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Cruise Traveler's Experience: Development and Validation of a Scale

Abstract

This study develops a measurement scale to assess cruise traveler experience. Based on the data collected from 341 respondents (Sample 1), exploratory factor analysis resulted in 15 items under four dimensions: Hedonics & escapism, social interaction, recognition & self-esteem, and activities and facilities. This factorial structure was then subjected to confirmatory factor analysis for validation using the second wave of data collected from 396 respondents (Sample 2). Furthermore, this study found significant roles of four dimensions on cruise satisfaction and post-consumption cruise behavior. Thus, this study makes significant contributions to consumer behavior by developing and validating the cruise traveler experience scale.

Keywords: cruise traveler satisfaction, cruise traveler behavioral intention, cruise traveler experience, scale development

1. Introduction

The cruise industry is one of the fastest-growing tourism and leisure travel segments, with more than 32 million cruisers in 2020 (Paiano et al., 2020). According to the Cruise Lines International Association, North America accounts for the highest rate of cruisers, with 14.2 million in 2018 (Cruise Lines International Association [CLIA], 2020). Before 2000, North America captured 90% of the global cruise market share but declined to around 70% from 2000 to 2011 (Sun et al., 2018). While the market share percentage dropped in North America; however, the total number of cruise passengers in North America increased during the economic recession in the 2000s (Sun et al., 2018). It indicated a maturing of the cruise industry in this part of the world (Jones, 2011; Sun et al., 2018) and resulted in cruise ships moving to other areas like Asia, where growth potential is much more potent (Juan & Chen, 2012; Sun et al., 2018)). As per Lau and Sun (2020), the number of Asians who perceive cruising as an exciting and affordable vacation increases every year. The cruise participants belong from various backgrounds (Lau & Yip, 2020).

According to CLIA (2020), more than 66% of Generation X and 71% of Millennials have a more positive attitude about cruising than two years ago, and 82% of cruisers have intentions to rebook a cruise for their next vacation. As a result, the projected global cruise tourism market will increase by 6% in 2022 from 2015 (Sun et al., 2018). Considering the increasing numbers of cruise travelers, scholars in the tourism industry are eager to understand their experiences and benefit cruise lines (Juan & Chen, 2012). However, despite the increasing growth of the cruise industry, little empirical research has been conducted on cruise tourism (Sun

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et al., 2018). It is especially true for the cruise industry and cruise passenger behavior in emerging markets and the paucity of investigation from tourism researchers (Han & Hyun, 2018; Sun et al., 2018).

Chua et al. (2015) delineated cruise passenger decision-making in detail in the cruise business environment and conjectured that customer price sensitivity influences cruise vacation decisions. Scholars have mentioned that the growing demand for exclusive cruising has caused cruise lines to offer many travelers alternative forms of cruise vacations. For example, it provides them an escape from their usual life routine, safe trips to exotic places, Vegas-style entertainment, exceptionally delightful service, high-quality food and beverages, innovative onboard features, and remarkable aesthetics (Navarro-Ruiz et al., 2020). Further, cruise passengers participate in many exciting activities and create memorable experiences (Ahn et al., 2021). Thus, traveler preferences and experiences have become very important in developing cruise tourism, and the industry has become more traveler-oriented. (Han & Hyun, 2018; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Yi et al., 2014). Therefore, cruise tourism can be considered experiential consumption, where the traveler's experiences during a cruise vacation influence their behavioral intentions toward cruising (Calza et al., 2020; Hsu & Li, 2017; Hung & Petrick, 2011). Juan and Chen (2012) suggest that extraordinary experiences during consumption may result in cruise traveler satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions. We infer from these arguments that the research needs to explore various components of cruise tourist experiences and their influence on tourist post-consumption behavior. Scholars have highlighted the necessity of studying cruiser experiences and post-consumption evaluations (Fan & Hsu, 2014; Hosany & Witham, 2010).

