

Gamification as a Cultural Tourism Marketing Strategy to Improve Generation Z Engagement at the Ronggowarsito Central Java Museum

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Abstract

Gamification has emerged as an innovative strategy that applies game design elements in non-game contexts to increase user engagement, motivation, and participation. In the tourism sector, gamification has gained increasing attention as a marketing approach capable of creating interactive, immersive, and memorable visitor experiences, particularly among Generation Z, who prefer digital, technology-driven, and participatory activities. Despite its growing application across various tourism settings, limited research has examined the role of gamification in cultural tourism marketing within regional museums. This study investigates how gamification enhances visitor engagement in the context of cultural tourism marketing at the Ronggowarsito Museum. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews with museum managers and visitors, participant observation of visitor activities, and analysis of museum promotional materials. The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that gamification elements, including interactive challenges, reward systems, mission-based exploration of museum collections, and digital media integration, significantly increase visitor engagement by encouraging active participation, strengthening cultural learning experiences, and stimulating social media sharing behavior. These results demonstrate that gamification extends beyond entertainment and serves as an effective cultural tourism marketing strategy for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of museums in the digital era, particularly in engaging Generation Z visitors.

Keywords: Gamification; Cultural Tourism Marketing; Generation Z; Ronggowarsito Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Tourist behavior changes and digital technology advances have transformed the tourism industry. Tourist destinations are expected to provide interesting, memorable, and interactive experiences that encourage visitors to actively engage in the tourism process, in addition to being places for recreation. This trend is particularly significant for Generation Z, a demographic generation that has grown up in a highly connected digital environment. Generation Z tends to prefer immersive, technology-driven, and experience-oriented activities over traditional ways of consuming information. The tourism sector has seen significant transformation in response to advances in digital technology and changing visitor behaviour. Tourism destinations are increasingly expected to offer interactive, memorable, and participatory experiences that encourage visitors to actively participate in tourism activities (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Morrison, 2019).

Cultural tourism is one of the most important industries in terms of sustaining cultural heritage and improving local identity. Cultural tourism is a vital way to preserve cultural heritage and reinforce local identity and community values (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Museums serve not only as repositories of historical artifacts but also as educational institutions that promote public understanding of culture and history (Istina, 2022; Widiyanto, 2025). But many museums still struggle to attract younger audiences due to the perception that museums are static, traditional, and not as engaging as modern digital entertainment platforms. Thus, museum managers must rapidly adopt creative strategies that can boost visitor engagement without compromising instructional goals.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

Author	Focus	Findings	Research Gap
Patricia (2023)	Gen Z & Museum Wayang	Visitor intention	No gamification aspect
Rahman et al. (2018)	AR Museum	Visitor experience	No tourism marketing perspective
Setyaningsih (2025)	Museum-date trend	Social media promotion	No visitor engagement analysis
This Study	Gamification + Gen Z + Museum Ronggowarsito	Visitor engagement and cultural tourism marketing	Novel contribution

Source: Primary Data 2026

Existing research has shown that museums encounter difficulties in engaging younger audiences because of the perception that museums are less interactive in comparison to modern digital entertainment outlets (Valentino et al., 2023; Setyaningsih, 2025). The museum has a range of collections covering geology, history, archaeology, ethnography, and regional culture and heritage. Even with its abundance of cultural resources, attracting younger tourists remains a challenge. Gen Z visitors, as digital natives, often seek experiences that combine education, entertainment, social sharing, and interaction. Therefore, in order to stay relevant in the digital age, museums need to rethink how cultural material is delivered and displayed.

One strategy that has received increasing attention in the fields of tourism and cultural heritage management is gamification. Gamification is the use of game-design elements in non-game contexts. These elements include challenges, rewards, accomplishments, competition, and interactive missions. According to earlier research, gamification has been shown to enhance user motivation, engagement, enjoyment, and participation across a variety of sectors, including marketing, education, tourism, and cultural heritage. Gamification is the use of game-design elements in non-game contexts to increase motivation, participation, and engagement (Deterding et al., 2011). Studies have shown that gamification can improve user experiences in educational, tourism, and cultural heritage contexts (Hamari et al., 2014; Yolthasart et al., 2024).

