

From Feeds To Beaches: Social Media Driving Coastal Tourism

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of social media on Generation Z and Millennial tourists' motivation to visit marine tourism destinations in Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta. As digital natives, these generations are particularly influenced by social media in their travel decisions, making them a crucial demographic for understanding the evolving landscape of tourism marketing. The research employs a quantitative approach with questionnaire survey. A total of 300 respondents (150 Gen Z and 150 Millennials) who have visited or plan to visit marine tourism destinations in Gunungkidul were surveyed online. Data analysis utilized SMART PLS to examine the relationships between social media engagement, destination image, and travel motivation. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between social media engagement and the motivation to visit Gunungkidul's marine destinations among both generations. Instagram and TikTok emerged as the most influential platforms, with user-generated content and influencer collaborations playing pivotal roles in shaping destination perceptions. Interestingly, Gen Z showed a higher susceptibility to peer recommendations and viral challenges, while Millennials were more influenced by informative content and authentic travel experiences shared on social media. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of social media's role in shaping young tourists' motivations in the context of marine tourism. It also provides practical implications for destination marketers and tourism stakeholders in Gunungkidul, offering strategies to effectively leverage social media platforms to attract Gen Z and Millennial visitors.

Keywords: Destination image, gen z and millennials, marine tourism, social media, tourist motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology is currently very massive. Reporting from We Are Social (2024), stated that active social media users in Indonesia reached 167 million people or around 60.4% of the total population of Indonesia. Social media has become an integral part of everyday life, people's dependence on social media for communication and interaction, as well as for entertainment (Wang & Park, 2023). The concept of social media has been interpreted in various ways. However, the most frequently referenced definition comes from Wolf et al. (2018) that describe social media as online platforms that enable users to create personal profiles, showcase their network of connections, and navigate through these interconnected networks of relationships.

In the tourism and hospitality industry, social media is considered a megatrend that significantly influences travelers' search and sharing behavior and changes marketing information distribution channels for tourism supplier operations and management (Leung et al., 2013) Especially for young travelers, who are characterized by high interest and ubiquitous connectivity on social media, purchasing decisions tend to be more easily influenced by social media (Giachino et al., 2020). Millennials and Generation Z are the main characters in traveling with the use of social media today. Although these two generations have different preferences, the behavior in travel activities has similarities (Slivar et al., 2019). Millennials' travel decisions are heavily shaped by social media's multifaceted influence. Peer-shared visual content, user-generated reviews, and influencer marketing strongly sway their destination choices, often outweighing traditional advertising. Social proof, direct brand engagement, and trending travel challenges create both aspirational desires and a sense of urgency. The community aspect of social platforms, enabling experience sharing and advice-seeking, further cements social media's pivotal role in guiding millennials' travel preferences and choices (Budiawan et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2019; Nur'afifah & Prihantoro, 2021). For Gen Z, they primarily

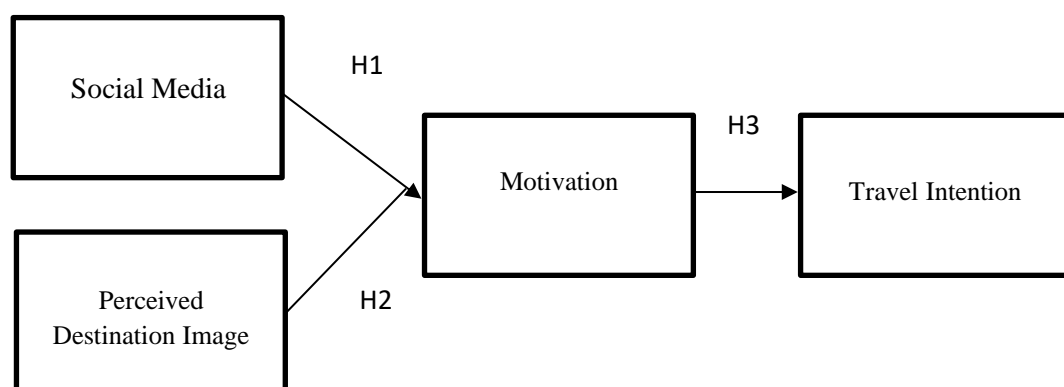


use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for travel inspiration, valuing visually appealing and authentic content. Gen Z trusts influencer recommendations and actively engages with user-generated content, reviews, and feedback. They also contribute by sharing their own experiences, creating a cycle of influence (Gai et al., 2024; Sari Rahayu et al., 2024; Wang & Park, 2023).

