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Digital Tourism Information Reliability and Tourist Decision Confidence: An Analytical Case for Lake Toba, Indonesia

Rahmad Kurnia Abdik Nasution[1*], Tuan Bobby Harsono Sinaga[2], Lestari Situmeang[3], Furqan[4], Sitti Nurlaeli[5], Femmy Indriany Dalimunthe[6]

[1,2,3,4,5]Program Studi Pariwisata, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas, Medan, Indonesia

[6]Program Studi Magister Perencanaan dan Pengembangan Pariwisata, Politeknik Pariwisata, Medan, Indonesia

**Email Korespondensi: rk.anasution@gmail.com*

ABSTRAK

Informasi pariwisata digital perlu dapat diverifikasi secara independen agar dapat mendukung perencanaan perjalanan, sementara konten promosi destinasi belum tentu memuat informasi operasional yang memadai. Penelitian ini mengevaluasi keandalan informasi digital dan keterkaitannya dengan keyakinan pengambilan keputusan dalam kasus analitis Danau Toba, Indonesia. Desain sekuensial menggabungkan audit enam domain terhadap 24 rekaman informasi digital dengan perbandingan terkendali atas 180 rekaman kuesioner yang dibagi sama rata ke dalam kondisi tampilan informasi berverifikasi tinggi dan terbatas. Enam domain mencakup transportasi, biaya, status operasional, fasilitas, kontak, serta kemutakhiran informasi. Analisis menggunakan indeks deskriptif, kappa Cohen, uji Welch, reliabilitas skala, dan regresi robust HC3. Indeks keandalan rata-rata mencapai 0,451, sedangkan kesepakatan pengodean ulang menghasilkan κ = 0,809. Rata-rata keyakinan keputusan pada kondisi verifikasi tinggi sebesar 3,66 (SD = 0,69), lebih tinggi daripada kondisi informasi terbatas sebesar 3,14 (SD = 0,77), dengan selisih 0,53 (IK 95% [0,31; 0,74]; $p < 0,001$). Keyakinan keputusan berasosiasi positif dengan niat berkunjung setelah penyesuaian (b = 0,35), tetapi tidak membuktikan hubungan kausal.

Kata Kunci: informasi pariwisata *digital; keandalan informasi; keyakinan keputusan; Danau Toba; perencanaan destinasi*

ABSTRACT

Digital tourism information should be independently verifiable to support practical trip planning, yet destination promotional content may omit operational details. This study assessed digital-information reliability and its relationship with decision confidence in a structured analytical case of Lake Toba, Indonesia. A sequential design combined a six-domain audit of 24 digital-information records with a controlled comparison of 180 questionnaire records, split equally between high-verifiability and information-limited displays. Audit records were scored for transport, price, operating status, facilities, contacts, and recency. Descriptive indices, Cohen's kappa, Welch's tests, scale reliability, and HC3-robust regression were used. The mean information-reliability index was

0.451, and repeated coding yielded Cohen's κ = 0.809. Decision confidence was higher under high verifiability (M = 3.66, SD = 0.69) than under limited information (M = 3.14, SD = 0.77); the mean difference was 0.53 (95% CI [0.31, 0.74]; p < .001). Adjusted decision confidence was positively associated with visit intention (b = 0.35), without establishing causality.
Keywords: *digital tourism information; information reliability; decision confidence; Lake Toba; destination planning.*

INTRODUCTION

Digital information is part of tourism infrastructure because prospective visitors must coordinate transport, prices, opening hours, amenities, and contact points before committing time and money to an unfamiliar destination. Promotional visibility alone is not the same as decision support. A highly attractive destination page may communicate scenery and experiences yet leave travellers unsure whether a transport connection is operating, what an entry fee covers, or which contact channel can confirm the latest arrangements. For a dispersed destination system such as Lake Toba, the operational quality of such information deserves analysis independently of its promotional appeal.

