected as the research sample using accidental sampling, whereby tourists encountered by the researchers at tourism locations were approached and invited to participate in the survey. However, respondents were required to satisfy specific eligibility criteria to ensure that they had sufficient experience to evaluate the destination. The inclusion criteria were: (1) tourists who had visited Samosir at least three times, (2) tourists who had obtained or accessed information about Samosir through digital media, and (3) tourists who were willing to participate voluntarily in the survey. The repeat-visit criterion was particularly important because respondents with multiple visits were considered to have sufficient actual experience to evaluate memorable tourism experience and destination loyalty.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered directly to eligible tourists at selected tourism locations in Samosir Regency. The questionnaire consisted of four main sections: (1) respondents' demographic and travel characteristics, (2) information credibility, (3) memorable tourism experience, and (4) destination loyalty. Information credibility was measured by adapting indicators representing the accuracy, reliability, trustworthiness, and credibility of tourism information. Memorable tourism experience measured the extent to which tourists considered their experiences in Samosir memorable and worth remembering, while destination loyalty reflected their willingness to revisit, recommend, speak positively about, and remain loyal to the destination. The measurement of MTE and destination loyalty was adapted from established tourism measurement scales, including the framework employed by Yu et al. (2026). All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A total of 318 valid questionnaires were retained for subsequent statistical analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. Descriptive statistics were initially employed to summarize respondents' demographic and travel characteristics. Subsequently, the measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity, while the structural model was assessed using path coefficients (β), coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The hypothesized direct relationships among information credibility, memorable tourism experience, and destination loyalty were tested using a bootstrapping procedure with statistical significance determined at $p < 0.05$. Finally, the indirect effect was examined to determine whether memorable tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between information credibility and destination loyalty. This analytical procedure enables the simultaneous assessment of measurement quality, structural relationships, and the proposed mediating mechanism within the research model.

Results and Discussions

Results

Respondent Description

A total of 318 tourists participated in this study. The respondents were relatively balanced by gender, comprising 53.1% males and 46.9% females. Most respondents were aged 26–35 years (35.2%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (25.8%) and 17–25 years (23.0%). Regarding education, bachelor's degree holders represented the largest group (43.7%), followed by senior high school graduates (27.7%). All respondents met the sampling criterion of having visited Samosir at least three times; 43.1% had visited three times, 32.4% four to five times, and 24.5% more than five times. Regarding digital tourism information, social media was the dominant source (40.3%), followed by travel websites or blogs (19.5%) and online travel platforms (17.9%).

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Profile

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	169	53.1
	Female	149	46.9
	Total	318	100
Age	17–25 years	73	23
	26–35 years	112	35.2
	36–45 years	82	25.8
	>45 years	51	16
	Total	318	100

Education	Senior High School	88	27.7
	Diploma	43	13.5
	Bachelor's Degree	139	43.7
	Master's Degree	43	13.5
	Doctoral Degree	5	1.6
	Total	318	100
Number of Visits to Samosir	3 times	137	43.1
	4–5 times	103	32.4
	>5 times	78	24.5
	Total	318	100
Primary Source of Digital Tourism Information	Social media	128	40.3
	Travel websites/blogs	62	19.5
	Online travel platforms	57	17.9
	Official tourism websites	39	12.3
	Online video platforms	32	10.1
	Total	318	100

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed based on factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Table 2 displays the results of convergent validity testing for all constructs in this study.

Table 2. Convergent Validity

Variable	Code	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach's Alpha
Information Credibility (X)	IC1	0.812	0.672	0.942	0.93
	IC2	0.835			
	IC3	0.798			
	IC4	0.846			
	IC5	0.821			
	IC6	0.807			
	IC7	0.854			
	IC8	0.781			
Memorable Tourism Experience (Z)	MTE1	0.824	0.689	0.952	0.943
	MTE2	0.851			
	MTE3	0.806			
	MTE4	0.837			
	MTE5	0.862			
	MTE6	0.819			
	MTE7	0.845			
	MTE8	0.793			
	MTE9	0.828			
Destination Loyalty (Y)	DL1	0.842	0.704	0.95	0.94
	DL2	0.817			
	DL3	0.869			

DL4	0.831
DL5	0.856
DL6	0.808
DL7	0.848
DL8	0.836

Table 2 presents the results of the measurement model assessment. All indicators demonstrate satisfactory convergent validity, with outer loading values ranging from 0.781 to 0.869, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for Information Credibility, Memorable Tourism Experience, and Destination Loyalty are 0.672, 0.689, and 0.704, respectively, indicating that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability values range from 0.942 to 0.952, while Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.930 to 0.943, exceeding the recommended value of 0.70. Therefore, all constructs demonstrate satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency reliability, confirming that the measurement model is suitable for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variable	IC	MTE	DL
Information Credibility (IC)	0.82		
Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE)	0.691	0.83	
Destination Loyalty (DL)	0.704	0.762	0.839

