

Cruise Tourism

Subjects: Others

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Cruise tourism is one of the leading industries suffering from covid-19 recently. Cruise tourism uses cruise ships with elegant services and various entertainment facilities as a means of transportation for scenic coastal tourist destinations. In particular, in accordance with the recent trend of increasing the size of ships, cruise lines have expanded the size and facilities of ships, and have continued to increase the maximum number of boarding ships. The cruise travel process and intensive entertainment system turned out to be a tourism structure vulnerable to the covid-19 pandemic. Will cruise tourism be extinguished? Should we prepare for the post-Pandemic cruise tourism era?

Keywords: cruise service quality ; cruise tourism ; cruise-SERVQUAL ; SERVQUAL ; covid-19

1. Introduction

Cruise tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism segments, and it has undergone significant transformation, especially in the last few decades ^{[1][2]}. Since 1990, the average annual passenger growth has reached about 6.63%, with cruise tourists increasing from 7.21 million in 2000 to 26.86 million in 2019 ^[3]. The number of passengers originating from Asia hit a record high in 2017, with 4.052 million taking ocean cruises (up 20.6%), and Asian cruise passenger numbers hit another record high in 2018 with 4.24 million (up 4.6%). In 2018, there were 28.5 million global ocean passengers, 14.8% of which were from Asia (versus 15.1% in 2017) ^[4]. The five-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of Asian port calls from 2014 to 2019 was 14%, and the five-year growth during that time was 88%, continuing an upward growth trajectory. Destinations such as Japan, mainland China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and India will show a stronger five-year CAGR and five-year growth than Asia's average ^[5]. It is time to learn more about the rapidly growing Asian cruise market.

Some believe that the expansion of disposable income and increased interest in quality of life have contributed to the steep growth of the cruise industry. Most cruise tourists are repeat customers who have had a satisfactory cruise experience and become loyal to a specific cruise brand ^{[6][7]}. The continued expansion of cruise passengers is also due to the provision of high-value cruising through the newest ships, world-class destinations, innovative ship facilities, and various onboard activities. Cruise lines design various services to meet changing customer needs ^{[8][9]}. High-value cruising refers to various special services, including cabins with excellent amenities, restaurants with various dining options, spas and wellness programs, sports and fitness, meeting rooms, Kids Zones, and wedding packages. Cruise ship service innovation has made cruise vacations more attractive and available to more target markets ^[8]. Cruise lines should create sustainable demand and loyal customers by differentiating the service quality of the onboard experience. Research by Li and Petrick ^[10] demonstrated that customer retention should be improved by providing excellent service quality and unique experiences.

Academic research in the cruise field has led to quantitative and qualitative growth since 2010 ^[11]. Papatnassis and Bekmann analysed papers published in a total of 56 overseas academic journals from 1983 to 2009 and divided them into four categories according to their research subjects. They found that despite the diversity of research methods and topics, scholars tend to focus on business, management, and economics. Vega-Muñoz et al. ^[12] analysed 320 papers in 142 journals between 1980 and 2018 and determined that the cruise industry is a subject of research worthy of various approaches. Cruise tourism research has been fragmented because of its multidisciplinary nature and its relatively young status ^[12]. Moreover, quantitative studies covering quality of service, service attributes, and perceived value ^{[8][10][13][14][15][16]} have been conducted, and a qualitative approach to these variables has also been taken. In addition, qualitative research into cruise lines has been conducted on limited topics such as brands, crisis management, and corporate sustainability ^{[17][18][19][20]}.

The sustainability of the cruise industry has attracted strong scepticism, with discussions centred on its corporate social responsibility, environmental issues, economic contributions, and adverse effects on the port of call ^{[21][22][23][24]}. As customers are increasingly interested in the ethical and environmental aspects of products and services ^[25], many scholars believe that the future challenges of the cruise industry are related to sustainable development ^{[22][26]}. The Cruise

Line International Association (CLIA) [27] is committed to contributing to the port of call in the form of ‘partnerships with the local governments, staggered arrivals and departures, excursion diversification, shoreside power, and local passenger spending’. It is encouraging cruise lines to invest more than USD 22 billion in energy-efficient ships and technologies in order to achieve the goal of reducing carbon emissions by 40% by the year 2030, as compared to 2008 emission levels. In particular, the cruise industry [24], which is already in a crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, must ‘improve its service process to improve its reputation’ [28]; accordingly, it should seek to enhance its image through improved service quality, develop innovative management systems and strategies, and promote sustainability.

