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Cruise Tourism Motivations in Flux: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This systematic review analyses the main motives that push people to the cruise modal and examines how health crises and other external factors influence those motives. The study synthesizes peer reviewed articles identified in the Scopus database using a 21-year timeframe (2003-2024). Results show that travelers' decisions are influenced not only by 'traditional' incentives of comfort, novelty, and social interaction, but also by progressively evolving issues of risk, brand reputation, and health protocols. Specifically, global disruptions can radically shift what should get priority, calling for transparency, and being crisis ready. This underscores the importance of satisfaction, enjoyment and previous experiences in the continuous process of stimulating intention to cruise, yet these are increasingly determined by perceived risk and the quality of crisis management. Operational measures with healthcare quality guarantees along with consistent communications will help operators and decision-makers build traveller confidence. Uncertain times require careful plans which unite marketing innovation with technological advancements and stakeholder partnerships to maintain market demand. This systematic review builds on earlier tourism research, offering a more granular depiction of cruise travellers' shifting motivations, thereby yielding insights that can shape both theoretical perspectives and practical planning in the broader cruise tourism sector for robust future industry growth.

Keywords: Cruise tourism, passenger motivation, travel behaviour, risk perception, systematic review

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Introduction

Cruise tourism has become an increasingly popular segment of the travel industry, attracting millions of passengers worldwide each year. The expansion of cruise tourism has brought both economic benefits and environmental challenges. Economically, it has stimulated job creation, increased local revenue, and spurred infrastructure development in port cities. Many destinations have invested in modern cruise terminals, improved transportation networks, and enhanced tourist facilities to accommodate larger ships and growing passenger numbers. Over the past two decades, cruise traveller dynamics have evolved significantly, shaped by changes in consumer preferences, economic shifts, and unprecedented global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Gössling et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the motivational factors behind cruise tourism is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies and enhancing passenger experiences. Research into traveller motivations provides valuable insights into the psychological, social, and economic factors that prompt individuals to choose cruise tourism over other travel alternatives (Crompton, 1979). Motivational factors encompass a range of desires, including relaxation, exploration, novelty, and the allure of an all-inclusive experience that simplifies the complexities of travel logistics (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Previous studies have identified various motivational factors, such as relaxation, adventure, and social interaction, that influence individuals' decisions to embark on a cruise, Despite the expanding body of literature on tourism behavior, there is still a lack of focused research that systematically examines the specific motivations and decision-making processes of cruise travellers. Understanding the motivations behind cruise travel, along with the decision-making processes of cruise tourists, is crucial for cruise operators, destination stakeholders, and policymakers, especially as the industry works towards recovery and adaptation in an uncertain landscape (Papathanassis, 2017). Moreover, these motivational factors often vary across different demographic groups and travel preferences, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to cruise tourism research. Furthermore, the impact of external factors, such as the COVID-19, and other global events, on cruise passenger motivations remains an area of ongoing investigation. This study builds upon existing knowledge by adopting a holistic approach that considers the dynamic nature of cruise tourism motivations in the context of an ever-changing global landscape. This research seeks to address this limitation by carrying out a comprehensive review of the literature from 2003 to 2024, concentrating on how motivational factors and decision-making criteria have evolved during this period. By examining these factors, we can gain valuable insights into consumer behaviour and preferences within the cruise industry. Additionally, understanding passenger motivations can help cruise lines tailor their itineraries, onboard amenities, and shore excursions to better meet the evolving expectations of diverse traveller segments. Thus, the objectives of this study are:

- To examine the key motivational factors that drive individuals to choose cruise tourism
- To understand how external events impact their decision to choose cruise tourism

By examining the influence of recent global events and changing travel trends, the research seeks to provide a more comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of cruise tourism motivations. The results of this study not only enrich the academic literature but also provide valuable practical insights for cruise operators, marketers, and policymakers to refine their strategies and enhance the overall cruise experience.