As presented in Table 3, the square roots of the AVE for Information Credibility (0.820), Memorable Tourism Experience (0.830), and Destination Loyalty (0.839) are greater than their respective inter-construct correlations. Specifically, the correlations among the constructs range from 0.691 to 0.762, with the highest correlation observed between Memorable Tourism Experience and Destination Loyalty (0.762). These values remain below the square root of the AVE for each corresponding construct, indicating that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs in the model. Therefore, Information Credibility, Memorable Tourism Experience, and Destination Loyalty satisfy the Fornell–Larcker criterion, providing evidence of adequate discriminant validity in the measurement model.

Inner Model

Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

Based on the data analysis conducted using SmartPLS 3.0, the R-square (R^2) values obtained are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)	
Dependent Variable	R Square
Memorable Tourism Experience (Z)	0.477
Destination Loyalty (Y)	0.681

The coefficient of determination results indicate that the proposed structural model has satisfactory explanatory power. The R^2 value for Memorable Tourism Experience is 0.477, indicating that Information Credibility explains 47.7% of the variance in Memorable Tourism Experience, while the remaining 52.3% is attributable to other factors outside the proposed model. Furthermore, the R^2 value for Destination Loyalty is 0.681, suggesting that Information Credibility and Memorable Tourism Experience collectively explain 68.1% of the variance in Destination Loyalty, while the remaining 31.9% is explained by other factors not included in the model. These findings demonstrate that credible tourism information and memorable experiences provide substantial explanatory power for tourists' loyalty toward Samosir. Thus, the results highlight the importance of providing credible destination information that corresponds with tourists' actual experiences in strengthening memorable tourism experiences and fostering long-term Destination Loyalty.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples to determine the significance of each hypothesized relationship. Table 3 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing and path coefficient estimations.

Table 5. Hypothesis Test Results / Path Coefficient

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	t-Statistic (O/STDEV)	p-Values	Description
Information Credibility → Memorable Tourism Experience	0.691	15.842	< 0.001	Significant
Information Credibility → Destination Loyalty	0.337	5.917	< 0.001	Significant
Memorable Tourism Experience → Destination Loyalty	0.529	11.638	< 0.001	Significant
Information Credibility → Memorable Tourism Experience → Destination Loyalty	0.366	9.426	< 0.001	Significant

Discussion

The Effect of Information Credibility on Memorable Tourism Experience

The findings demonstrate that Information Credibility has a positive and significant effect on Memorable Tourism Experience ($\beta = 0.691$; $t = 15.842$; $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting the first hypothesis. This result indicates that tourists who perceive destination-related information as accurate, reliable, trustworthy, and consistent are more likely to develop memorable experiences during their visits to Samosir. Information Credibility therefore represents more than a functional component of tourism communication; it provides an informational foundation through which tourists develop expectations and subsequently interpret their actual destination experiences.

The finding is supported by recent studies emphasizing the importance of credible tourism information in shaping tourists' cognitive and behavioral responses. (Matyusupov et al., 2024) demonstrate that perceived source credibility, particularly trustworthiness and expertise, plays an important role in tourists' information-adoption processes. Recent research on social-media information processing similarly shows that destination source credibility influences tourists' cognitive and affective destination images (Li et al., 2024). Matyusupov et al. (2024) further demonstrate that smart tourism technologies significantly contribute to Memorable Tourism Experience, indicating that technology-mediated information and interactions can become important antecedents of memorable destination experiences. (Jamshidi et al., 2023) also show that tourists' destination-related evaluations significantly contribute to the formation of Memorable Tourism Experience. Collectively, these studies support the broader mechanism identified in the present research: credible and useful informational stimuli can shape the conditions under which meaningful and memorable tourism experiences are formed.

In the context of Samosir, this finding is particularly important because tourists increasingly encounter information concerning Lake Toba, Batak cultural heritage, traditional villages, local cuisine, accommodation, accessibility, and tourism activities through digital channels before and during their visits. When this information accurately corresponds with actual destination conditions, tourists experience greater consistency between expectations and reality. Such consistency can facilitate more meaningful interaction with the destination and strengthen the memorability of the visit. Accordingly, destination managers should not regard credible information merely as promotional content but as an integral component of tourism experience management.