Marine tourism is now a trend among young people, especially Millennials and Generation Z. For example, beaches in Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta have recorded an increase in the number of visitors, most of whom are young people (Martino, 2024). Maritime tourism involves travel by tourists to locations away from their place of residence to enjoy recreational activities. This type of tourism focuses on utilizing the marine environment as the center of activity and the main attraction (Junaid, 2018). In other words, marine tourism utilizes the beauty and potential of the sea as a magnet to attract tourists. In a visiting decision, tourists will usually be influenced by push and pull factors, and destination image is a big part of the pull factor that can attract tourists to make visiting decisions (Setiawan & Wibawa, 2024). Destination image is a mental representation of a tourist destination that is formed in the tourist cognitive (Morrison & Andres Coca-Stefaniak, 2021). This construct is a synthesis of various factors, including expectations, prior knowledge, imagination, and individual emotional responses. The formation of destination image is influenced by psychological variables, empirical experience, exposure to information through various media, intrinsic motivation, socio-economic context, education level, marketing strategies, and subjective perceptions (Baggio, 2017; Fistola & La Rocca, 2017; Jovicic, 2019; Kummitha & Crutzen, 2017). Thus, it can be concluded that destination image is the result of a complex interaction between the objective reality of a destination and tourists' psychological interpretation of that reality.

There have been many studies on the motivation of tourists to visit a destination (Fodness, 1994; Mahika, 2011; Yoo et al., 2018) In general, this research looks at factors from within the tourist and what the destination offers (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021; Carvache-Franco Mauricio Carvache-Franco Orly Carvache-Franco Ana Beatriz Hernández-Lara, 2020; Güzel et al., 2020). Studies related to social media on tourist visiting motivation have also been conducted (Budiawan et al., 2021; Gai et al., 2024; Kumar & Gilitwala, 2019; Slivar et al., 2019; Wang & Park, 2023). However, there have not been many studies that reveal the role of social media in motivating tourists to visit a beach destination, especially at Gunungkidul Beach, Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, this finding can be taken into consideration for destination managers to carry out the right marketing strategy by utilizing technology and social media. So this research aims to find the role of social media and understanding related to marine tourism destinations in Gunungkidul to generate motivation and intention in making a visit.

Based on the explanation of the phenomenon above, the research framework is described as follows.



Through the research framework above, this study seeks to answer the hypothesis:

H1. Social media influences the visiting motivation of the Millennial generation and Gen Z tourists at Gunungkidul Yogyakarta beach destination.

- H2. Perceived Destination Image affects the visiting motivation of Millennial generation and gen Z tourists at Gunungkidul beach destinations in Yogyakarta.
- H3. Motivation affects the travel intentions of the Millennial generation and Gen Z tourists at Gunungkidul beach destinations in Yogyakarta.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Method

This research uses quantitative methods. Data were collected through an online questionnaire with the Google Form platform. The research sample was obtained through purposive sampling technique which is tourists aged 27-43 (millennial generation) and 12-26 years (generation Z) who have visited one of the beaches in Gunungkidul, and use social media Instagram and TikTok. Analysis processing was carried out with the help of SMART PLS. First, to test the reliability of the questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha was applied and the pilot test was conducted with 30 samples. Secondly, Multiple Linear Regression method was applied to test the level of influence of independent variables on dependent variables. Furthermore, the secondary data technique is also applied in this research. These secondary data came from sources such as articles, journals, textbooks, and previous research.

2.2 Measurement

Measurement is done by adopting the function of social media as a source of information (Hu et al., 2017; Tajpour et al., 2023). Perceived Destination Image with Cognitive, Affective, and Unique indicators (Gartner, 1996), Tourism Motivation (Fodness, 1994), and Travel intention (Arora & Lata, 2020).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study used 300 respondents with 150 millennial respondents and 150 generation Z respondents. The following are the results of the validity and reliability tests. The validity test is determined by the loading factor value > 0.7 (Savitri et al., 2021) and the reliability test is measured by the Chronbach's Alpha value above 0.6 (Haryono, 2016).