Methodology

This study employs a systematic review methodology to investigate the motivational factors and decision-making processes influencing cruise tourism. A systematic review was chosen to ensure a comprehensive and transparent synthesis of the existing literature, providing a robust foundation for understanding how these factors have evolved over the past two decades. The systematic review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to enhance rigor and reproducibility (Moher et al., 2009). Scopus database was used to identify the sources. Scopus database was utilised because of its extensive collection of peer-reviewed academic literature in tourism and related disciplines. Scopus database contains over 22800 journals from over 5000 publishers globally. To identify relevant studies, a detailed search strategy was developed using combinations of key terms and Boolean operators. The search string included terms such as "cruise tourism," "traveller motivation," "decision-making," "tourist behaviour," and "risk perception," along with wildcard operators to capture variations in terminology. The search was restricted to articles published between 2003 and 2024 to ensure the inclusion of contemporary and relevant studies (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016). This search strategy was developed by authors is also in line with Jaafar et al. (2021). To ensure the relevance and quality of the studies included, we included a 21 years timeline for this study. This timeline is in accordance with Salleh et al. (2020) and Jaafar et al. (2021) where the researchers highlight a 19 years timeline is an acceptable duration to see the progress and research related to a specific subject. The emphasis was on selecting and considering peer reviewed journal articles. The articles focused on motivational factors, decision-making process or behavioral aspects of cruise travelers. However, abstracts, case reports, book series, textbooks, review articles and conference proceedings in line with the Jaafar et al. (2021) were excluded from this study. Only relevant articles published in English language were included in this study as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The inclusion & exclusion criteria

Criterion	Eligibility	Exclusion
Type of literature	Peer reviewed articles	Systematic reviews, book series, textbooks, conferences proceedings and case reports
Timeline	Between 2003-2024	Before 2003
Language	English	Non-English
Indexing	Scopus	Non-Scopus

Adapted from Shafrril et al. (2018) & Jaafar et al. (2021)

Four phases of systematic review process were used in this study. The first stage was to identify keywords through search. Trusting on past research studies and thesaurus, keywords related to this study were highlighted as shown in the previous section. At this phase, 256 articles showed up in the search. As a follow up in the second phase which was screening, 192 articles qualified to move towards the next phase. At the eligibility stage (third phase), 165 articles were carefully excluded because of their lack of on the study's objectives.

Table 2: Summary of major articles

Authors		Castillo-Manzano et al. (2022)	Zhou et al. (2023)	Martínez-Molés et al. (2022)	Radic et al. (2020)	Ali et al. (2022)	Radic et al. (2021)	Hung et al. (2024)	Tsai and Bui, (2020)	Book et al., (2023)	Hung et al., (2020)	Aras, (2023)	Lemmetyinen et al., (2016)	Yi et al. (2014)	Chua et al. (2017)	Jones, (2011	Liu et al. (2016)	Han and Hyun, (2019)
Marketing, Branding, Technology & Experience	Social media review	✓																
	Company image																	✓
	VR			✓														
	Prior experience & informativeness								✓							✓		
	Brand awareness												✓					
	Tourist number	✓																
Consumer characteristics	Income	✓																
	Personality							✓										
	Age											✓						
Psychological - Sociological Factors	Enjoyment			✓		✓					✓	✓						
	Interactivity						✓											✓
	Travel experience					✓						✓		✓		✓		
	Perceived health risk		✓														✓	
Cruise quality	Perceived value	✓									✓				✓			
	Cruise attributes															✓		
External factors such as pandemic	Negative image in media publications		✓		✓					✓								

In the last phase, 17 articles were carefully finalized and were used for the study. This is in line with the Moher et al. (2009) and Jaafar et al. (2021). The finalized articles were evaluated and analysed. The analysis was performed using a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and trends in cruise travellers' motivations and decision making. Thematic synthesis allowed for the integration of findings across diverse studies, highlighting both commonalities and unique insights. Additionally, the role of external factors, such as global disruptions, was examined to provide a nuanced understanding of evolving travel behaviours. Themes and sub-themes were organised and developed accordingly to the study's objectives. The next section focused on the results and discussion of this study.

Results and discussion

This section delineates the findings and discourse derived from the systematically evaluated literature organised by themes. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the reviewed literature concerning the motives of cruise visitors and the external factors influencing these motivations. These findings provide an all-inclusive analysis of existing factors of motivations and external factors that impact the cruise tourist motivations.