The Effect of Information Credibility on Destination Loyalty

The second hypothesis is also supported, demonstrating that Information Credibility has a positive and significant direct effect on Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.337$; $t = 5.917$; $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that tourists' confidence in destination-related information contributes to their willingness to maintain a relationship with Samosir. Accurate and trustworthy information can reduce perceived uncertainty and strengthen confidence in the destination, thereby supporting subsequent behavioral responses such as revisit and recommendation intentions.

This interpretation is consistent with recent research on credibility and tourism behavior. (Jianga et al., 2023) demonstrate that source trustworthiness and expertise facilitate tourist information adoption, suggesting that credibility determines whether tourism information is accepted as a reliable basis for decision-making. Research on social-media information processing further indicates that destination source credibility positively shapes cognitive and affective destination images, which are important precursors of subsequent tourist responses (Shin et al., 2023). (Haroon et al., 2023) find that smart tourism technologies significantly influence Destination Loyalty, demonstrating that technology-enabled destination interactions can contribute directly to stronger tourist–destination relationships. Recent research on tourism influencer communication also indicates that source credibility can influence behavioral intentions through intervening psychological mechanisms, highlighting the importance of credible digital communication in tourist decision-making.

Nevertheless, the direct effect of Information Credibility on Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.337$) is considerably lower than its effect on Memorable Tourism Experience ($\beta = 0.691$). This difference provides an important theoretical insight. Credible information appears to exert a stronger influence on how tourists experience and remember Samosir than on loyalty directly. Information can establish confidence and realistic expectations, but loyalty ultimately depends on whether these expectations are validated through actual experiences. Destination managers should therefore avoid exaggerated or inconsistent promotional communication and instead ensure that information concerning attractions, facilities, prices, transportation, accommodation, cultural activities, and accessibility accurately reflects actual conditions.

The Effect of Memorable Tourism Experience on Destination Loyalty

The third hypothesis confirms that Memorable Tourism Experience has a positive and significant effect on Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.529$; $t = 11.638$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, tourists who develop distinctive, meaningful, emotionally engaging, and memorable experiences are more likely to demonstrate stronger loyalty toward Samosir. This finding demonstrates that tourists' post-visit behavioral responses are influenced not merely by the functional attributes of the destination but also by the memories retained from their overall tourism experiences.

The finding is strongly supported by previous empirical research. (Yesiana Ihda Kusnayain, 2025), examining visitors to small island destinations, demonstrate that Memorable Tourism Experience plays an important role in explaining Destination Loyalty and mediates the effects of tourist self-identification on loyalty. (Rahmawati & Kusumawati, 2024) similarly find that Memorable Tourism Experience significantly contributes to Destination Loyalty and operates as a mediating mechanism between smart tourism technologies and loyalty. (Kahraman & Cifci, 2022), in the Indonesian context, report that Memorable Tourism Experience contributes significantly to tourist loyalty, with tourist satisfaction providing an additional mediating pathway. Laela (2024) likewise demonstrates that Memorable Tourism Experience has a positive effect on Destination Loyalty among tourists visiting mountain destinations in Indonesia. These findings collectively reinforce the important role of memorable experiences in generating enduring tourist–destination relationships.

The relevance of Memorable Tourism Experience is particularly evident because tourism consumption is inherently experiential. Experiences involving novelty, meaningfulness, emotional engagement, cultural interaction, and destination distinctiveness are more likely to remain salient in tourists' memories and subsequently influence future behavioral decisions. For Samosir, these memories can emerge through the Lake Toba landscape, Batak cultural heritage, traditional villages, local cuisine, cultural performances, historical narratives, and interactions with local communities.

Therefore, the relatively strong effect of Memorable Tourism Experience on Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.529$) indicates that experience design should constitute a central element of Samosir's destination management strategy.

The Effect of Information Credibility on Destination Loyalty through Memorable Tourism Experience

The most important contribution of this study is reflected in the fourth hypothesis. The indirect effect of Information Credibility on Destination Loyalty through Memorable Tourism Experience is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.366$; $t = 9.426$; $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the direct effect of Information Credibility on Destination Loyalty remains positive and significant ($\beta = 0.337$; $t = 5.917$; $p < 0.001$). Consequently, Memorable Tourism Experience performs a complementary partial mediating role in the relationship between Information Credibility and Destination Loyalty. This finding reveals an important mechanism underlying the development of tourist loyalty. Credible tourism information can directly strengthen tourists' confidence in a destination, but its influence also operates indirectly when credible information facilitates experiences that tourists subsequently perceive as memorable. Information Credibility therefore influences Destination Loyalty through two complementary pathways: an informational pathway and an experiential pathway. The informational pathway establishes trust and realistic expectations, whereas the experiential pathway transforms the fulfillment of those expectations into enduring memories and subsequent loyalty.