With some exceptions, cruiser experiences remain relatively under-studied, with less attention (Casado-Díaz et al., 2021; Han et al., 2019; Hung et al., 2019; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019). For instance, Hosany and Witham (2010) were the first researchers to examine cruise traveler experiences. They adapted the generic 'experience economy' scale, developed for bed & breakfast hotels by Oh et al. (2007). Many scholars have adapted their scale in the extant literature across different contexts of the tourism industry (Ali & Omar, 2014; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). As a result, this scale has become a generic scale for assessing customer experiences in most tourism and hospitality settings. However, considering that some experiences related to the cruise industry (e.g., activities, onboard facilities, and Hedonics) would differ from other service industries, developing a specific scale to assess cruise tourists' experiences becomes essential. Thus, to fill this gap in the extant literature, this study proposes a scale that explicitly highlights the components of cruise traveler experiences. It also examines the effect of these experiences on cruiser satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Further, to operationalize the concept of cruise traveler experiences, this research proposes four primary dimensions of cruise traveler experiences (i.e., Hedonics and escapism, social interaction, recognition and self-esteem, and activities and facilities). From a practical perspective, this study explains the importance of overall experiences for cruise travelers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cruise traveler experience

Assessing experiences is important because the concept of experience has implications for higher perceived value, positive emotions, and satisfaction levels, intentions to revisit, and willingness to pay more, among other things (Ali & Omar, 2014; Calza et al., 2020; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Pine et al., 1999). However, most consumer studies have not considered the concept of experience clearly (Ahn & Back, 2019). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) introduced experiences as something "*that trigger a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun*" (p. 132). Further, Pine et al. (1999) investigated the concept of experiences. They proposed the term "*experience economy*," which is the final phase of economic progression where service providers provide unforgettable, satisfactory experiences Ahn et al. (2021); (Olsson et al., 2012; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Wong, 2013) by adding value to their offerings (Berry et al., 2002). In this context, Pine et al. (1999) defined experience as "*events that*

engage individuals in a personal way” (p. 12). However, Wang (1999) posited that the experience is not based on objects but on personal feelings involved with activities. Similarly, Oh et al. (2007) proposed a definition of experiences: “*enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for those consuming these events*” (p. 120). Berry et al. (2002) claimed that the coordination of mechanical and humanistic clues influences experiences in the consumption environment. Navarro-Ruiz et al. (2020) explain that experience has three dimensions that affect customers’ behavioral intentions with temporal, spatial, and interactional approaches. Even though these definitions are not universal, they underscore common characteristics of customer experiences (Ahn & Back, 2019). Usually, experiences are personal and exceptional phenomena; they influence customer perceptions and participation intentions, engage customer emotions, inspire repurchase intention, are remembered for some time, and are shared with others (Siddiqi & Akhtar, 2020). The holistic cruise experience includes maritime navigation, local tourism in arrivals, hotel management, and pleasure tourism. Furthermore, cruises are a unique vacation experience that involves social interaction and interpersonal behavior in a group vacation context. Interactionism recognizes outside influences for every situation and personal factors that individuals bring to an experience (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). Thus, this study defines cruise traveler experiences as memorable encounters that engage cruise travelers personally and emotionally in response to their interactions within the physical and/or social environment, resulting in satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions.

2.2. Hedonics and escapism

Tourism scholars have deeply investigated the idea of the pursuit of pleasure, escape relaxation, and satisfaction of the senses as the elements of the tourism experience (Rink, 2019). Hedonics or pleasure is strongly linked with cruise travelers’ value perceptions and behavioral intentions (Duman & Mattila, 2005). Most consumer behavior is fundamentally pleasure-seeking because consumers seek pleasant service experiences (Schlesinger et al., 2020). In Petrick’s (2004) study, emotional components (e.g., how cruise travelers feel) are directly linked to the perceived value of a cruise experience. People look for new things to occasionally escape the daily routine where they can recover both physically and mentally (Han & Hyun, 2018; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981; Oh et al., 2007). Scholars have investigated the significance of the escapist experience. Escapist experience is not only a critical key factor in tourism experience (Oh et al., 2007) but is significant in cruise settings as well (Hwang & Hyun, 2015). Take the Singapore cruise as an example; exceptional events onboard, concerts and local arts performances improve within three day itinerary and provide a desirable feeling of escapism (Lau & Yip, 2020). The concept of liminality enhances the experience of the cruise. Straying from the norms of everyday life is the central concept of liminality, central to the escapist or the out-of-the-ordinary experience (Rink, 2019; Selänniemi, 2003).