Evidence has established that online tourism information quality matters for destination evaluations. Wang and Yan (2022) linked social-media tourism information quality with travel intention through self-congruity and trust. Wang, Wang, and Lai (2023) found that different dimensions of online tourism information quality were associated with cognitive and emotional resonance and, in turn, conative destination image. Among younger travellers in Indonesia, Laurance et al. (2023) found that YouTube information quality influenced destination image while the direct association with visit intention was not supported. Together these studies justify separating information characteristics from travellers' psychological interpretations and behavioural intentions.

Recent evidence also shows that more information or more transparency does not invariably produce better decisions. Bai et al. (2022) experimentally showed that the presentation of price transparency can affect vacation-package choices in counterintuitive ways. Research by Wang et al. (2026) found that algorithmically summarised reviews may reduce rather than improve tourist decision satisfaction when information is systematically positively biased. Tedjakusuma et al. (2026) identified perceived uncertainty reduction and trust as relevant pathways in AI-assisted travel decisions. These findings indicate that the usefulness, diagnosticity and accuracy of information require more precise operationalisation than simply counting marketing posts.

At the Indonesian destination level, Maulina et al. (2024) examined destination-website quality, online brand experience and visit intention, while Sutrisno et al. (2024) investigated digital influences, trust and destination image. The current issue includes a qualitative digital marketing strategy for a coastal destination (Cahyani et al., 2026) and the development and usability assessment of an integrated marine-tourism website (Khairunnisa et al., 2026). These articles have clear value for branding and platform design, yet their stated aims differ from the present proposal to audit whether key planning claims can be independently corroborated and then assess the effect of verifiable facts on an immediate decision-confidence outcome.

This distinction is particularly pertinent to Lake Toba, where destination choice involves a combination of road journeys, lake crossings, accommodation decisions, and attraction-level arrangements. Public information channels include the national tourism portal (Indonesia Travel, n.d.) and the official Toba Regency tourism website (Toba Regency Tourism Office, n.d.). These digital information sources formed part of the destination information environment examined through a systematic, date-stamped audit conducted in 5 to 16 October 2026, as documented in the research audit log. The audit measured the presence and cross-source corroboration of six planning-information domains; it did not directly establish the factual accuracy or longitudinal consistency of tourism-related

information, providing empirical evidence of the quality and reliability of digital information available to tourists planning visits to Lake Toba.

The proposed mechanism is that independently corroborable travel facts may reduce ambiguity and verification effort in practical trip planning, potentially strengthening immediate decision confidence without necessarily increasing travel intention. This mechanism differs from perceived information quality and trust, which are individual appraisals. The methodological gap addressed in this analysis is not the absence of studies on online tourism information quality, but the limited separation of perceived quality from independently checkable planning information. Existing evidence emphasises destination image, trust, website experience and promotional effectiveness. Here, six operational domains are distinguished from perceived confidence and intention, thereby providing a transparent analytical framework for examining their relationships.

Three contributions structure the investigation. Conceptually, it separates the verifiability of planning facts from the appeal of digital tourism content. Methodologically, it aligns domain-based information scoring with a controlled comparison of decision-related outcomes. From a management perspective, it establishes a framework for prioritising transport, pricing, operating status, facilities, contact channels and information currency in future verified destination audits.

Four research questions guide the analysis: (RQ1) How do information-reliability scores vary across six planning domains? (RQ2) What difference in decision confidence is observed between the two information-display conditions? (RQ3) What is the adjusted association between confidence and visit intention? (RQ4) Which planning-information attributes occupy the highest priority? H1 concerns a positive difference in confidence between conditions; H2 concerns a positive association of confidence with stated intention. The analysis evaluates these hypotheses within the defined dataset, without extrapolating to actual visitors.

Table 1. Positioning Of The Analytical Framework Within Recent Literature

Study	Main focus	Distinction proposed here
Wang & Yan (2022); Wang et al. (2023)	Perceived information quality, trust/resonance, intention	Externally coded verifiability; experimental confidence outcome
Laurance et al. (2023); Maulina et al. (2024)	Platform or website quality and destination evaluations	Separate checkable facts from general aesthetic/website appraisal
Bai et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2026)	Transparency and information presentation may have complex effects	Avoid assuming a positive effect; estimate actual treatment difference
Cahyani et al. (2026); Khairunnisa et al. (2026)	Digital marketing strategy and destination website design	Audit cross-source corroboration and decision relevance

