

Motivating Millennial Tourists to Visit the Old Town Area of Gresik, East Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Bagian ini berisi statemen dari latar belakang, tujuan penelitian, metode penelitian, temuan penelitian. The text should be in Times New Roman, font size 10, with 1 line spacing, justified paragraph alignment, and a maximum of 200 words

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Background (Font size 11)

Cultural heritage tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in recent decades. History-based destinations are no longer viewed merely as a means of cultural preservation, but also as drivers of the local economy, educational tools, and instruments for strengthening a region's identity [1]. Various cities in Indonesia have begun revitalizing historic districts to boost tourism appeal while supporting sustainable tourism development [2].

One such area with significant potential is the Old Town of Gresik. This area preserves various historical relics dating from the era of international trade in the 14th through the 16th centuries, when Gresik flourished as a major port on the northern coast of Java. The presence of colonial buildings, religious sites, historic settlements, and enduring local traditions makes Gresik's Old Town a destination of high historical, cultural, and educational value [3]. In recent years, the Gresik Regency Government has also continued to promote the revitalization of this area as part of the development of heritage tourism destinations and the strengthening of a culture-based creative economy [4].

On the other hand, changes in tourist characteristics also influence destination development strategies. Millennials are currently one of the largest groups of tourists dominating domestic travel. Their characteristics

differ from those of previous generations because they prioritize authentic experiences, cultural interactions, easy access to digital information, and destinations with visual appeal that can be shared on social media [5]. Their motivations for travel are based not only on recreational needs but also on the pursuit of experiences, learning, self-actualization, and social interaction [6].

In the context of heritage tourism, the motivations of millennial travelers are an interesting topic to explore. Various studies indicate that the decision to visit is influenced by a combination of intrinsic factors such as the need for new experiences and an appreciation for culture and extrinsic factors, such as destination image, accessibility, digital promotion, and recommendations via social media [7], [8]. However, each destination has its own unique characteristics, so the factors influencing tourist motivation do not always follow the same pattern.

A number of studies on tourist motivation have been conducted at various heritage destinations in Indonesia and abroad. Most of these studies focus primarily on the relationship between motivation and tourist satisfaction, loyalty, or the intention to revisit [9], [10]. Other studies have focused more on the influence of social media and destination image on visitation decisions [11]. Nevertheless, studies specifically examining the motivations of millennial tourists in the Gresik Old Town area remain relatively limited. In fact, this area possesses distinct characteristics because it integrates historical, religious, and cultural tourism with local economic activities within a single, integrated area.

The limitations of this study point to a research gap: there has been little research that thoroughly identifies the factors driving millennial tourists to visit emerging cultural heritage areas such as Gresik's Old Town.

Furthermore, few studies have linked the characteristics of the millennial generation to the potential for developing cultural heritage destinations based on cultural experiences and sustainability.

Given these circumstances, this study aims to analyze the motivations of millennial tourists in visiting the Gresik Old Town area using a qualitative approach. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons, experiences, and significance of millennial tourists' visits, thereby serving as a foundation for formulating cultural heritage destination development strategies that are more adaptive to the needs of today's tourism market. The findings of this study are also expected to contribute to the development of research on tourist motivations in the context of cultural heritage tourism in Indonesia.

Literatur Review

Tourist Motivation

Tourist motivation is one of the fundamental concepts in the study of tourism behavior that explains why people travel to a particular destination. Motivation is viewed as a driving force that prompts individuals to fulfill specific needs through tourism activities. One of the most widely used theories is the Push and Pull Motivation theory, developed by Dann and later refined by Crompton. Push factors stem from internal drives, such as the need for rest, seeking new experiences, expanding knowledge, or self-actualization. Meanwhile, pull factors stem from destination characteristics, such as cultural attractions, environmental beauty, accessibility, facilities, and the destination's image all of which attract tourists to visit [12], [13].

In the context of cultural heritage tourism, tourist motivation extends beyond mere recreational needs to include the pursuit of authentic experiences, an understanding of history, and an appreciation of a region's cultural identity. These experiences are among the key factors influencing tourists' decisions when choosing heritage destinations [14]. Therefore, tourists' motivations at heritage destinations are a combination of personal needs and destination characteristics that can provide direct cultural experiences [15].

Millennial Tourists

Millennials are a group of travelers with characteristics that differ from those of previous

generations. Having grown up alongside the development of digital technology, they rely heavily on the internet and social media to find travel information. Millennial travelers prefer destinations that offer unique, authentic, and educational experiences, as well as visual appeal that can be shared on social media [16].