The research of museums and cultural tourism has generally concentrated on the revitalization of museums, visitor satisfaction, the educational roles, destination branding, and digital advertising strategies. Although there have been studies on museum revitalization, visitor experience, and digital tourism promotion (Rahman et al., 2018; Noftianto, 2025; Patricia, 2023), there has been little research on gamification as a cultural tourism marketing strategy to improve Generation Z engagement in regional museums. Moreover, research on the use of gamification in cultural heritage settings has demonstrated positive outcomes regarding visitor motivation, engagement, and educational potential. However, instead of considering gamification as a comprehensive cultural tourist marketing strategy, much of the current study has been dedicated to technical implementation or educational effects. In addition, there is still limited empirical research on the relationship between gamification and Generation Z in regional museums in Indonesia.

This limitation indicates a significant research gap. Although the importance of interactive technologies and visitor-centered experiences has been previously discussed, very few studies have explicitly explored the extent to which gamification is used as a

strategic marketing tool that can increase the engagement of Generation Z visitors to cultural tourism destinations. Moreover, regional museums are underrepresented in the academic discourse as the existing research tends to focus on museums in major metropolitan areas or internationally recognized cultural sites. Thus, there is still a lack of knowledge on how gamification could enhance visitor engagement and help regional cultural tourism organizations such as Museum Jawa Tengah Ronggowarsito to achieve their marketing goals.

The concept of involvement has become increasingly important in the tourism marketing literature. Visitor engagement extends beyond simple visitation to include behavioural exchanges before, during, and after the tourism experience and also includes emotional involvement, active participation, and cognitive investment. Generation Z often shows involvement through digital participation, social media sharing, content production, and peer-to-peer contact. Museum managers eager to enhance visitor experiences and boost destination competitiveness in a more digital tourist era can learn a lot from knowing how gamification influences engagement.

The current study is distinctive in that it examines the use of gamification as a marketing strategy for cultural tourism, not simply as a technological innovation, or educational instrument, but rather as a means of increasing the engagement of Generation Z within a local museum setting. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on museum tourism, visitor engagement, and cultural tourism marketing in Indonesia, with a focus on the Museum Jawa Tengah Ronggowarsito. The study also provides useful recommendations for museum management in creating visitor-centered strategies that integrate digital innovation with cultural preservation.

This study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends the application of gamification theory to the field of cultural tourism marketing by demonstrating how game design elements can enhance visitor engagement in a museum setting. Second, it addresses a gap in previous studies by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of gamification in attracting and engaging Generation Z visitors in a regional museum, a context that has received limited scholarly attention. Third, the study offers practical insights for museum managers by identifying key gamification elements, including interactive challenges, reward systems, mission-based exploration, and digital media integration, that can strengthen cultural learning experiences, increase visitor participation, and improve the competitiveness of museums in the digital tourism era.

Based on the background above, this study aims to explore the role of gamification as a cultural tourism marketing technique in increasing the engagement of Generation Z at

Museum Jawa Tengah Ronggowarsito. The study specifically aims to investigate how Generation Z visitors perceive gamification elements, how these elements influence visitor participation and cultural learning experiences, and how gamification improves the museum's overall appeal as a destination for cultural tourism in the digital age.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze the role of gamification as a cultural tourist marketing technique to increase participation of Generation Z at the Ronggowarsito Central Java Museum. The qualitative approach was selected because it provides comprehensive insight into the experience, views, and interpretations of the participants regarding the implementation and potential use of gamification in a museum tourism environment. To gain an in-depth understanding of visitors' experiences and perceptions of gamification in the context of a museum, a qualitative case study approach was adopted (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Figure 1. Generation Z Visitors Exploring Museum Collections



Source: Primary Data 2026

The research was conducted at Ronggowarsito Museum of Central Java. This museum is one of the largest cultural and historical museums in Central Java, Indonesia. Volunteers with relevant knowledge of museum management and visiting were selected through purposive sampling. Informants were museum managers in charge of visitor services, educational programs or promotional activities and Generation Z tourists between 17 and 27 years old who had visited the museum in the previous twelve months. Additional supporting data were drawn from promotional materials, social media posts, museum publications, and institutional documents related to visitor engagement programs. The data

were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Table 2. Informant Profile