Cruise quality

Another theme that emerged during the analysis was the cruise quality. A total of 4 articles out of 20 studies focused on cruise quality. Based on the reviewed literature, perceived value and cruise attributes were identified as major factors that make up consumer attributes.

Perceived value

Comfort and quality of accommodation during the vacation forms the primary aspect for enjoyment and relaxation as well as the perception of luxury. In the study by Castillo-Manzano et al. (2022), tourists repeating with the same cruise line correlate with higher cabin quality. Passengers in balcony staterooms are more likely to repeat than those in outer staterooms without a balcony, albeit the latter still outnumbers those in interior guestrooms. Passengers who book lower-priced cabin classifications may have lower salaries and fewer means to support future voyages, making them more price-sensitive and less loyal (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). Repeating is less likely on Premium and Luxury cruise lines compared to mainstream cruise lines (e.g., Royal Caribbean, Norwegian, and Carnival), which are mass-marketed and have a lower square meter/crew member to passenger ratio. Repeating on the same ship on the Premium and Luxury lines decreases by about 3% and 13.5%, respectively. Mainstream lines offer a wider range of options than Premium and Luxury lines, allowing for repeat cruises on the same corporation's vessels. Mainstream cruise lines offer a wider range of staterooms and services than Premium and Luxury lines due to their larger ships and global destinations (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). Additionally, onboard entertainment and leisure opportunities, as well as the gastronomical experience, are also strongly linked to the possibility of repeating a cruise on the same ship, line, or organisation. The findings suggest that the onboard culinary experience is crucial for cruiser retention. Therefore, loyalty programs should prioritise food quality and diversity over other activities like premium performances (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). Some cruise lines, such as Oceania's Jacques Pépin and Princess' master chocolatier Norman Love, have hired renowned chefs as consultants to improve their culinary offerings (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). This validates their successful strategy. Evaluations of service, staff, and ship features, such as entertainment and food, were more strongly correlated with the possibility of repeating a cruise on the same ship (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). Out of all the particular features, the standard and diversity of the cuisine served in the ship's many restaurants appear to be the most crucial factor in determining whether or not a tourist will return to the same cruise line or cruise company (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). A study by Hung et al. (2020) also showed that travellers who valued luxury more had a stronger sense of loyalty to cruise travel. The findings demonstrated that escapist experiences offer cruise passengers arousing emotions and indications of product quality, two fundamental components of the allure of upscale travel. The research also shows that cruise passengers' escapist experiences have a beneficial impact on luxury value (Hung et al., 2020). Additionally, the study states that the repurchase intention for cruise travel does not stem from the social symbolic significance of cruising but rather from the perceived quality of a cruise product (Hung et al., 2020). Similar findings were reported by Chua et al. (2017). The results from their study show that repeat cruise consumers reported lower perceived prices, higher affective pleasure, perceived value, and behavioural loyalty compared to first-time cruisers. The study found that providing good value was a key component in increasing customer loyalty for cruise vacations. This suggests that cruise companies should prioritise providing high value to maintain and attract customers (Chua et al., 2017).

Cruise attributes

Cruise attributes were also found to be an important factor. The study by Jones (2011) shows how selecting to cruise is influenced by a number of vacation features, including nightlife, bars, history, scenery, accommodations, comfort, locals, culture, getaway, kid-friendly amenities, social interaction, and climate. The study found that cruise passengers on the two itineraries ranked the aforementioned vacation features nearly the same. Eight-day cruisers ranked these in reverse order, while 6-day cruisers gave comfort the highest influence and accommodation the second-highest influence. These were the only variances between the top and bottom two criteria. The least important vacation feature, according to 6-day cruisers, was the locals, followed by kid-friendly amenities. On the 8-day itinerary, respondents once more rated the importance of these two characteristics in the opposite order. Although there are differences in how they rate them, it is evident that comfort, lodging,

getaway, climate, and scenery rank as the top five vacation factors for both first-time and returning cruise passengers. The child facilities and the locals were the two least important features for both newcomers and returning visitors (Jones, 2011).