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Result

Variables	Questionnaire Statement	Loading Factors	Chronbach's Alpha
Social Media Information Resources	Lots of content about beach destinations in Gunungkidul	0.875	0.833
	The information I get on social media is accurate	0.798	
	I trust the information on social media related to beach destinations in Gunungkidul.	0.919	
Perceived Destination Image			
Cognitive	Attractions and facilities in the destination attract my attention	0.753	0.948
	The price offered by the destination is affordable	0.947	
Affective	I will not feel bored if I visit beach destinations in Gunungkidul.	0.959	
	I am re-energized after seeing the description of beach destinations in Gunungkidul.	0.918	
Unique	The uniqueness of the beach destinations in Gunungkidul makes me curious to visit.	0.853	
	The beach destinations in Gunungkidul have different characteristics from other beach destinations.	0.887	

	The beach destinations in Gunungkidul attract my attention.	0.769	
	Travel gives you a better understanding of current events	0.897	
Motivation	A vacation clears your mind out	0.949	0.858
	I need a break from my daily routine, to get refreshed, and to have a different outlook	0.800	
	I have the intention to visit beach destinations in Gunungkidul	0.909	
Travel Intention	I will visit Gunungkidul beach destinations within this year.	0.777	0.810
	I would recommend Gunungkidul beach destinations to other travelers	0.865	

Source: Authors, 2024

Based on the test results in Table 1, it can be seen that all items on the research instrument have values that can be categorized as valid and reliable.

Table 2. Hypothesis test result

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Motivation_(Z) -> Travel Intention_(Y)	0.599	0.595	0.064	9.366	0.000
Perceived Destination Image_(X2) -> Motivation_(Z)	0.604	0.604	0.067	9.016	0.000
Social Media_(X1) -> Motivation_(Z)	0.218	0.219	0.067	3.242	0.001

Source: Authors, 2024

The results of the hypothesis testing above show that Social Media and Perceived Destination Images have a positive and significant effect on motivation with a P-Value <0.05 and motivation drives positive and significant interest in visiting millennial tourists and generation Z with a P-Value <0.05.

3.1 Discussion

Based on the results of the tests that have been carried out, it is found that social media and perceived destination image influence the motivation and interest in visiting millennial generation and generation Z tourists to beach destinations in Gunungkidul. These results make this research hypothesis supported. The growth of technology greatly influences the behavior of tourists today. The findings of this study reveal a strong relationship between social media engagement and motivation to visit Gunungkidul's marine destinations across the two generations studied. This positive correlation suggests that the higher one's engagement with destination-related content on social media, the greater their desire to visit in person. User-generated content and collaboration with

influencers proved crucial in shaping perceptions of the destination, reflecting the importance of authenticity and social influence in travel decision-making.

Interestingly, the study revealed significant generational differences in responses to social media content, particularly when it comes to travel-related information and destination marketing. Generation Z, born and raised in the digital age, exhibits unique characteristics in their interactions with social media content that set them apart from other generations. This group demonstrates a heightened susceptibility to peer recommendations, indicating the crucial role that reference groups play in their decision-making process. The influence of peers on Generation Z's travel choices is notably stronger compared to other generations, suggesting that their perceptions and preferences are heavily shaped by the opinions and experiences shared within their social circles on digital platforms. Furthermore, Generation Z shows a strong tendency to engage with and participate in viral challenges on social media platforms, a behavior that is particularly prevalent in their interaction with travel-related content. This inclination reflects their more spontaneous nature and an inherent desire to be part of emerging trends and cultural phenomena. The appeal of viral challenges for this generation lies not only in the excitement of participation but also in the opportunity to share their experiences widely across the digital landscape. This behavior underscores Generation Z's desire for social validation and their inclination to create and consume content that is highly shareable and engaging. Such tendencies have significant implications for how travel destinations and experiences are marketed to this demographic, suggesting that strategies leveraging peer influence and viral content creation could be particularly effective in capturing the attention and interest of Generation Z travelers.

On the other hand, Millennials display a markedly different approach in their interactions with travel-related social media content, setting them apart from their Generation Z counterparts. Research indicates that this generation is more significantly influenced by informative content when making travel decisions. This preference for data-driven and fact-based decision-making reflects a more analytical approach to travel planning. Millennials tend to seek out comprehensive and verified information before committing to a travel destination or experience. They are more likely to engage with detailed blog posts, in-depth travel guides, and expert reviews that provide substantial insights into a destination's offerings, culture, and practical considerations. This behavior suggests a more cautious and planned approach to travel, where Millennials prioritize thorough research and reliable information to inform their choices, rather than making spontaneous decisions based on trending content or peer influence.