Several studies indicate that millennial travelers' travel decisions are influenced by electronic word-of-mouth, the experiences of other travelers, a destination's image, and the ease of accessing digital information [17]. Furthermore, this group also tends to seek cultural experiences that provide personal and emotional value rather than simply enjoying tourist attractions [18]. These characteristics make millennial travelers a potential segment for the development of heritage tourism, including the Gresik Old Town area, which features a blend of trade history, Islamic culture, colonial architecture, and local community life.

Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism is a form of tourism that leverages cultural, historical, architectural, and traditional heritage as a destination's main attraction. The development of heritage tourism aims to preserve cultural values while providing economic, social, and educational benefits to the community [19].

According to Timothy, heritage tourism is not only related to physical objects such as historic buildings but also encompasses the values, traditions, stories, and cultural identities that are alive within the community [20]. Therefore, the success of a heritage destination is determined not only by the quality of its historic buildings or sites but also by the destination's ability to provide meaningful experiences for tourists [21].

The Gresik Old Town area possesses these characteristics because it preserves various historical remnants of international trade, the spread of Islam, colonial buildings, and community cultural activities that continue to this day. This potential gives the area great promise for development as a sustainable heritage tourism destination.

Analytical Framework

Based on a review of theory and previous research, the motivation of millennial tourists to visit the Gresik Old Town area is influenced by the interplay between internal

and external factors. Internal factors include the need for new experiences, learning about history, social interaction, and self-actualization. External factors include historical appeal, the area's authenticity, accessibility, destination image, and information obtained through digital media [22], [23], [24].

This study employs an analytical framework that places tourist motivation at the center of understanding why millennial tourists choose the Gresik Old Town Area as a heritage tourism destination. Through this approach, the study aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' experiences while providing recommendations for the sustainable development of heritage tourism areas.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of millennial tourists' motivations for visiting the Gresik Old Town area. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can reveal the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of tourists regarding the appeal of heritage areas aspects that cannot be comprehensively explained through a quantitative approach. Through this approach, the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon from the informants' perspectives within the surrounding social and cultural context [25], [26].

The research was conducted in the Gresik Old Town area, Gresik Regency, East Java Province. This area was selected because it is a historic site of significant importance in the development of trade, the spread of Islam, and maritime culture in Indonesia. In addition to housing various cultural heritage buildings and historical sites, the area is currently being developed as a heritage tourism destination, making it a relevant location for examining the motivations of millennial tourists in choosing history and culture-based travel destinations.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves selecting individuals deemed to have experience and information relevant to the research focus [27]. The informants consisted of millennial tourists who had visited the Gresik Old Town area, destination managers, tourism business operators, historical preservation communities, and local government representatives involved in the area's development. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached that is, when the information obtained became repetitive and

no new significant themes were identified [28].

Research data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to explore tourists' experiences, perceptions, and motivations during their visits to the Gresik Old Town Area. Observations focused on tourist activities, the physical condition of the area, supporting facilities, and interactions between tourists and the local community. Meanwhile, documentation was obtained from government archives, destination management reports, scientific publications, field photographs, and various documents related to heritage area development. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to obtain comprehensive information while enhancing the credibility of the research findings through data triangulation [29].

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [30]. The analysis began with a data condensation process involving the selection, simplification, and grouping of information based on research themes. The data were then presented in the form of narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate the interpretation process. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions through an iterative interpretation process until a comprehensive understanding of millennial tourists' motivations for visiting the Gresik Old Town area was achieved.

To ensure the validity of the research findings, the principle of trustworthiness which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was applied, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba [31]. Data credibility was achieved through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking with several informants. Transferability is achieved by providing a detailed description of the research context, thereby enabling readers to assess the applicability of the research findings to other contexts. Dependability is maintained through documentation of the entire research process, while confirmability is ensured by verifying that all interpretations are based on empirical data collected during the study. Consequently, the research findings are expected to possess a high level of reliability and provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations driving millennial tourists to visit the Gresik Old Town area.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis yielded four main themes that explain millennial tourists' motivations for visiting the Gresik Old Town Area, namely (1) the search for historical and cultural experiences, (2) the influence of social media on visitation decisions, (3) the desire to have authentic experiences, and (4) expectations regarding the development of heritage destinations. These four themes are interrelated in shaping tourists' motivations for choosing the Gresik Old Town Area as a travel destination.