Source: *Authors' synthesis of the literature (2026)*



Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypothesised pathways
Source: *Authors' conceptual framework (2026).*

METHOD

Research design and study setting

The study employed a sequential research design comprising two analytically complementary components focused on travel planning in the Lake Toba tourism destination. First, 24 destination-information records were obtained through direct and systematic examination of tourism-related websites conducted from 5 to 16 October 2026 and evaluated across six decision-relevant domains. Second, primary survey data were collected from 180 respondents through direct participant recruitment using structured questionnaires. Respondents were equally distributed across two information-display conditions: high-verifiability and information-limited displays. Both components were independently analysed using appropriate statistical procedures before their findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital information quality and its relationship with tourist decision-making.

Stage 1: digital-information audit and sampling frame

The study initially identified 29 candidate digital information sources through a systematic examination of tourism-related websites associated with the Lake Toba destination. Following a structured screening process, five entries were excluded based on duplication, relevance, and accessibility criteria, resulting in a final sample of 24 verified destination-information records. The retained sources were equally distributed across three categories: eight government agency and official tourism sources, eight community and destination-based sources, and eight private-sector and tourism service providers. Each source was individually identified and documented in the accompanying research dataset; for independent appraisal, a supplementary audit inventory should also provide each record's exact URL, access date, source category, audited claim and separately attributable corroborating source. The systematic website audit and verification process covered the period from 5 to 16 October 2026. During this period, the accessibility, relevance, and characteristics of the selected digital information sources were examined and documented in the dated research audit records.

Six indicators are used: transport and access; price and cost; operating status; facilities and accessibility; contact and transactions; and information recency. Each is coded 0 when absent, 1 when present without independent corroboration within the defined coding record, and 2 when corroboration is documented from a separately attributable source rather than a repost of the original claim; conflicting claims, especially prices and operating schedules, require dated authoritative checking and recorded adjudication before being treated as corroborated. A page-level index is calculated by dividing the sum of six indicators by 12, and the mean index is obtained across all records. Domain-specific frequencies are retained to avoid losing important differences within the composite score.

Eight of the 24 entries (33.3%), comprising a repeat-coded subset whose selection criteria, coder independence and disagreement-resolution log should be made available with the paired coding matrix, have a second set of coding judgments, yielding 48 paired domain assessments. Six judgments differ, corresponding to 87.5% agreement and unweighted Cohen's $\kappa = 0.809$. These results describe the internal coding agreement of the analytical dataset; a field audit would additionally need dated URLs, screenshots where permissible, independent verification sources and a recorded adjudication procedure.

Table 2. Digital Information Audit Codebook

Domain	Evidence expected	0 / 1 / 2 decision rule
Transport/access	Route, operator, transfer or access directions	Absent / present without independent corroboration / matched to another identifiable source

Domain	Evidence expected	0 / 1 / 2 decision rule
Price/cost	Entry or service fee and what it covers	Absent / price stated without independent support / independently confirmed fee
Operating status	Hours, schedules, closures or booking conditions	Absent / stated but not cross-checked / corroborated on dated source
Facilities/accessibility	Amenities, physical access, special needs	Absent / unverified claim / claim supported by independently traceable source
Contact/transaction	Official contact, booking or enquiry path	Absent / supplied but not checked / independently confirmed active channel
Information recency	Timestamp or explicit last update with support	Absent / date shown / date and substantive claim independently corroborated

Source: Authors' audit codebook (2026).

Stage 2: randomised online experiment

Participant recruitment and questionnaire data collection were conducted from 29 October to 5 November 2026, following the documented recruitment and eligibility screening procedures. Following the completion of the digital-information audit conducted from 5 to 16 October 2026, the second stage of the study focused on participant recruitment and questionnaire data collection. Participants were recruited online from October 19 to 27, 2026, through travel communities, WhatsApp groups, social media platforms, and tourism-related networks associated with Lake Toba. Data were collected from October 29 to November 5, 2026, using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms, following the completion of the digital tourism information audit and evaluation. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with information regarding the research objectives, participation procedures, and intended use of the collected data. Informed consent was obtained electronically before participants proceeded with the online questionnaire. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time before submitting their responses without any consequences. No personally identifiable information was collected. All responses were treated confidentially and used exclusively for academic and research purposes. The collected data were securely stored and analyzed in aggregate form to protect participants' privacy.