Several recent studies provide empirical support for this mediation logic, although they examine different antecedents of Memorable Tourism Experience. (Hanaysha et al., 2023) demonstrate that Memorable Tourism Experience mediates the effects of self-identification on Destination Loyalty, confirming its role as an experiential mechanism connecting tourists' destination-related evaluations with loyalty. (Ortiz et al., 2024) similarly identify Memorable Tourism Experience as a mediator linking smart tourism technologies with Destination Loyalty. (Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2024) demonstrate that memorable experiences contribute to tourist loyalty both directly and through satisfaction, providing further evidence that MTE can translate positive destination experiences into stronger loyalty outcomes. (In'airat, 2023) also establishes the role of Memorable Tourism Experience within a broader mechanism linking destination fascination and perceived enjoyment with Destination Loyalty. Together, these findings support the theoretical proposition that MTE can function as an intervening experiential mechanism through which antecedent destination stimuli are transformed into loyalty.

The present study extends these findings by positioning Information Credibility as the antecedent of this experiential mechanism. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.366$) is slightly greater than the direct effect of Information Credibility on Destination Loyalty ($\beta = 0.337$), suggesting that credible information becomes particularly important when it is translated into experiences that tourists remember. Thus, the effectiveness of tourism communication should not be assessed solely by whether tourists perceive information as trustworthy. Destination managers should also evaluate whether the expectations generated by credible information are fulfilled through authentic, meaningful, and distinctive experiences

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that information credibility has a favorable and significant effect on memorable tourism experience (MTE) and destination loyalty of tourists visiting Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Accurate, reliable, trustworthy and consistent tourism information leads to the construction of meaningful and unforgettable destination experiences, and at the same time reinforces the allegiance of the tourists toward the destination. Moreover, MTE has a positive and significant influence on destination loyalty, implying that tourists with unique, meaningful, and memorable experiences are likely to have positive post-visit behavioral intentions such as revisit, positive word-of-mouth, and destination recommendation. Importantly, MTE influences significantly the association between information credibility and destination loyalty. The

results indicate a complementing partial mediation mechanism since both direct and indirect effects are positive and statistically significant. Thus, information credibility enhances destination loyalty not only through a direct route but also indirectly through the construction of memorable tourism experiences that later build tourists' relationships with the place.

The present study makes a theoretical contribution to the tourism and destination marketing literature by unifying the informational and experiential components of tourist behavior inside one explanatory framework. Specifically, the results contribute to the literature by identifying information credibility as an antecedent of MTE and its direct and indirect effects on destination loyalty. This view extends the notion of tourism information beyond its traditional significance in pre-visit information search, information adoption, and destination choice by emphasizing its significance in tourists' experiential assessments and post-visit behavioral intentions. But there are certain limits to note. First, the suggested model includes only three main constructs and hence can exclude other psychological and experiential reasons influencing destination loyalty. Second, the study focuses only on return visitors of Samosir Regency which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to first-time visitors and other destination contexts. Third, the combination of accidental sampling and cross-sectional design reduces representativeness of the sample and does not allow unambiguous causal inference. Future studies are thus encouraged to include other dimensions such as destination image, destination trust, perceived value, visitor satisfaction, destination authenticity, and place attachment to provide a more comprehensive understanding of destination loyalty formation. Further research, using longitudinal designs, probability-based sampling, and multigroup analysis could also examine potential differences between first-time and repeat visitors, domestic and international tourists, and destinations with different cultural, geographical, and experiential characteristics.

The results emphasize the management relevance of combining credible communication about tourism with the provision of real and memorable experiences at the location. It is important for local governments, destination management organizations, tourism businesses, accommodation providers, and digital marketers in Samosir Regency to share accurate, transparent, consistent, and regularly updated information through official tourism websites, social media platforms, online travel agencies, and other digital communication channels. Information on tourist attractions, accessibility, transportation, accommodation, entrance fees, opening hours, cultural events, local cuisine and tourism facilities should be in conformity with the real destination conditions, to reduce the gap between the expectation of tourists and the experience on-site. In addition, destination communication methods should also consider the narratives that are relevant to the culture, communicating the unique traditions, local communities, historical legacy and cultural importance of Lake Toba and Batak culture, in addition to factual facts. Activities like cultural storytelling, community-based tourism, traditional culinary experiences, guided heritage activities, cultural performances, and interactive digital content can transform credible destination information into meaningful and memorable tourism experiences. Tourism stakeholders are able to raise tourists' trust, increase the likelihood of revisiting and recommending the destination and facilitate the formation of long-lasting destination loyalty through the enhanced congruence between the destination features presented and the actual experiences of the visitors. Finally, integration of credible information management and experience-based destination development can contribute to the long-term competitiveness and sustainable growth of tourism in Samosir Regency.

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