Marketing, branding, technology and experience

A total of 6 articles out of 20 studies focused on motivation factors. Based on the reviewed literature, Social Media Review, Company Image, use of VR technology, Prior Cruise Experience and Informativeness, Brand Awareness, Information Source and Tourist Numbers were identified as major factors that influence motivation.

Social media review

Social media reviews are one of the most popular modes for information sharing. Users can share a detailed account of personal experience related to any product used or services availed. Active social media users refer to popular networking sites as well as websites for information regarding any potential product or service of interest. Study by Castillo-Manzano et al. (2022) evaluated the impact of social media on potential cruise tourists. The study reported that most active posters on "Cruiseline.com," or those who receive a score of 9 in Social networking, are the ones that re-post the most. As a result, they have a greater understanding of the ships' features and the benefits that cruise lines provide to loyal customers. The most active reviewers on this site have a higher chance of repeating with the cruise line and a higher chance of repeating with the cruise corporation, making them more likely to repeat on the same ship as compared to those with the least activity. This shows that the competition in the cruise industry is also being fought online, meaning that cruise companies should make it obvious to prospective clients what benefits they provide to loyal consumers (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022).

Company image

Positive reviews by cruise tourists not only provide detailed information about the cruise attributes, but it also influence the company's image (Han & Hyun, 2019). In the context of a luxury cruise, the correlation between hedonic value and complete company image was noticeably larger than that between utilitarian value and image. Hedonic value has a bigger impact on how intentions are formed for full service or high-end products. The findings showed that desire for cruise travel and intention to return were positively and significantly impacted by the company's overall image (Han and Hyun, 2019).

VR

Another aspect of social media is the use of advanced technology such as VR in providing a virtual experience of the advertised cruise voyage. A study by Martínez-Molés et al. (2022) evaluates the use of VR technology and its impact on purchase intent. The findings demonstrate the persuasiveness of VR technology by showing that it outperforms the website format in the majority of the factors we examined. The only area where the differences in visualisation format were not significant was in relation to purchase intent (Martínez-Molés et al., 2022). Additionally, this factor was considered in a study involving use of fully immersive VR technology on consumer behaviour in pre-purchase information gathering (Martínez-Molés et al., 2022). The study evaluated the effectiveness of VR in providing the feeling of presence which enhanced the user enjoyment especially in women as compared to the men. However, there was no significant results for interactivity and purchase intent. The study identified VR as the most persuasive medium to improve consumer learning and enjoyment, especially in the information-gathering stage of planning a cruise vacation. The study also suggests that this pronounced gender bias could be due to higher involvement of women in the information-gathering stage of planning vacations.

Negative image in media publications

Negative publicity has higher potential to create sensation among the populace. Thus, the extensive media coverage exacerbates passengers' perceptions of the risk associated with taking a cruise by highlighting the link between cruise ships and the coronavirus (Zhou et al., 2023). Thus, news and social media would increase passengers' perceptions of the risks (Zhou et al., 2023). Moreover, the participants in the study by Radic et al (2020) believed that COVID-19 is a serious illness that can greatly affect a person's health. Additionally, they noted the issue of too much knowledge (infodemic) surrounding it. Some participants said that the media are interested in news about the COVID-19 pandemic and cruise tourism (Radic et al., 2020). Another study highlighting the negative impact of media coverage of COVID-19 pandemic was reported by Book et al. (2023). This study looked at how the media's coverage of Covid cases on cruise ships influenced people's views and choices, considering their personal comfort with risk and past experiences with cruises. The researchers studied the role of vividness, base rate information and format in creating this negative perception. The results show that the way words were used in the scenarios didn't change how consumers felt. This might be because people became desensitised to dramatic words like "outbreak" after hearing them many times during the pandemic. When cases were shown in a general way instead of a specific way, people thought less positively about cruising. This shows how vividness and access affect opinions. The information about base rates affected how people viewed cruise experiences, especially for those who had never been on a cruise before. This was influenced by their previous cruise experiences and the way the information was presented (Book et al., 2023). The findings of this study also highlighted that cruisers' and non-cruisers' views and intentions were affected by negative framing and limited numbers. These results show that both groups can be impacted by decision-making, but those who have never taken a cruise before are more affected (Book et al., 2023). According to the findings, cruisers are more inclined to use all forms of transportation, indicating that previous cruise experience is a good indicator of a person's overall travel inclination. The results show that previous cruisers

are willing to travel despite being aware of the risks. Thus, highlighting the role of risk tolerance acted as a mediating factor between prior cruise experience and propensity to travel as well as overall image (Book et al., 2023).