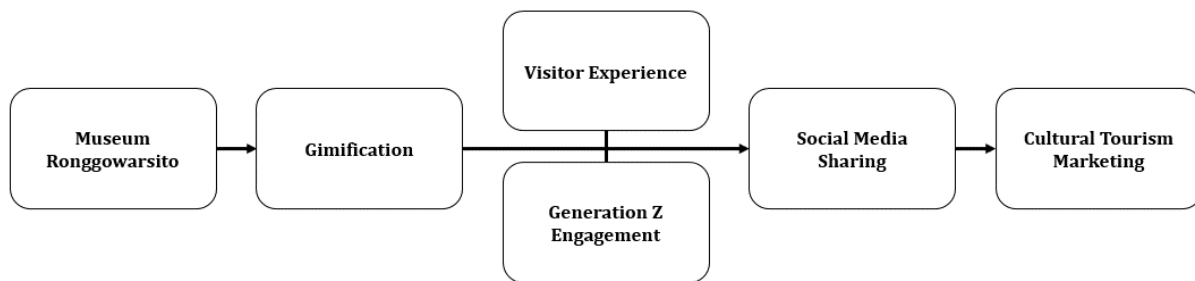
Code	Category	Age	Role
GZ-01	Visitor	20	Student
GZ-02	Visitor	22	Student
GZ-03	Visitor	24	Employee
MM-01	Manager	40	Museum Manager
MM-02	Manager	35	Promotion Officer

Source: Primary Data 2026

Data collection methods included documentation studies, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' views about their experiences of museums, interactive activities, digital engagement strategies, and the potential role of gamification to increase visitor participation. Visitor behavior, patterns of interaction, use of museum facilities, and reactions to current promotional and instructional initiatives were all observed. As a supplement to the findings from the interviews and observations, documentation analysis was used to examine images, advertisements, visitor information material, and social media posts made by the museum. Triangulation techniques were used to improve trustworthiness by comparing data sources from interviews, observations, and documentation (Patton, 2015).

The gathered data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which consists of data condensation, data display and drafting, and verification of conclusion. Data condensation involved selection, simplification, and organization of relevant data from various sources. Thematic categorization was then used to display the data in a systematic manner so as to be easily interpreted and compared among participants. The last phase consisted of drawing conclusions and confirming new trends in gamification, tourist interaction, and marketing tactics of cultural tourism. To ensure the reliability of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing the interview results, observational findings, and documentary evidence. Source triangulation was also employed to increase the validity and reliability of the research findings by involving participants of different backgrounds, i.e., museum administration, and Generation Z visitors.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Research Findings



Source: Primary Data 2026

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

FINDING

1. Generation Z's Perception of Museum Experiences

Table 3. Coding Result

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Museum Is Boring	Need For Interaction	Gen Z Perception
Want Challenges	Active Participation	Gamification Engagement
Easier To Remember	Experiential Learning	Cultural Learning
Share On Instagram	Digital Advocacy	Tourism Marketing

Source: Primary Data 2026

The findings indicate that Generation Z visitors regard museums as important cultural institutions for the preservation of local identity and historical knowledge. Participants, however, consistently described museums as environments that often depend on passive learning strategies, such as reading information panels and looking at objects without meaningful interaction. Although many visitors appreciated the educational value of the Ronggowarsito Central Java Museum, many also said that traditional exhibition methods were less appealing than the digital entertainment platforms they often use. Several informants emphasized that interactive activities that encourage participation and exploration make museum visits more enjoyable.

Figure 3. Interview Observation at Ronggowarsito Museum



Source: Primary Data 2026

The findings suggest that Generation Z is now more concerned with the quality of the experience when choosing a travel destination, rather than the number of attractions. Immersion, participation and emotional connection are becoming increasingly important dimensions of contemporary tourism. Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy paradigm, which argues that consumers are looking for memorable experiences rather than simply consuming information, is consistent with this finding. One challenge in the museum environment is to convert visitors from passive observers to active participants. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the expectations of Generation Z to develop creative cultural tourism marketing strategies that can improve tourist satisfaction and engagement. These findings are consistent with the Experience Economy view that tourists are looking for more immersive and memorable experiences instead of passive information consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 2019). Similar observations were made by Haqqi (2025) who noted Generation Z prefers interactive cultural experiences that integrate digital engagement.