Additionally, Millennials exhibit a stronger interest in authentic travel experiences shared on social media platforms. This inclination reflects their tendency to seek out unique and meaningful experiences that go beyond surface-level tourism. They are drawn to content that showcases genuine local cultures, off-the-beaten-path destinations, and immersive activities that promise a deeper connection with the places they visit. Unlike Generation Z, who might be more swayed by popular trends or viral challenges, Millennials appear to value authenticity and personal growth in their travel experiences. They are more likely to engage with and be influenced by content that depicts real, unfiltered travel stories and insights from fellow travelers or locals. This preference for authenticity also extends to how they perceive and interact with influencer content, often favoring micro-influencers or content creators who provide honest, detailed accounts of their travel experiences over highly polished or commercialized presentations.

These generational differences in social media interaction and travel decision-making processes have profound implications for travel destination marketing strategies. The distinct preferences and behaviors of Generation Z and Millennials necessitate tailored approaches to effectively engage each group. For Generation Z, marketing campaigns may need to pivot towards creating highly shareable and viral content. This could involve developing interactive challenges, user-generated content competitions, or immersive social media experiences that encourage active participation and sharing. The goal would be to tap into Gen Z's desire for social validation and their inclination to engage with trending content. Leveraging influencer networks that resonate with this age group is also crucial, as Gen Z tends to trust and follow the recommendations of their peers and social media personalities

they admire. On the other hand, strategies aimed at attracting Millennials should focus on providing in-depth and authentic information about destinations. This approach aligns with their preference for comprehensive research and fact-based decision-making. Marketing efforts could include detailed blog posts, informative videos, and interactive guides that offer genuine insights into a destination's culture, history, and local experiences. Showcasing real experiences from previous travelers, perhaps through curated user-generated content or testimonials, can be particularly effective. This strategy not only satisfies Millennials' desire for authenticity but also provides the detailed information they seek when planning their travels.

The findings of this study also underscore the importance of a personalized approach in destination marketing. The stark differences in how Generation Z and Millennials interact with and are influenced by social media content highlight the need for marketers to move beyond one-size-fits-all strategies. By understanding the nuanced preferences and behaviors of each generation, marketers can design more effective and targeted campaigns. This personalized approach could involve developing distinct content strategies for different social media platforms, recognizing that each generation may have preferred platforms or ways of consuming content. For instance, short-form video content on platforms like TikTok might be more effective for reaching Gen Z, while long-form blog posts or in-depth travel guides on platforms like Instagram or dedicated travel websites might better resonate with Millennials. Moreover, this personalized approach extends to the creation of campaigns specifically targeted at each demographic group. For Generation Z, this might involve gamification elements, augmented reality experiences, or social media challenges that encourage active participation and content creation. For Millennials, it could mean developing content series that deep-dive into various aspects of a destination, partnering with respected travel experts or locals for authentic insights, or creating interactive planning tools that cater to their desire for comprehensive information. By tailoring not just the content but also the delivery method and engagement strategies to each generation's preferences, destination marketers can significantly enhance the effectiveness of their campaigns, leading to better engagement, increased interest, and ultimately, more successful conversion of potential travelers into actual visitors.

4. CONCLUSION

The role of social media is crucial for the development of tourism destinations today. The utilization of social media as a medium in marketing and branding tourism destinations needs to be done, especially for marine tourism destinations. The changing behavior of tourists along with the shifting times and the growth of technology is a great opportunity for destinations to capture it and make the right target market. This research provides valuable insights into the role of social media in influencing tourists' motivation to visit marine destinations in Gunungkidul, with a particular focus on the differences between Generation Z and Millennials. The main findings show a strong positive correlation between engagement on social media and motivation to travel, with Instagram and TikTok being the most influential platforms.

Significant generational differences were revealed in how the two groups respond to social media content. Generation Z is more susceptible to peer influence and viral challenges, while Millennials are more interested in informative content and authentic experiences. This emphasizes the importance of tailored marketing strategies for each demographic group. This research provides practical implications for the tourism industry, especially in the development of more effective and differentiated digital marketing strategies. Understanding the different content and platform preferences between generations can help tourism destination managers and marketers design more targeted and efficient campaigns.

This research focuses on marine destinations in Gunungkidul, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other types of tourist destinations or different geographical locations. Given the rapid changes in trends and features of social media platforms, the findings of this study may have limited temporal relevance. The study may not have fully accounted for external factors such as economic conditions, global travel trends, or special events that may affect travel motivations. Future research could expand the scope to include other generations, conduct long-term



research to track changes in traveler preferences and behavior over time, especially given the rapid evolution of the social media landscape, and investigate how the use of social media in tourism promotion affects destination sustainability and explore ethical approaches to destination marketing in the digital age.

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