Prior experience and informativeness

Experiences be it personal or reviews from other consumers shape the decisions of purchase. A study by Tsai and Bui (2020) explored the impact of prior experience on the purchase intentions of potential cruise tourists. Respondents with and without prior cruise product experience differ significantly, according to this study. Therefore, a multi-group moderation technique using dummy variables for both groups is used in this study: categorical moderation analysis. The findings indicate that respondents who had previously used cruise products significantly impacted the link between word-of-mouth praise and purchase intentions negatively. Respondents with no prior experience show a substantial favorable effect (Tsai and Bui, 2020). Moreover, Jones (2011) in their study stated that when seeking reviews or testimonials for cruise experience there are several readily available sources across different platforms. The information sources can be grouped into three categories: media-based, Internet-based, and personal-based. By using these groups, it is evident that cruisers place a great value on personal information sources, which make up three of the top five sources (Jones, 2011).

Brand awareness

Publicity and marketing of product and services are only as good as the experience of the consumers who availed such services. In this context, social media reviews could be considered as Word-of-Mouth (WoM) from cruise tourists of any given cruise line. The highest number of positive reviews derived from positive experience and satisfaction of consumers give certain distinction of a brand to the cruise lines. This brand awareness may influence the behavioural intentions of potential cruise tourists. Study by Lemmetyinen et al. (2016) explores the influence of brand awareness on consumer satisfaction and factors associated with behavioural intentions. The strongest influence on satisfaction and WoM is found in brand awareness, indicating that brand awareness of a cruise location is a significant predicate of both destination satisfaction and WoM. Our study's distinctiveness is strengthened by examining the moderating role of brand awareness in the motivation–satisfaction relationship. Its main goal is to better understand what drives cruise passengers to disseminate favourable (or unfavourable) information about the locations on a cruise itinerary and how their awareness of those locations may influence their behavioural intentions (Lemmetyinen et al., 2016).

Tourist number

The study by Castillo-Manzano et al. (2022) identify that repetition appears to be a more alluring experience for couples and solo cruisers than for those going in big groups of friends and/or family, according to both ship and cruise companies. This can be explained by the fact that in the latter scenario, the pooled decision-making process lessens the discretionary decision-making authority of each cruiser. Therefore, compared to a person traveling alone or with a companion, a passenger traveling in a large group is 6% less likely to repeat on the same ship, with the repeat intention corresponding to the person who filed the online review (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022).

Psychological - sociological factors

This section concentrates on the factors that influence behavioural intention to purchase cruise voyage which emerged as one the major themes from the review of literature. A total of 9 articles out of 20 studies focused on motivation factors. Based on the reviewed literature, enjoyment, satisfaction, consumer experience, interactivity, travel experience, and willingness to travel were identified as major factors that influence behavioural intention.

Enjoyment

The primary goal of any vacation is relaxation and enjoyment in an environment outside the regular life. The preference and interests of the tourists in their mode of enjoyment define their decision to choose cruise vacation. The study by Martínez-Molés et al. (2022) explored the role of enjoyment in influencing behavioural intention. The study reported that with the exception of the connections between enjoyment and both product knowledge and purchase intent, most of the links suggested in the structural model were validated. Of all the suggested outcomes in the study, the effect of presence on enjoyment was the strongest. Findings support the beneficial influence of enjoyment on brand attitude, even though the relationships between enjoyment and product knowledge and purchase intent were not statistically significant (Martínez-Molés et al., 2022). Ali et al. (2022) reported that cruise traveller experience was a reliable indicator of visitors' pleasure and future behaviour. Furthermore, the results show that behavioural intentions can also be predicted by satisfaction. But according to the current study, the biggest factors influencing satisfaction and recommendations are escapism, hedonics, onboard amenities, and activities. Customer satisfaction is, of course, the other important indicator of positive behavioural intentions. This study found that cruise travellers' satisfaction had a beneficial impact on their behavioural intentions, such as repeating and sharing favourable experiences (Ali et al., 2022). Consumer experience of enjoyment is well explained using the 4E model (escapism, education, entertainment, and aesthetic experiences). According to the research by Hung et al. (2020), it can be used to understand cruise travel experiences. The study also states that this validates the structural aspects of customer encounters (Hung et al., 2020). Additionally, this survey emphasises how first-time and return passengers differ when it comes to their