2. Cruise Service Quality

Service quality is recognized as a key determinant of business success and a major method of gaining competitive edge. With the rapid increase in the capacity of the cruise industry, cruise lines should reconsider differentiation [23], and as service quality is an important variable in creating customer loyalty, it is important to derive a service improvement strategy by measuring service quality.

According to Parasuraman et al., service quality is defined as a ‘the consumer’s judgment about an entity’s overall excellence or superiority’ of the service; the authors use the concept of ‘perceived service quality’, which differs from objective quality [29]. Perceived quality, unlike objective or practical quality, is more abstract than specific product properties and similar to attitude; it is an overall evaluation by the customer. Parasuraman et al. [29] proposed SERVQUAL (see Table 1) as a perceived service quality measurement tool. Their SERVQUAL model adopts a disconfirmation paradigm in which the quality of service consists of five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. Many researchers have tried to transform service quality to suit the hospitality and tourism environment [30], testing the SERVQUAL framework in restaurants [31], lodging [32], destinations [33], and outbound guide package tours [34]. Industry-adjusted measures include HISTOQUAL for historic houses [35], ECOSERV for eco-tourism service quality [36], and Cruise’s SERV-PERVAL [14] to measure holiday experience satisfaction (HOLSAT) [37].

Table 1. SERVQUAL Model.

Dimension	Contents
Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Assurance	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
Empathy	Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers

Adapted from [29].

In an empirical study of Caribbean cruise passengers by Petrick, four measurement items (excellent quality, reliability, dependencies, and consistency) of SERV-PERVAL, a concept that emphasizes the reliability items in the SERVQUAL model, were used. The most suitable model for predicting behaviour was the quality model, rather than the satisfaction model or perceived value model [14].

Kwortnik [20] expanded ‘Bitner’s service scope framework’ [38] by analysing customer data on an online cruise discussion board (CruiseCritic.com) to investigate the impact of cruise line service environments, specifically considering passengers’ emotions, meaning-making, and onboard behaviours. The physical environment of a ship, called the shipscape, was divided into (a) ambient environmental factors (scents, sounds, cleanliness, lighting, music, temperature, etc.); (b) design elements (decoration, colour, furnishings, layout, size, entertainment architecture, etc.); and (c) social factors (crowding, queues, cruise cues, crew co-working production, and friendship). Cruise customers who primarily pursue emotional enjoyment are consciously and unconsciously observing the environmental factors of cruise ships [20], and these physical environments will be important determinants of customer psychology and behaviour [39].

Lobo used the SERVQUAL scale of [29] for luxury cruise line passengers to measure the difference between expectation and performance of service quality and to explore the relationship between overall satisfaction and behaviour [40]. Li and Petrick empirically verified the impact relationships among quality, value, satisfaction, investment size, and alternatives on online panels of cruise experiences that affect customer loyalty [13]. Petrick analysed differences in cruise experiences, price sensitivity, monetary price, behavioural price, perceived quality, perceived value, overall satisfaction, word of mouth, and repurchase intention by segmenting Caribbean cruise passengers according to their perceptions of the cruise line’s reputation [41]. Yi et al. [42] explored Asian cruise travellers’ perceived value, in terms of satisfaction and behavioural

intention, of the travel experience. The perceived value was measured on a SERV-PERVAL scale, and the results of the study showed that the perceived value of the cruise experience affects travel satisfaction and behavioural intention [42]. Chua et al. [8] used the three dimensions of service quality form developed by Brady and Cronin [43], where cruise service quality is divided into three dimensions: physical environment (physical surroundings of cruise ships), interaction (employee service), and outcome quality (benefits given to customers at a service encounter). They analysed the relationship between novelty, perceived value and satisfaction, and loyalty [8].

The quality of an interaction represents the customer's perception of crew service in service delivery [44], and the interaction between the customer and the crew is reflected in 'Service Performance', in which the customer evaluates the service experience [45]. Interactional quality can be measured with assurance (knowledge, employee courtesy, and ability to build customer trust), responsiveness (service delivery and willingness to help customers), reliability (employee's ability to accurately perform promised services), and empathy [29][43][44][46]. Outcome quality is the technical quality that determines the perceived service quality by what cruise customers received during service delivery [43]. Even though SERV-PERVAL [14] applies SERVQUAL to the cruise industry and emphasizes perceived value, this study focuses on SERVQUAL [29] because it is more commonly used.

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