One participant stated:

"I think museums are important because they help us understand local history and culture. However, many exhibitions still feel passive because visitors mostly read information boards without much interaction." (Informant GZ-03)

Another visitor explained:

"I usually enjoy places where I can interact with the content. If museums can provide more interactive experiences, I would be more interested in visiting regularly." (Informant GZ-07)

2. Gamification as an Interactive Visitor Engagement Tool

The paper reports that gamification has a great potential for increasing visitor engagement in the context of museums. Participants responded positively to a range of gamification features including interactive missions, collection-based tasks, reward systems,

digital badges, achievement levels, and point-accumulation processes. According to the informants, these elements arouse the curiosity and the motivation of tourists to explore the museum collections more deeply. Visitors do not simply wander through halls of display but perform tasks and learn about museum objects.

The findings are in line with previous studies that gamification can increase participation, motivation, and visitors' engagement in tourism environments (Hamari et al., 2014; Tongpaeng et al., 2024). Gamification elements such as rewards and challenges motivate users to stay actively engaged throughout the experience (Deterding et al., 2011). The results indicate that gamification enhances behavioral engagement by increasing the level of involvement, focus, and exploration activities during the museum visit. Participants say that taking part in challenge-based activities makes them feel happy and a sense of accomplishment, motivating them to engage more with exhibitions. These results are consistent with previous research suggesting that gamification has the potential to increase user engagement and motivation in non-game settings. From the perspective of tourism marketing, gamification provides an opportunity to transform traditional cultural tourism experiences into interactive experiences aligned with the preferences of digital native audiences. So, gamification is a strategic tool for increasing tourists' engagement and destination appeal as well as a technology breakthrough.

Figure 4. Interview Activities with Museum Management



Source: Primary Data 2026

One participant commented:

"If there were missions or challenges that required us to find certain collections and answer questions, I would definitely spend more time exploring the museum." (Informant GZ-05)

Another visitor explained:

"Collecting points or badges would make the visit feel more exciting because there is something to achieve." (Informant GZ-09)

One of museum manager also mentioned:

"Interactive activities could help visitors become more involved instead of only observing the collections." (Museum Manager-01)

3. Gamification and Cultural Learning Experiences

Another significant finding relates to the way in which gamification improves cultural learning opportunities. The interactive challenges, participants said, made the museum material easier to understand, remember and use in real-life situations. Rather than passively absorbing knowledge, visitors actively searched for clues, analyzed historical accounts, and made connections between cultural pieces and larger social and historical contexts. This procedure increased emotional and cognitive engagement in the museum tour. This finding aligns with previous studies that have shown that gamified environments can enhance learning retention and cultural interpretation among museum visitors (Galindo-Durán, 2025; Rahman et al., 2023). Interactive learning mechanisms enable visitors to actively build knowledge, rather than passively receive information.

Figure 5. Preview of Virtual Museum Game



Source: Primary Data 2026

Results demonstrate that gamification is effective in merging entertainment value and educational objectives. After completing tasks and receiving prizes, participants said they were more interested in learning about the history and cultural heritage of the area. This result demonstrates how gamification can contribute to the support of experiential learning by fostering active engagement in the process of knowledge acquisition. These

results are consistent with recent museum research emphasizing the importance of interactive interpretation in improving visitor learning outcomes. Furthermore, gamification helps preserve culture by making heritage knowledge more accessible and relevant to younger generations. Museums can play a role in education and increase public awareness of cultural heritage by offering enjoyable and interactive learning experiences.

One participant informed:

"Learning history becomes easier when it feels like solving a challenge rather than reading long explanations." (Informant GZ-02)

Another visitor explained:

"I tend to remember information better when I actively search for it during a game or challenge." (Informant GZ-11)

4. Gamification as a Cultural Tourism Marketing Strategy

The last theme highlights the strategic role of gamification in marketing for cultural tourism. The results indicate that when Generation Z visitors have unique and engaging museum experiences, they are more likely to share their experiences on social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, and X. Participants also frequently mentioned that they intended to write about difficulties, successes, and interactive activities as part of their digital lifestyle. Such behavior raises online visibility and extends the museum experience beyond physical visits.

Sharing through social media is an important form of electronic word-of-mouth marketing. Gamification can create positive visitor experiences that can increase user-generated content, raise awareness of the place, and influence prospective travelers on social media. Compared to traditional museum visits, participants agreed that interactive experiences are more likely to be suggested to peers. The research results show that gamification can be a strategic marketing tool through generating memorable experiences that encourage digital engagement and advocacy. The visitors' propensity to share their experiences on social media is consistent with the concept of consumer engagement and electronic word-of-mouth communication (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Similar results have been found in studies on Generation Z tourism behavior and destination promotion using user-generated content (Masnadi et al., 2024; Patricia, 2023).