Seeking Historical and Cultural Experiences

Interview results show that most millennial tourists visit the Gresik Old Town area because they want an experience different from that offered by modern tourist destinations. They are interested in learning about Gresik's trading history, the development of Islam, and the historic buildings that still retain their original character. Tourists not only enjoy the area's physical beauty but also seek to understand the historical significance inherent in each site they visit. One informant said,

“When you come here, it's not just to take photos, but to learn how Gresik used to be a bustling port city. It feels different from a typical tourist trip.”

These findings indicate that tourists' motivations are driven not only by recreational needs but also by a desire to gain educational and cultural experiences. This aligns with the concept of heritage tourism, which explains that tourists choose historical destinations because they seek authentic experiences while expanding their knowledge of a region's identity [.....]. The results of this study also support the findings of Carreira et al. [.....], who state that historical value and authenticity are important factors in shaping the tourism experience in cultural heritage areas.

Digital Media as a Travel Motivation

The second theme shows that social media plays a very significant role in shaping the motivations of millennial tourists. Nearly all informants learned about the Gresik Old Town area through Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or posts by content creators. One informant explained,

“At first, I saw a TikTok video about Gresik Old Town. After seeing how interesting the atmosphere was, I finally invited my friends to come here.”

Social media serves not only as a source of information

but also shapes tourists' expectations of the destination they plan to visit. Visuals of old buildings, historic alleys, and local community activities help foster positive perceptions before tourists arrive in person

This finding supports the research by Sari et al. [.....], which explains that millennial tourists tend to use digital media as their primary reference when choosing travel destinations. The study's results also show that electronic word-of-mouth serves as a factor that strengthens the image of heritage destinations, thereby increasing interest in visiting them.

Authentic Experience as the Main Attraction

The next theme shows that millennial travelers value authentic experiences more than modern amenities. They are drawn to strolling through historic alleys, interacting with locals, visiting religious sites, and enjoying traditional cuisine all of which are part of the identity of Gresik's Old Town. One informant remarked,

“What's interesting is that the atmosphere still feels authentic. We can see old buildings, meet the locals, and try traditional foods that have been around for a long time.”

These authentic experiences provide an emotional value that is hard to find at man-made tourist destinations. Travelers feel a connection between history, culture, and the daily lives of the community that continues to this day. This finding reinforces Timothy's [.....] view that authenticity is one of the key factors determining the success of heritage destinations. The higher travelers' perception of a region's authenticity, the higher the quality of the travel experience they receive.

Expectations for Heritage Tourism Development

In addition to revealing the motivations behind their visits, this study also identified tourists' expectations regarding the development of the Gresik Old Town area. Most of the informants expressed a desire for more comprehensive historical information, professional tour guides, additional interpretive signs, and the regular hosting of cultural festivals. According to one of the informants,

“It would be a shame if only the buildings were restored. It would be much more interesting if each site had a story that visitors could read or have explained by a guide.”

These expectations indicate that tourists want not only improvements in infrastructure but also enhancements in the quality of cultural heritage interpretation. Good information will help tourists understand the historical value of the area, thereby making their travel experience more meaningful. These findings are consistent with UNESCO [.....], which emphasizes that heritage tourism development must integrate conservation, cultural interpretation, and community participation in order to create sustainable tourism experiences.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that millennial tourists' motivation to visit the Gresik Old Town area stems from the interaction between personal factors and destination characteristics. This motivation does not arise in isolation but is shaped by experiences, perceptions, digital information, and the cultural values inherent in the heritage area. These findings indicate that millennial tourists' behavior is no longer dominated solely by a recreational orientation but has shifted toward the pursuit of meaningful tourism experiences.

This shift reflects a paradigm shift in tourism consumption—from simply enjoying tourist attractions to a process of gaining experiences that provide educational, emotional, and social value. This reinforces the Push and Pull Motivation theory, which explains that a person's decision to travel results from the interaction between internal drives and the external attractions of a destination [.....].

In the context of the Gresik Old Town area, internal factors are evident in tourists' desire to learn about history, broaden their cultural horizons, and gain new experiences not found in modern tourist destinations. Meanwhile, external factors are manifested through the presence of historic buildings, religious sites, local community activities, and historical narratives that remain alive in daily life.

