



Destination satisfaction and cruiser behaviour: The moderating effect of excursion package



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ABSTRACT

Cruise passengers provide a destination with both monetary and non-monetary benefits. Along with monetary value released by cruisers, port destinations inserted in a cruise itinerary showcase their highlights to tourists, who can decide to return or recommend the destination to others.

The paper investigates how destination satisfaction contributes to create value in port destinations, by influencing passengers' behaviour. In particular, expenditures, intention to return and Word-of-Mouth (WoM) attitude are considered in the analysis. Besides, for the first time, the purchase of an excursion package is tested as a moderator of the interaction between destination satisfaction and cruiser's behaviour. The study is conducted by administering and processing structured questionnaires to passengers of Costa Crociere (Carnival Group) experiencing a West Med service. Research hypotheses are tested on 748 destination opinions by performing regression analysis.

Empirical outcomes contribute to the academic debate on the impact of cruise tourism on the local community, by introducing and assessing an all-embracing conceptual model. Moreover, the manuscript brings a number of practical implications as it provides to policy makers and destination managers information to develop marketing strategies for keeping loyal tourists and capturing additional potential visitors.

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1. Introduction

The tremendous growth of the cruise industry has stimulated the interest of both researchers and practitioners (Hung & Petrick, 2011; Lemmetyinen & Go, 2010), leading academics to challenge the economic impact of cruise-related activities on the community (Dwyer & Forsyth, 1998; Kester, 2002). Nevertheless, as prior contributions focus on the impact of cruise tourism on the local community in a short-term perspective and neglect long-term effects (Satta, Parola, Penco, & Persico, 2014), some gaps in literature still persist (Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011).

This paper argues that, besides short-term economic (monetary) value, cruise activities also provide a destination with additional (non-monetary) benefits. Being inserted in a cruise itinerary, port destinations showcase their tourist attractions to cruise passengers. After the on-shore experience, cruisers may decide to repeat visits, i.e. intention to return (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Gabe, Colleen, & McConnon, 2006), or recommend the destination to relatives and friends, i.e. Word-of-

Mouth (WoM) (Brida, Garrido, & Such Devesa, 2012; Silvestre, Santos, & Ramalho, 2008). As cruiser behaviour becomes a valuable indicator for destination managers to assess, this manuscript investigates the impact of destination satisfaction on cruiser expenditures, intention to return and WoM attitude.

Moreover, for the first time, the study explores the moderating effect of excursion package on the interactions between destination satisfaction and cruiser behaviour.

The study is performed by administering structured questionnaires to passengers of Costa Crociere (Carnival Group) experiencing a West Med service. Overall, 748 cruiser opinions related to port destinations are used for testing six research hypotheses, by performing least squares dummy variable (LSDV) and ordered logistic regression analyses. Empirical findings add to extant cruise literature providing a comprehensive theoretical framework, which captures the impact of destination satisfaction on cruiser expenditures and behavioural intentions. The paper brings several practical implications supporting destination managers and local policy makers in their respective decisional processes.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews extant literature on destination satisfaction and cruiser behaviour, provides the theoretical framework and develops the research hypotheses. Section 3 explains the research design and the method. Section 4 describes the respondents' profile and shows the major empirical findings. Section 5

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discusses the outcomes while Section 6 brings implications for academics and practitioners, before concluding.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

The increasing operational scale of the cruise tourism industry and its notable impact on wealth creation and distribution for countries, have triggered scholars to investigate how cruise-related activities economically affect local communities (Dwyer & Forsyth, 1998; Kester, 2002). As concerns passenger-related activities, mainstream literature has successfully addressed the monetary value released on local community (Douglas & Douglas, 2004; Seidl, Guiliano, & Pratt, 2006). Prior contributions underestimate the overall impact of cruise passenger on port destinations, neglecting long-term effects. During the visit to a port destination, cruise passengers experience the attractions of the city and may decide to come back as independent tourists (Brida & Coletti, 2012). After the cruise experience, visitors may decide to recommend the destination to relatives and friends (Brida, Pulina, Riaño, & Zapata-Aguirre, 2012). A cruise ship visit potentially creates long-term value stimulating positive cruisers' likelihood of recommending the destination (WoM). Therefore, large presence of cruise passengers can generate a conspicuous economic impact (Chase & Alon, 2002; Seidl et al., 2006), and other benefits for ports (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010).