Figure 6. Preview of Virtual Museum Game



Source: Primary Data 2026

In addition, the use of gamification is consistent with modern tourism marketing approaches emphasizing experiential value, co-creation, and involvement. Gamification helps to actively engage the guests in the tourism experience, rather than viewing the guests as passive consumers. This approach is particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose travel decisions are strongly influenced by peer suggestions and digital interactions. Consequently, the gamification strategy of the Ronggowarsito Central Java Museum has the potential to increase visitor engagement, improve destination branding, and increase the museum's competitiveness in the cultural tourism industry.

Overall, the results suggest that gamification has significant potential to enhance the participation of Generation Z in museum settings. Gamification can help to achieve cultural tourism marketing goals by integrating interactive experiences, educational content, and digital engagement to stimulate emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. The findings suggest that museums can remain relevant in the digital age by adopting visitor-centered strategies that balance technological innovation and cultural preservation.

One participant mentioned:

"If the museum had interesting challenges, I would probably upload them to Instagram Stories or TikTok because it would look fun." (Informant GZ-06)

Another visitor added:

"I often visit places recommended by my friends on social media. Interactive museum activities would make me more likely to recommend the museum to others." (Informant GZ-10)

One of museum manager also explained:

"Social media exposure generated by visitors can become an important promotional channel for the museum." (Museum Manager-02)

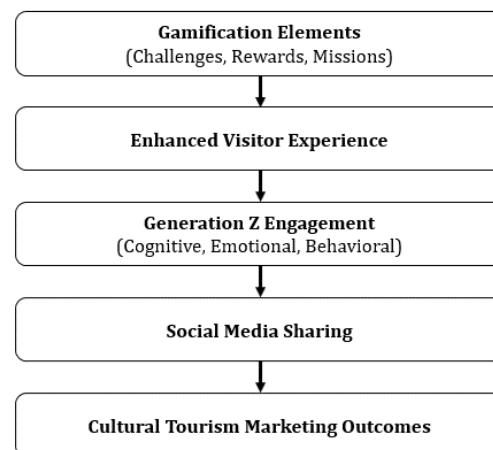
Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Findings
Generation Z's Perception of Museum Experiences	Interactive Expectations	Visitors expect museums to provide participatory and technology-based experiences
	Educational Value	Museums remain important sources of cultural and historical knowledge
Gamification as an Interactive Visitor Engagement Tool	Motivation and Participation	Gamification encourages visitors to explore museum collections more actively
	Visitor Enjoyment	Challenges and rewards increase enjoyment and involvement
Gamification and Cultural Learning Experiences	Experiential Learning	Visitors learn cultural content through exploration and interaction
	Cultural Appreciation	Interactive activities strengthen appreciation of local heritage
Gamification as a Cultural Tourism Marketing Strategy	Social Media Sharing	Visitors are motivated to share experiences online
	Electronic Word-of-Mouth	Positive experiences encourage recommendations to peers

Source: Primary Data 2026

CONCLUSION

Figure 6. Conceptual Model Findings



Source: Primary Data 2026

This study concludes that gamification can be an effective cultural tourism marketing strategy to increase the engagement of Generation Z in the Ronggowarsito Central Java

Museum. Interactive challenges, mission-based exploration, reward systems, and digital participation are integrated to contribute to behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement while supporting cultural learning experiences and destination attractiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, this research advances the literature on cultural tourism marketing by showing that gamification is not only an educational tool, but also a strategic tool that links visitor experience, engagement, and digital advocacy. The results also provide support for incorporating experience economy and visitor engagement perspectives in the context of museum tourism. These results go beyond previous studies on gamification (Deterding et al., 2011; Hamari et al., 2014) by showing its role as a cultural tourism marketing strategy rather than as an educational tool only.

In practice, museum managers are encouraged to develop visitor-centered gamification initiatives, such as QR-code treasure hunts, digital badges, achievement systems, and social-media based challenges. Such strategies can enhance the visitor experience, encourage user-generated content, and increase the museum's exposure to younger audiences.

This study is limited to a single museum context and is primarily focused on Generation Z visitors. Future studies may compare several museums, investigate the effectiveness of specific gamification technologies, or adopt mixed-method approaches to examine the relationship between gamification, revisit intention, destination loyalty, and long-term cultural engagement.

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