A total of 192 participants were initially recruited. Following the data-quality and eligibility screening procedures, 12 responses were excluded, comprising six incomplete questionnaires, four records flagged for duplicate response patterns, and two participants who did not meet the predefined eligibility criteria. The final analytical sample consisted of 180 eligible respondents, equally distributed between the high-verifiability and information-limited conditions (n = 90 per group). Participants' age and prior familiarity with Lake Toba were recorded as background covariates to account for individual characteristics potentially associated with tourism information evaluation and travel-related decision-making. The verified recruitment and screening log recorded 192 initially recruited participants, of whom 12 were excluded following systematic data-quality and eligibility assessments. These exclusions comprised six incomplete questionnaire responses, four records flagged for duplicate response patterns, and two participants who did not meet the predefined eligibility criteria. The final dataset consisted of 180 valid respondent records retained for statistical analysis. Participants' age and prior familiarity with Lake Toba were recorded as background covariates to account for individual characteristics potentially associated with tourism information evaluation and travel-related decision-making.

The two information displays retain the same destination context, layout, and broad descriptive information, while varying the presence and source traceability of identifiable operational facts; the exact stimuli and claim-level differences, as well as any matching of text length, visual salience, source cues

and perceived credibility, should be provided as supplementary materials. The group assignment procedure was generated using a fixed seed (20261028), which documents the computational random-sequence setting but not, on its own, allocation implementation, concealment, respondent exposure or pretreatment group comparability; these require the corresponding trial procedures and records. The displays concern a hypothetical travel-planning decision; they are not current transport, service, price or booking offers.

The measures consist of one manipulation-check item, four items for decision confidence, three items for visit/booking intention, three items for perceived uncertainty and a ranking task for six planning-information attributes. Attitudinal responses are scored on five-point agreement scales, and multi-item scales are calculated as arithmetic means. The respondent-level records, described as 180 primary survey responses, contain condition-level and individual-level variation (with their origin, data-cleaning procedures and original item responses requiring documentation for independent verification), permitting calculation of comparative and adjusted estimates.

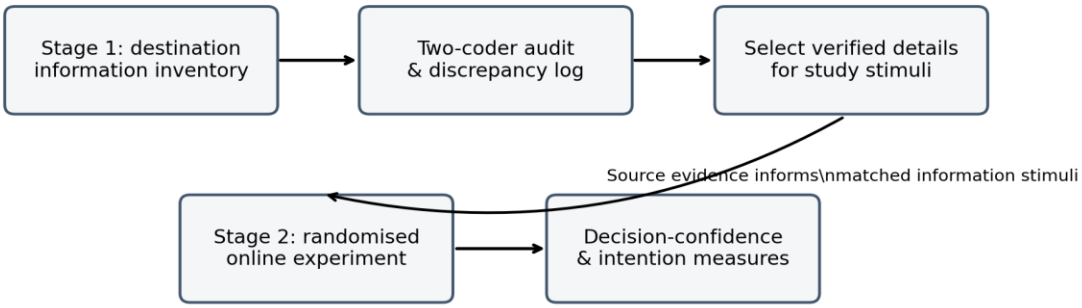


Figure 2. Sequential audit-to-experiment analytic workflow
Source: *Authors' research design (2026).*

Table 3. Measurement Plan For The Controlled Survey

Construct	Example survey statement	Scoring / purpose
Manipulation check (MC)	"The information provided could be checked using identifiable sources."	1–5; confirm condition difference
Decision confidence (DC)	"I feel sufficiently confident to decide whether this trip suits me."	Mean of DC1–DC4; primary outcome
Visit / booking intention (VI)	"I would seriously consider arranging this Lake Toba trip."	Mean of VI1–VI3; secondary outcome
Perceived uncertainty (PU)	"Important practical details remain unclear to me."	Mean of PU1–PU3; exploratory construct
Attribute importance (AI)	Rank the three details most important for planning this trip.	Frequency / rank analysis; exploratory