2.3. Social interaction

Social interactionism conceptualizes social identity and role identity (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). Behavior and experience can best be understood through two aspects: the social situation or the presence and behavior of other people, and personal factors, or attitude, mood, and personality traits (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Interpersonal interaction may lead an individual to behave in a certain way within a group, and group members should act or react in coordinated ways. The qualities of cruise ship space foster social interactions and allow like-minded individuals to form social groups. In addition, social interaction in a group context intersects with vacation experiences (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). Cruise travel has profoundly influenced economic and social coherence (Yan, 2019). Social influences were the significant factors affecting the decision to go on a cruise vacation, considering intentions are often motivated by social approval (Hung & Petrick, 2011).

2.4. Recognition & self-esteem

Social recognition and self-esteem are strong motives for cruise travelers (Han & Hyun, 2018). Previous research has suggested that one theoretical component of social value is self-esteem enhancement. Self-esteem

enhancement benefits from symbolic features obtained from products, personnel, and experiences (Han & Hyun, 2018; Hyun & Han, 2015; Rintamäki et al., 2006). In the retail industry, self-esteem is the key predictor of brand attachment and social value (Park et al., 2010). Self-esteem is often motivated by social approval, and naturally, recognition from society is linked to self-esteem (Hung & Petrick, 2011; Jung & Han, 2016). The dimension of self-esteem and social recognition is related to self-worth and wanting to impress others with experience, which eventually enhances the perception of self-enhancement and social approval among cruise travelers (Ahn et al., 2021; Calza et al., 2020). Recent studies on cruisers' behavioral intention show that personal norm, which is highly associated with self-enhancement and self-esteem, is important (Han et al., 2019). Cruise companies offer discounted prices for those who bring additional people on board to address the need for bonding, self-esteem, and social recognition among cruise travelers (Hung & Petrick, 2011).

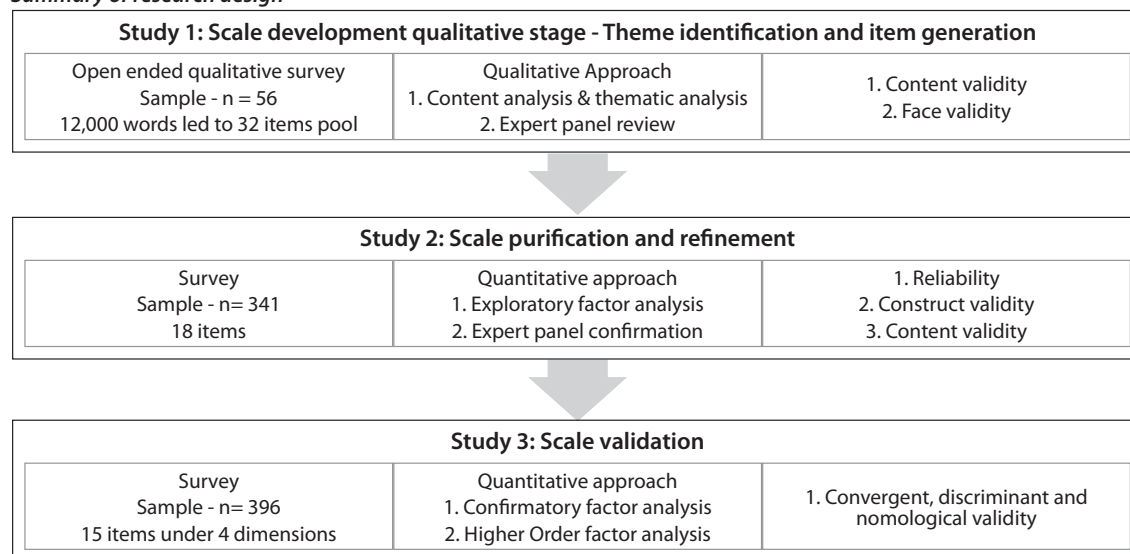
2.5. Activities and facilities

According to Juan and Chen's (2012) study, the second stage of the cruise experience is the 'on-site experience phase,' focusing on various recreational facilities and activities. Second, only to price, the respondents in the study chose activities and facilities as the primary considerations in package holiday selection. Activities onboard include entertainment, which reflects passive participation and helps attract cruise travelers (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Activities are a crucial factor affecting tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Hwang & Han, 2016). Castillo-Manzano and López-Valpuesta's (2018) study compared cruise experience with casino hotel resort experience in Las Vegas. They claimed that the cruise experience is richer and more varied because of the range of facilities, onboard activities, and cuisine. The satisfaction level is tightly connected to activities and facilities onboard (Calza et al., 2020; Castillo-Manzano & López-Valpuesta, 2018).