These findings show that the appeal of heritage lies not only in physical aspects such as old buildings, but also in symbolic value and cultural identity, which can foster an emotional connection between tourists and the destination. Thus, the success of a heritage destination cannot be measured solely by the number of cultural assets it possesses, but also by its ability to provide meaningful

experiences for visitors [.....].

The research findings also indicate that authenticity is a crucial factor in shaping the motivations of millennial tourists. Most informants stated that they were more interested in visiting areas that still retain their original character rather than those that have undergone excessive modernization. Tourists view the presence of historic buildings, old settlements, community traditions, and local economic activities as an integral part of the identity of Gresik's Old Town.

This perception indicates that authenticity is not only understood as the originality of physical structures but also encompasses the social, cultural, and community experiences that take place within the heritage area. These research findings support Timothy's [.....] view that authentic experiences are at the core of cultural heritage tourism because they allow tourists to directly understand the relationship between history, culture, and community life.

On the other hand, this study found that social media has become one of the dominant factors in shaping the motivations of millennial travelers. Unlike previous destination promotion strategies that relied on conventional media, most of the informants learned about the Gresik Old Town area through Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and various other digital platforms. Social media not only provides information about destinations but also shapes travelers' expectations regarding the experiences they will have during their trips. Photos, videos, and reviews from other travelers create an initial perception of the area's uniqueness, thereby sparking a desire to visit the destination. This finding reinforces the research by Sari et al. [.....], which explains that millennial travelers rely heavily on digital information sources in their travel decision-making process.

However, the results of this study offer a broader perspective than previous research. Social media serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a space for constructing meaning around heritage destinations. Tourists form expectations about the atmosphere of the area, the activities available, and even the historical value they will gain before they actually visit the location. In other words, the digital experience becomes part of the overall tourist experience, meaning that the actual journey begins the moment travelers access information through social media. This phenomenon demonstrates that managing heritage destinations in the digital age requires

communication strategies that focus not only on promotion but also on conveying historical narratives and cultural identity in an engaging manner.

The results of this study also show that millennial tourists tend to seek out participatory experiences. They not only want to see historic buildings, but also want to understand the stories behind them, interact with local communities, participate in cultural activities, and enjoy traditional cuisine that is part of the region's identity. These findings suggest that meaningful travel experiences are those that engage travelers both emotionally and intellectually. Therefore, historical interpretation is a key element in the development of heritage destinations. Information boards, interpretive museums, tour guides, and digital technologies such as augmented reality can serve as tools to enhance travelers' experiences while deepening their understanding of the area's historical significance.

From a destination management perspective, the findings of this study highlight that the revitalization of heritage areas cannot focus solely on the conservation of physical structures. Preservation efforts must be integrated with the development of tourism experiences that meet the needs of the millennial generation. The revitalization of these areas should be directed toward creating comfortable public spaces, organizing regular cultural activities, strengthening the local community's creative economy, and developing digital technology-based historical interpretation. This approach allows heritage areas to maintain their historical value while enhancing their appeal as tourist destinations that remain relevant in today's world.

The findings of this study also show that the motivations of millennial tourists are closely linked to the concept of a sustainable tourism experience. Tourists express appreciation for areas that are able to preserve their historical character without disrupting the lives of local communities. They view the presence of traditional economic activities, local cultural practices, and the preservation of historic buildings as integral parts of the tourism experience that cannot be replaced by modern destination development. This perspective demonstrates that the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of tourism need not be viewed as two conflicting interests but can work synergistically when managed through a community-based approach (community-based heritage tourism).

Compared to previous studies, which have largely treated tourist motivation as a variable influencing satisfaction or the intention to revisit [4], [6], this study offers a different perspective. Tourist motivation is understood as a social construct formed through the interaction between digital experiences, historical value, the authenticity of the area, and the involvement of the local community. Thus, motivation is viewed not only as an individual psychological factor but also as the result of tourists' interpretation of a destination's cultural identity. This perspective broadens the study of tourist motivation in the context of heritage tourism, particularly in historic areas undergoing revitalization, such as Gresik's Old Town.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the main appeal of the Gresik Old Town area lies not only in the presence of historic buildings, but also in the area's ability to provide an authentic, educational, and meaningful experience for millennial tourists. Therefore, future strategies for developing heritage areas should focus on strengthening historical narratives, improving the quality of cultural interpretation, creatively utilizing digital media, and empowering local communities as an integral part of the tourism experience. This approach is expected to enhance the competitiveness of the Gresik Old Town area as a heritage destination while preserving the sustainability of its cultural values.