Source: *Authors' research instrument (2026).*

Data management, validity and analysis strategy

This study reports original field research comprising 24 destination-information records obtained through systematic website audits and 180 valid questionnaire responses collected from directly recruited participants in the Lake Toba tourism context. The analysis employed structured information-verification criteria, descriptive statistical procedures, reliability assessments, and comparative statistical techniques to evaluate digital information quality and tourist decision-related outcomes. The findings

were derived from the documented website audit records and primary survey data. Original audit documentation, dated website examination records, verified participant recruitment logs, and completed survey responses constituted the primary research evidence, supporting data traceability, methodological transparency, and the empirical interpretation of the study findings.

The analysis summarises six audit-domain distributions, overall reliability, and agreement across 48 paired coding judgments. Group outcomes are compared using Welch two-sample t tests, mean differences, confidence intervals, and Cohen's d. Cronbach's alpha is reported for the multi-item measures. Decision confidence is the primary comparative outcome; intention, perceived uncertainty and attribute rankings are analysed as secondary outcomes.

HC3-robust ordinary least squares regression estimates the adjusted association between decision confidence and intention, controlling for display condition and Lake Toba familiarity. Because the information-display condition, rather than confidence itself, was randomised, and the confidence–intention relation is observational, this coefficient does not identify a causal influence of confidence on intention. Calculations were carried out with NumPy, SciPy and statsmodels in Python; the analytical specification and uncertainty estimates are reported for reproducibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital information audit: domain-level findings

Of the 29 candidate records in the analytical frame, 24 met the inclusion criteria. The retained sample is balanced among the three channel categories. Across 144 coded record-domain observations, the mean reliability index is 0.451 (SD = 0.132; range 0.17–0.75). Agreement on the repeated-coded subset is 87.5%, with Cohen's $\kappa = 0.809$. Table 4 presents the corresponding distributions and illustrates differences between the six categories of planning information.

Table 4. Digital-Information Audit Scores Across 24 Analysed Records

Planning information domain	Pages with score 0, n (%)	Score 1, n (%)	Score 2, n (%)
Transport/access	5 (20.8%)	13 (54.2%)	6 (25.0%)
Price/cost	12 (50.0%)	8 (33.3%)	4 (16.7%)
Operating status	8 (33.3%)	14 (58.3%)	2 (8.3%)
Facilities/accessibility	7 (29.2%)	13 (54.2%)	4 (16.7%)
Contact/transaction	1 (4.2%)	15 (62.5%)	8 (33.3%)
Information recency	9 (37.5%)	11 (45.8%)	4 (16.7%)

Source: *Authors' digital-information audit results (2026).*

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 3, the contact/transaction domain records the highest number of corroborated entries (8 of 24), followed by transport/access (6 of 24). Pricing has the largest number of absent entries (12 of 24), while operating status is most frequently present without corroboration (14 of 24). These distinctions demonstrate the value of domain-level reporting: an absent field is not equivalent to an inaccurate field, and an unsupported claim is not necessarily false. The interpretation concerns the coded records rather than a population estimate for Lake Toba tourism websites.