3. Scale development

The main objective of this study is to develop a measurement scale to assess cruise traveler experiences. The development procedure for measuring cruise traveler experiences followed Churchill's (1979) scale development procedures to achieve this objective. Development of the scale used three studies, including 1) theme identification and item generation, 2) scale purification and refinement, and 3) scale validation. The methodological process for developing and validating a scale appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Summary of research design



3.1. Study 1: Scale development qualitative stage – Theme identification and item generation

The first step in scale development is item generation, which as per Hinkin (1995), is the essential exercise to establish proper measures. To complete this stage and identify the recurring themes, this study followed suggestions by Grant and Davis (1997). It used the existing literature and data from open-ended surveys (written interviews) as the guide.

3.1.1. Data collection and sampling

According to Malhotra et al. (2006), an open-ended interview/survey allows respondents to offer detailed and quality information, making it an effective method to attain insights into the subject of interest. We selected a panel of 56 respondents through an online panel company in November 2018. These people were approached with a survey form including an open-ended question regarding the cruise travel experience. 54% of the respondents were males, while 43% were female. In terms of age, 29% of respondents were between the age of 25 and 34, 36% were between 35 and 44, and 24% were over the age of 55. In terms of employment status, 73% of the respondents worked as paid employees, whereas 19% were self-employed. Only respondents who took a cruise trip within the last 30 days were retained for this study. The main objective for this stage was to collect qualitative data to understand cruise travelers' experiences. Respondents were asked to explain their cruise travel experience in 200-400 words. The exact questions used in this open-ended questionnaire are as follows.

- How would you describe your experience/feeling during your last cruise trip?
- Please provide as many details as possible (We recommend 200-400 words).

3.1.2. Data analysis

Qualitative data generated from the data collection was close to 12,000 words (22 pages). After being checked for accuracy, these data were subjected to content analysis using the QSR NVivo software. The first step was to conduct a Thematic analysis to develop an initial coding set and a coding manual as per the guidelines by NVivo 11. The next stage in the qualitative data analysis was to code and refine the merged themes. After identifying nodes from the transcript, themes were created. Similar nodes were then either deleted or linked to get the final nodes. In the final step, themes and corresponding dimensions were identified to create the initial pool of items, as suggested by Crabtree and Miller (1999).

3.1.3. Results

Findings of the content analysis resulted in 4 themes related to cruise traveler experience, generating 32 items. Subsequent deletion of repeated statements reduced the pool of items from 32 to 23. It was followed by item refinement by subject experts to establish face validity and content validity (DeVellis, 2016). The panel included five experts, including one industry professional, three professors, and 1 English language expert (See Table 1). This panel review identified several issues related to content ambiguity, non-relatedness, and redundancy (Kim et al., 2018), resulting in the deletion of another five items, leaving 18 items remaining for further analysis.

Table 1
The panel of experts for item review

No	Position	Degree	Affiliation	Field
1	Full professor	Ph.D.	University in U.S.	Hospitality management
2	Associate professor	Ph.D.	University in Malaysia	Hospitality management
3	Assistant professor	Ph.D.	University in Turkey	Business
4	Travel agent (cruise ships)	Master	Travel agent based in Malaysia	-
5	Professional editor	Master	-	-

3.2. Study 2: Scale purification and refinement stage

Study 2 was conducted to build upon the findings from study 1 and assess the pool of 18-items to purify and refine the item pool in case certain statistical (reliability and validity), and psychometric criteria were not met.