cruise experiences. While first-time travellers prioritise entertainment, returning passengers find that educational activities are more significant in their quest for cruise escape (Hung et al., 2020). The study Aras (2023) also explored the factor of enjoyment in terms of its influence on behavioural intentions. The objective of the study was to explore the connection between respondents' objectives and the reasons for their cruise travel. Five components of motivation learning/discovery and excitement; enjoyment; relaxation and escape; social/esteem need; and family/relatives were identified because of the factor analysis. The characteristics of "enjoyment" and intention and "relaxation and family" were shown to be related in their study of prospective cruise travellers in China (Aras, 2023).

Travel experience

Travel experience forms the basis for informed decision-making when planning cruise vacation. Although there may be instances where consumers seek the thrill of unpredictability to satisfy their curiosity for adventure, most tourists might rely on previous experience when making such decisions. The cruise traveller experience was identified to be a reliable indicator of visitors' pleasure and future behaviour based on the findings of the study by Ali et al. (2022). Furthermore, the results show that behavioural intentions can also be predicted by satisfaction (Ali et al., 2022). According to exploratory findings of the study by Yi et al. (2014), cruise passengers categorise their trip experience along four dimensions: "Staff," "Entertainment," "F&B," and "Facility". These elements have an impact on cruise passengers' emotions because of their overall travel satisfaction, cruise experience, and future travel habits (Yi et al., 2014). Any successful vacation itinerary depends on a crucial factor of Willingness to travel. The findings of study by Aras (2023) revealed a strong and positive correlation between the motivational characteristics of "learning/discovery and thrill" and "intention." In general, it has been noted that prospective cruise passengers' desire to travel may be influenced by their openness to discovering new locations and experiencing the thrill of doing so (Aras, 2023). The findings of the study by Jones (2011) indicate that there are a variety of reasons why people choose to take a cruise. However, the relative importance of each of these reasons may differ depending on the cruiser's experience rather than their itinerary (Jones, 2011).

Perceived health risks

Perceived health risk is a major factor that determines consumer behaviour. The potential risk to well-being forms a hindrance in enjoying any activity which is counterintuitive to its original purpose of relaxation. Thus, a highly unpredictable and high-risk environment as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic deterred majority of the tourist populace. The study by Zhou et al. (2023) identified that the passengers are hesitant to take a cruise due to concerns about COVID-19 exposure. In addition to cruisers, ship crew members are also concerned about the virus and the risk of infection (Zhou et al., 2023). A study by Liu et al (2016) discovered that due of the exposure to high-risk news coverage, respondents' negative perception of the implicated cruise line was influenced by the degree of perceived threat. Another objective of their study investigated the effects of crisis communication in a wider context of cruising, going beyond the purview of cruise lines. Perceived efficacy might attenuate the mediating association between perceived dangers and cruise travel intentions through perceived safety, which was an intriguing and encouraging discovery. However, the results demonstrated that crisis responses might, in fact, result in positive behavioural and perceptual changes when instructive information was provided. This is achieved through an increase in perceived efficacy. This is significant for the travel and tourist sector, particularly during emergencies. Therefore, in order to effectively respond to a crisis, future crisis recovery marketing strategies must incorporate efficacy-related information. These strategies should aim to increase people's confidence and comfort in participating in touristic activities even during times of crisis, educate the public about preventive measures, and clearly communicate the crisis situation (Liu et al., 2016).