Conclusion

This study shows that millennial tourists' motivation for visiting the Gresik Old Town area is influenced not only by the desire to travel but also by the need to have authentic, educational, and meaningful experiences. Historical attractions, cultural richness, the area's atmosphere which still retains its original character and interactions with the local community are the main factors shaping tourists' decisions to visit. In addition, social media plays a significant role in shaping initial perceptions of the destination and driving tourists' interest in visiting heritage areas.

The research findings also indicate that the tourism experience in heritage areas is shaped by a combination of tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Tourists not only appreciate the presence of historic buildings but also value historical narratives, community traditions, local economic activities, and the atmosphere of the area, which still reflects the identity of Gresik's Old

Town. Thus, the motivations of millennial tourists result from the interplay between personal factors, digital experiences, and destination characteristics that can provide a comprehensive cultural experience.

The findings of this study confirm that the development of the Gresik Old Town area as a heritage tourism destination should focus on creating tourism experiences that are more interpretive, participatory, and community-based. The preservation of historic buildings must be integrated with engaging historical narratives, the use of digital technology, and the empowerment of local communities as part of the tourism experience. This approach is expected to enhance the destination's appeal while preserving the historical and cultural values of the Gresik Old Town area.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in the Gresik Old Town area; therefore, the findings reflect the motivations of millennial tourists in the context of that specific destination and cannot yet be generalized to other heritage areas. Second, the study involved only millennial tourists and a few stakeholders; thus, it does not yet reflect the perspectives of tourists from other generational groups or all parties involved in destination management.

Furthermore, the study employed a qualitative approach focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of tourists' experiences and perceptions. Consequently, this study did not quantify the extent of the influence of each factor shaping tourist motivation, as would be possible through a quantitative approach.

Recommendations

Future research is recommended to expand the study's scope by comparing several heritage sites in Indonesia, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of tourists' motivations across various destination characteristics. Subsequent studies could also involve a more diverse sample of respondents based on age group, tourist origin, and socioeconomic background to obtain a broader perspective.

In addition, future research could employ a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative methods to explain tourists' experiences while testing the relationships between variables. Studies on the role of social media, digital technology, and local

community involvement in heritage tourism development also need to be conducted to generate recommendations better suited to the needs of destination management in the digital age.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study contributes to the development of research on tourist motivation in the context of heritage tourism by demonstrating that the motivation of millennial tourists is influenced not only by push factors and pull factors but also by digital experiences, destination authenticity, and interactions with local communities. These findings expand the application of tourism motivation theory and enrich our understanding of tourist behavior at cultural heritage destinations, particularly in emerging heritage areas such as Gresik's Old Town.

The research results provide practical implications for local governments and destination managers to develop the Gresik Old Town area through an approach that is more oriented toward the tourist experience. Efforts to preserve the area need to be integrated with strengthening historical interpretation, utilizing digital media, improving the quality of tourism facilities, and empowering local communities so they can create authentic, attractive, and sustainable heritage tourism experiences for millennial tourists.

Contributions by Researchers

All authors actively contributed to every stage of the research. The first author was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. The second author contributed to the development of the methodology, validation of the research results, and review and editing of the manuscript. The third author was involved in supervising the research, interpreting the results, and refining the manuscript until it was ready for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there were no conflicts of interest in the conduct of the research, the preparation of the manuscript, or the publication of this article. The entire research process was conducted independently, without any influence from any party that could potentially affect the results or interpretation of the research.

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was approved by the [Institution/Board Name] Ethics Committee under approval number [Approval Number]. All participants provided informed consent, and the research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines to ensure confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary participation.

INFORMED CONSENT

All participants in this study provided informed consent prior to their involvement. They were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research, and their participation was voluntary.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Access to the data may be subject to ethical or legal restrictions.

REFERENCES

In this journal, references must include at least 40 sources, with a minimum of 80% being primary references such as journal articles (national journals ranked minimum SINTA 2 and/or reputable international journals indexed in Scopus, Emerald), proceedings, dissertations, theses, research books, and papers. The references should be current, preferably from the last 5 years. Quotations from scientific papers should not exceed 30% of the bibliography. The bibliography writing format follows the IEE. For works with more than two authors, use et al. For non-English publications, provide the original title followed by an English translation in square brackets. To ensure consistency and proper formatting, use reference management software such as Mendeley, Zotero, or EndNote.

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