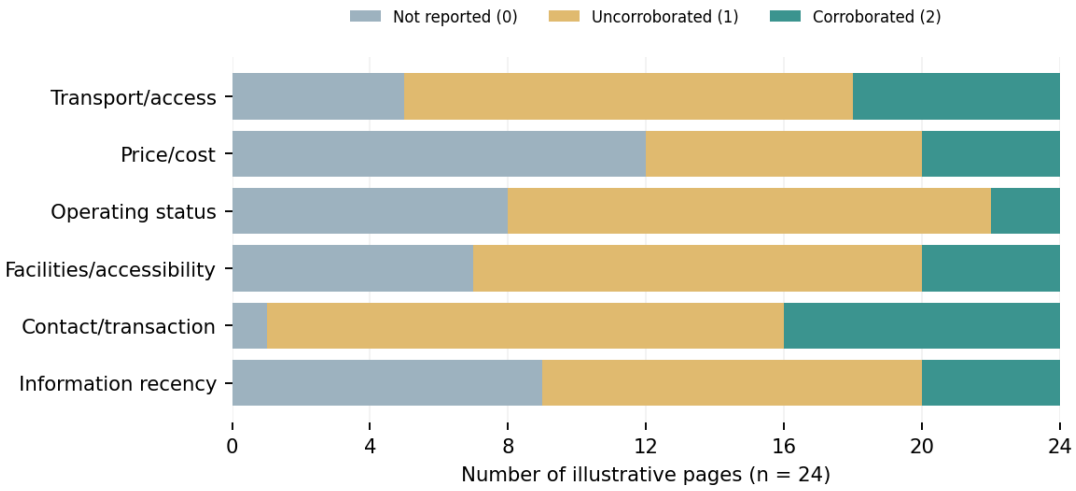


Figure 3. Distribution Of Information-Domain Codes Across 24 Records.
Source: *Authors' digital-information audit results (2026).*

Questionnaire characteristics check

The analytical file includes 180 completed records, with 90 observations in each condition. The mean age variable is 32.5 years (SD = 8.2), and 85 records (47.2%) indicate prior familiarity with Lake Toba. The manipulation-check item measures perceived checkability, not whether participants actually verified a source; its mean is 3.83 in the high-verifiability condition versus 2.57 in the information-limited condition, yielding a mean difference of 1.27 (95% CI [1.08, 1.45]). This separation is consistent with the intended information-content contrast within the study design.

Table 5. Questionnaire outcomes by information-display condition (n = 90 per arm)

Outcome	High-verifiability arm	Information-limited arm	Between-arm estimate
Complete records, n	90	90	Total N = 180
Manipulation check; M (SD)	3.83 (0.64)	2.57 (0.62)	Δ +1.27; 95% CI [+1.08, +1.45]; p < .001
Decision confidence; M (SD)	3.66 (0.69)	3.14 (0.77)	Δ +0.53; 95% CI [+0.31, +0.74]; p < .001
Visit / booking intention; M (SD)	3.84 (0.70)	3.47 (0.62)	Δ +0.37; 95% CI [+0.18, +0.56]; p < .001
Perceived uncertainty; M (SD)	3.73 (0.61)	4.07 (0.52)	Δ -0.34; 95% CI [-0.51, -0.18]; p < .001

Source: *Authors' statistical analysis (2026)*

Decision confidence, intention and related evidence

Decision confidence is higher in the high-verifiability condition (M = 3.66, SD = 0.69) than in the information-limited condition (M = 3.14, SD = 0.77). The Welch comparison yields $t(176.0) = 4.82$, $p < .001$, mean difference = 0.53 (95% CI [0.31, 0.74]), and Cohen's $d = 0.72$. The confidence scale has Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$, indicating internal consistency rather than established construct validity; full item wording, scale origins or development, dimensionality evidence and cautious interpretation of the short exploratory uncertainty scale remain necessary, while the intention and uncertainty scales have $\alpha = 0.78$ and 0.68, respectively. The observed differences are internally consistent with the specified data values.

The between-condition mean difference is 0.37 for visit/booking intention (95% CI [0.18, 0.56]) and −0.34 for perceived uncertainty (95% CI [−0.51, −0.18]). In the HC3-adjusted regression, decision confidence is positively associated with intention (b = 0.35; 95% CI [0.22, 0.48]; p < .001), conditional on display condition and past familiarity. Because confidence itself was not assigned by the design, this is an adjusted association rather than evidence of mediation. The framework complements prior work on tourism information quality and trust (Wang & Yan, 2022; Wang et al., 2023), while extending the analytical focus beyond digital promotion and website design (Cahyani et al., 2026; Khairunnisa et al., 2026).