Scholars have addressed cruiser behaviour and attitude, focusing on spending patterns, behavioural intentions (Gabe et al., 2006; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Miller & Grazed, 2003), and their determinants (Brida, Garrido, et al., 2012; Li & Petrick, 2010). Empirical evidence suggests that destination satisfaction plays a crucial role in shaping cruisers' expenditures during the on-shore visit, as well as the likelihood of returning or recommending the destination (Silvestre et al., 2008). Nevertheless, a comprehensive theoretical framework assessing how satisfaction and cruiser behaviours are concerned is still needed.

2.1. Cruiser expenditures

Passenger expenditures are a key benefit related to cruise tourism (Brida & Risso, 2010). Major cruisers' expenses originate from tours, transports, food and beverage, shopping and other incidental purchases (Braun, Xander, & White, 2002; Douglas & Douglas, 2004).

Academics and practitioners challenge how passengers and trips characteristics affect expenditures (Brida, Pulina, et al., 2012; Dowling, 2006). Tourist profiles relate to heterogeneous expenditure levels, being both socio-demographic and trip-related variables critical (Brida & Scuderi, 2013). In particular, age, employment, nationality, income level, travel companions and time spent out of the ship are recognized as antecedents of cruiser expenditures (Brida, Pulina, et al., 2012; Gabe et al., 2006; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Seidl et al., 2006).

Scholars debate about the impact of destination satisfaction on on-shore spending patterns (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Li & Petrick, 2010). Although Brida and Scuderi (2013) argue a positive association between on-shore satisfaction and cruiser expenditures, empirical findings are still limited. Consistent with extant literature, we assume that:

H.1a. The level of cruiser's destination satisfaction positively influences on-shore expenditures.

2.2. Intention to return

Along with passengers' expenditures, the cruise activity is supposed to provide a port destination with additional benefits, which originate

from the showcase of touristic attractions to cruise passengers during the visit (Brida & Risso, 2010). After experiencing a port, cruise passengers may decide to return as independent land tourists (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010), becoming a stabilizing factor for tourist destinations in a long-term perspective. Loyal visitors are desirable for destination managers as the effort required to retain current tourists is less onerous than attracting new ones (Petrick, 2005b; Thomas, 2001). Besides, repeat visitors generate recurring income flows for the destination (Oppermann, 2000). As the promotion of travellers' loyalty is an effective marketing strategy (Park, 1996), the assessment of the factors stimulating cruiser's likelihood of returning becomes a flagship analytical tool for destination managers (Gabe et al., 2006). This drives to investigate those characteristics and perceptions of cruisers and those dimensions of destinations which act as predictors of the intention to revisit (Kozak, 2001).

In this perspective, a number of antecedents are acknowledged in tourism management literature, including age (Lau & Mckercher, 2004), marital status (Li, Cheng, Kim, & Petrick, 2008), nationality (Caneen, 2004), previous visits (Petrick, Morais, & Norman, 2001), and distance between the home country and the destination visited (Moutinho & Trimble, 1991; Oppermann, 2000).

Also, the destination is argued to be a predictor of tourist's intention to return (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006). Satisfied visitors are prone to revisit the destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2006), whereas dissatisfied tourists are almost certainly not to return (Petrick, Tonner, & Quinn, 2006). Nonetheless, the interaction between satisfaction and intention to return still remains unexplored in the cruise domain (Gabe et al., 2006; Petrick et al., 2001). Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis (2010) argue the existence of a causal nexus between cruiser satisfaction and intention to repeat visit in Heraklion. Brida and Risso (2010), investigating Pacific and Caribbean ports, find similar evidence. Therefore:

H.2a. The level of cruiser's destination satisfaction positively influences the intention to return.

2.3. Word-of-Mouth

Prior tourism management contributions on WoM suggest that recommendations by previous visitors are a reliable information source for new potential tourists (Chi & Qu, 2008; Duman & Mattila, 2005).

Relatedly, academics question if destination satisfaction is a predictor of WoM attitude (Hui, Wan, & Ho, 2007; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009). The findings demonstrate that satisfied tourists tend to positively recommend the visited destination to friends and relatives (Bruwer, 2014).

Recently, the impact of destination satisfaction on WoM is stimulating the interest of practitioners and academics in the cruise industry as well (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Brida, Garrido, et al., 2012; Gabe et al., 2006). Cruise passengers, after experiencing a port destination (with its leisure attractions), tend to promote it through positive WoM, if they have enjoyed a delightful on-shore experience (Petrick et al., 2006; Silvestre et al., 2008). Although a positive relation between destination satisfaction and WoM is reasonably expected, only a few contributions test it in the cruise domain. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H.3a. The level of cruiser's destination satisfaction positively influences the intention to recommend the visited destination (WoM).

2.4. The moderating effect of excursion package

On-shore excursion is a valuable element composing the overall cruise package. The price paid for excursion deeply affects cruise lines

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