Interactivity

The most important aspect of cruise travel is the travel on the open seas with opportunities for interaction in communal spaces. Common activities with fellow cruisers create this opportunity for interaction. Study by Radic et al. (2021) reported that the dining environment and interactions with other patrons had a favourable impact on the guests' emotional reactions in the stimulus domain. This study by Radic et al. (2021) thus highlighted the importance of interactivity onboard to improve tourist experience. In a similar line of thought, bonding was also identified as a major driving force behind cruising, along with self-worth and social recognition. Despite its significance, concentrating solely on leisure and escape cruise services is insufficient and ineffective to fully satisfy passengers' requirements and desires as reported by Han & Hyun (2019).

Consumer characteristics

This section concentrates on the consumer attributes of the potential cruise tourists. A total of 4 articles out of 20 studies focused on consumer characteristics. Based on the reviewed literature, Income of tourist, Tourist personality, and Age of tourist were identified as major factors that make up consumer attributes. Income is the primary factor which determines how much a tourist is willing to spend on vacation. The studies reviewed identified income to be a crucial factor especially for repeat cruise passengers. The cruise tourists who choose expensive accommodation have a higher likelihood of becoming repeat cruise passengers (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). The study found that passengers traveling in a suite have a higher likelihood of repeating cruise travel compared to those travelling in other cheaper alternatives such as the stateroom accommodation. They also pointed out that the tourists travelling in inside staterooms are more sensitive to price of accommodation and are less likely to repeat with the cruise line. One of the reasons for this behaviour could be lower incomes (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). Decision-making among consumers is majorly influenced by their personalities. The study by Hung et al (2024) states that the

tourist personality influences their cruising intentions. They categorised the tourists into two personality traits – psychocentric and allocentric. Tourists' cruising intentions were positively influenced by an allocentric personality, while a psychocentric personality had a negative impact. Under similar situations, tourists with more psychocentric personality qualities are less likely to cruise, whereas those with more allocentric personality traits are more likely to do so (Hung et al., 2024). Standardised coefficients indicate that an allocentric personality has a greater impact on cruising intentions compared to a psychocentric personality. This finding supports the study's hypothesis that personality plays a factor in cruise decision making. Age is one of the major factors affecting the cruise purchase intention. The study by Aras (2023) identified a considerable disparity between the ages of the respondents and their intentions. The study participants aged 46-65 showed increased intention to go on a cruise compared to those aged 25 and under. The research findings support the CLIA 2022 report, which found an average age of 47.6 years for cruisers between 2018 and 2020. This conclusion was not surprising given the efforts of those aged 25 and younger to pursue a successful profession while lacking financial stability as compared to those older respondents with higher financial stability.

Possible solutions for enhancing travel motivation

Drawing on the findings of this study and previous research, several different strategies can be utilized to strengthen cruise travel motivation. Following are key strategies that can strengthen cruise travel motivation.

Healthy and safety enhancements

Ensuring robust health protocols and reducing the perceived risk has become the important factors (Zhou et al., 2023). Health facilities need to be updated. Many cabins are without balconies, which means that they fully rely on the internal circulation system'. The pandemic has therefore highlighted the pressing necessity to modernise ships' ventilation systems (Zhou et al., 2023). Especially after COVID-19 pandemic, health-related measures to ensure that the onboard illness can be handled gives reassurance to the cruise travellers (Radic et al., 2020). Furthermore, publicising up to date safety measures via different channels such as social media, websites and signage will also help to reduce the perceived risk.

Government and destination level policies

Government agencies can collaborate with the cruise operators at national, state and local levels to help rebuild confidence (Pan et al., 2021; Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011). This is very important especially after COVID-19. Standardised COVID-19 protocols can simplify compliance and reassure travellers especially those who are traveling for the first time that they are safe. Moreover, a joint effort by government tourism boards, health agencies and cruise lines together can shape and portray destination image as safe and accountable.