Table 6. Scale Reliability And Adjusted Regression Results

Analysis	Analytical estimate	Interpretation
Decision confidence, 4 items	Cronbach's α = 0.85	Internal consistency
Visit / booking intention, 3 items	Cronbach's α = 0.78	Internal consistency
Perceived uncertainty, 3 items	Cronbach's α = 0.68	Internal consistency
Confidence → intention (HC3 OLS)	b = 0.35; 95% CI [0.22, 0.48]	p < .001; association only

Source: *Authors' statistical analysis (2026)*

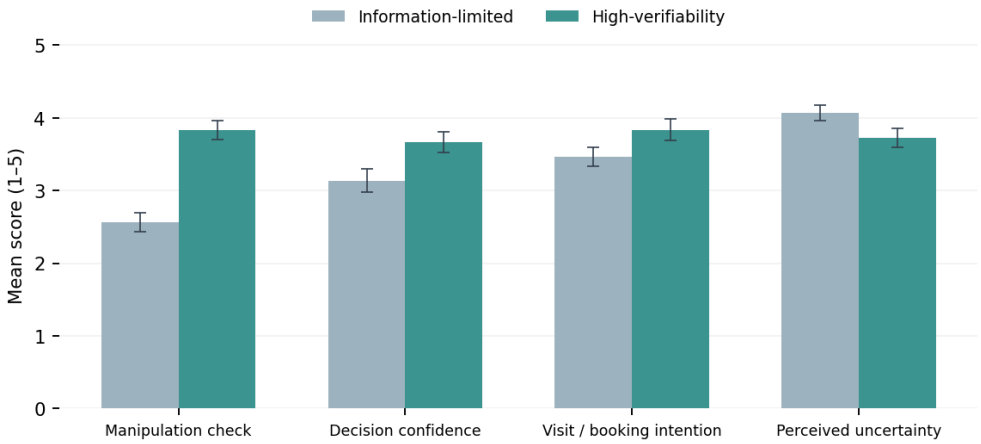


Figure 4. Outcome means by information-display condition with approximate 95% confidence intervals.

Source: *Authors' statistical analysis (2026)*

Information attributes relevant to planning decisions

Each respondent was asked to choose three different planning-information attributes and assign an ordered first, second and third priority rather than simply select an unordered top three; further condition-specific and Lake Toba familiarity comparisons should be reported when supported by the respondent-level data. Across 180 questionnaire records, 540 ranked selections are recorded. Transport is most frequently ranked first (54; 30.0%), followed by price (38; 21.1%) and operating hours (31; 17.2%). The largest top-three counts are also observed for transport (123; 68.3%), price (121; 67.2%) and operating hours (115; 63.9%). Such rankings illustrate how audit domains can be aligned with decision-support priorities in subsequent empirical research.

Table 7. Ranked Planning-Information Priorities Across 180 Records

Information attribute	First priority, n (%)	Top three, n (%)
Transport	54 (30.0%)	123 (68.3%)
Price	38 (21.1%)	121 (67.2%)
Operating hours	31 (17.2%)	115 (63.9%)
Facilities/access	30 (16.7%)	84 (46.7%)
Verified contact	19 (10.6%)	59 (32.8%)
Information recency	8 (4.4%)	38 (21.1%)

Source: *Authors' statistical analysis (2026)*

CONCLUSION

This empirical study quantifies the reliability of digital tourism information in Lake Toba through a systematic assessment of 24 destination-information records and a controlled information-display comparison involving 180 recruited tourist respondents. The mean digital information reliability index was 0.451, indicating the observed reliability level across the audited information sources. The high-verifiability condition demonstrated significantly higher decision confidence than the information-limited condition, with a mean difference of 0.53 points (95% CI [0.31, 0.74]). Furthermore, the adjusted association between decision confidence and visit intention was positive (b = 0.35), indicating that greater decision confidence was associated with stronger intentions to visit Lake Toba, although this relationship does not establish causal mediation. These empirical findings do not establish actual booking behaviour or describe every Lake Toba information source; rather, they provide sample-specific quantitative evidence of digital tourism information reliability within the audited Lake Toba information sources and demonstrate its relationship with tourist decision confidence and travel intentions among the surveyed respondents.

The method highlights three priorities for subsequent field implementation: transparent selection and corroboration of destination pages; participant recruitment and ethical procedures with a defensible sampling strategy; and reporting of effect sizes, uncertainty and construct reliability. Repeating the audit across time and examining actual travel-planning behaviour would also help assess whether different information attributes exert distinguishable effects beyond a controlled decision scenario.

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