Crisis management and preparedness

Reinforcing crisis readiness is vital for sustaining cruisers motivation over the long term (Liu & Pennington-Gray, 2017). All involved parties should collaborate and get ready for each step to make sure everything is safe and free from contamination (Zhou et al., 2023). Recently, because of COVID-19, the biggest problem for cruise lines during outbreaks of infectious diseases is that their profits rely on having passengers. Cruise ships regularly do things like cleaning to show guests they are managing health risks (Radic et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to be ready for any crisis coming in the future. Crisis management and preparedness for pandemics such as COVID-19 is the key. Additionally, ongoing monitoring of global health advisories and local port ensures swift itinerary adjustments (Zhou et al., 2023). Also, clear guidelines and drills for staff in handing different crises such as weather or health minimizes disruptions and clams passengers anxiety as well.

Study's implications

Theoretically, this study highlights diverse viewpoints on cruise travellers motivations. By understanding factors like perceived risk, safety, interactivity, enjoyment and experience, this study highlights the complexity of motivation in this niche tourism market. Specifically, the emphasis of external events indicates that the motivation is dynamic and subject to rapid shifts. This deepens our understanding of tourism decision making models. Additionally, the findings of this study also shed light on how consumer personality and their past experiences can impact cruise travel motivations. Therefore, from a theoretical standpoint, these findings call for a more nuanced view of decision making in cruise tourism, one that balances motivators and personality and repeat visitor loyalty with rapidly shifting perceptions of safety. Practically, this study indicates the need for cruise lines to adapt both onboard offerings and marketing strategies in ways that address and take care of risk sensitivity. Straightforward safety protocols, transparent communication about health measures and crisis ready contingency plans can reduce the perceived uncertainty that deters new and returning travellers. Efforts such as showcasing rigorous sanitation practices after COVID-19 lockdown or using technology like VR torus can help prospective guests visualise and trust the safety and quality. Collaborative initiatives between cruise companies and government agencies will be beneficial, ensuring that health and safety guidelines align. Lastly, by coordinating branding campaigns that highlight destinations as safe, scenic and responsibly managed, practitioners can restore confidence in cruising and spark renewed demand in a sector primed for recover.

Limitations and future research directions

Although this systematic review offers insights into the motivations of cruise travellers and how external events affect their decisions, a few caveats remain. The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database only, excluding other relevant

sources such as policy documents or reports. Secondly, the included studies varied widely in terms of geographical focus. Yet, the selection criteria, which required studies to be in English, introduced a stronger bias towards Anglo-American perspectives. This limitation may have excluded valuable insights from non-English-speaking contexts, potentially narrowing the scope of findings and perspectives. Therefore, future studies might concentrate on real-time examination of passenger motives during distinct crisis phases. For instance, capturing sentiments immediately following a significant global event could provide granular data on how anxiety and perceived risk evolve over time. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons could deepen knowledge of how social norms and cultural expectations shape the intensity of motivations such as luxury seeking or risk aversion, particularly relevant given that the global cruise market is increasingly drawing travellers from diverse backgrounds. Another fruitful avenue involves investigating specific onboard technologies beyond VR to assess if contactless services or smart cabins can sustain passenger enthusiasm in an environment still grappling with health concerns. Ultimately, integrating psychometric tools that measure personality traits or situational factors (like pandemic exposure) may clarify the interplay between individual dispositions and macro-level events, thereby advancing both the theoretical and practical dimensions of cruise tourism research.

Conclusion

This systematic review shows cruise travellers motivation factors and how external factors can impact them. While classic drivers like comfort, value for money, and enjoyment-remain fundamental, more recent studies point to a heightened awareness of risk, partly due to media coverage and broader global events. Taken together, these findings indicate that motivations to cruise are not solely shaped by leisure aspirations but also by how travellers perceive safety, brand reputation, and collective crisis management efforts. Moreover, the integral role of marketing and technology emerges from studies emphasising the impact of virtual reality previews and social media commentary on prospective passengers' confidence. As the industry moves forward, it may be prudent for cruise operators to regularly reassess traveller sentiment, paying special attention to first-time cruisers and those with varying levels of disposable income or different personality profiles. By adjusting onboard services, ensuring clear health protocols, and actively managing online discourse, the cruise sector stands well-positioned to meet shifting consumer expectations and reinforce its appeal. Ultimately, the review underscores the potential of targeted strategies that address both timeless desires for recreation and ever-evolving concerns in a world increasingly shaped by global events.

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