3.2.1. Data collection and sampling

This study has focused on cruise travelers above 18 years old from a generic target population. This study only focused on those respondents who took a cruise trip in the last 30 days. Data was collected in February 2019. As per Yuksal (2017), these conditions of current consumption are essential to reduce the potential recall bias of respondents. The data was collected from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online platform for surveys, and is commonly used by researchers in hospitality and tourism (Ali et al., 2021). An online questionnaire was created using Qualtrics and later posted on MTurk with incentives for participation. To ensure data quality, only participants with a minimum of 95% Human Intelligence Task approval rate were recruited (Peer et al., 2014); additionally, two attention check questions were included in the questionnaire. The final data set removed responses with incomplete data or failing to pass the attention check questions. As a result, a total of 341 valid responses were collected. Using the Power analysis, this sample size fulfills the necessary condition of the required sample size by considering a 99% confidence level, standard deviation of 0.5, and $\pm 1\%$ margin of error. Of the 541 respondents, 51% were male, and 44% were female. In terms of age, 50.1% of respondents were between 45 and 54 years old, and 27.6% were above the age of 55. 57% of the respondents were paid employees, whereas 37% were self-employed. Data from these 541 respondents were used for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to derive the factorial structure from the pool of 18 items produced in study 1.

3.2.2. Results

For EFA, principal component analysis was used with Promax rotation to get the factorial structure. The KMO test ensured the overall measure of sampling adequacy; it was 0.922 (> 0.50). Bartlett's test of sphericity supported the validity of the instrument. Three items with lower loading values were deleted, resulting in a four-factorial structure with 15 items. All the identified factors produced an eigenvalue higher than one and explained 71.64% of the total variance. Internal consistency for these three factors was assessed by employing Cronbach's alpha. Results ranged between 0.71 to 0.83, confirming the reliability of the scale. Table 2 shows the factors identified from the EFA. Factor 1 consisted of four items and was called '*hedonics & escapism*'. Factor 2 also had four items and was called '*social interaction*'. The third factor had four items and was called '*recognition & self-esteem*'. The last factor comprised three related items and was called '*activities and facilities*'. The expert panel again assessed this structure of the scale for face and content validity.

Table 2
Exploratory factor analysis

Dimensions and items		Loadings	Mean	St. dev
Factor 1 = Hedonics and escapism				
HE1	I completely escaped from my daily life.	0.718	5.051	1.075
HE2	The holiday on cruise gave my mind a rest.	0.730	5.993	1.113
HE3	I felt relaxed on the cruise.	0.749	5.180	1.174
HE4	I felt extraordinary on the cruise	0.301	3.109	1.098
HE5	I felt delighted on the cruise	0.806	6.010	1.168
Factor 2 = Social interaction				
SI1	The onboard staff was friendly and knowledgeable.	0.803	6.102	1.134
SI2	The onboard staff had ability to control the situation.	0.812	6.201	1.253
SI3	Other onboard travelers were polite and respectful.	0.833	6.041	1.068
SI4	Other onboard travelers were disciplined, followed the rules & regulations	0.710	5.014	1.185
SI5	Other onboard travelers were at their best	0.387	2.913	1.124

Table 2 (continued)

Factor 3 = Recognition and self-esteem				
RS1	I have been taken seriously whenever help was needed.	0.765	5.110	1.156
RS2	I felt important and respected onboard.	0.713	5.211	1.162
RS3	Traveling on cruise ship increased my feelings of self-worth.	0.681	5.061	1.182
RS4	Traveling on cruise ship increased my feelings of accomplishment.	0.786	6.050	1.110
Factor 3 = Activities and facilities				
AF1	The cruise has a good selection of food and beverages.	0.765	2.11	1.156
AF2	Onboard activities were entertaining and amusing.	0.713	2.21	1.162
AF3	There were appropriate activities/facilities on the cruise for everyone.	0.681	2.16	1.182
AF4	<i>Onboard facilities and activities were properly explained</i>	<i>0.386</i>	<i>3.15</i>	<i>1.110</i>

Note: All the items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Agree to 7 = Strongly Disagree. Items in italics were deleted.

3.3. Study 3: Scale validation stage

As per DeVillis’s (2016) suggestions, a second dataset was used to assess the reliability of the 15-item scale by employing the test-retest method. Study 3 was conducted to confirm the factorial structure by establishing convergent and discriminant validity of the scale. Results from Study 2 determined for cruise travelers’ experience to be a 4-factor scale.

3.3.1. Data collection and sampling

To collect data for this study, a purposive sample of cruise travelers was used. The self-administrated questionnaires were distributed face-to-face to cruise travelers at two cruise ports in Malaysia right after debarkation, i.e., Langkawi and Klang. Data were collected only from tourists who had experienced cruise travel. To increase participation, the research purpose was explained to the respondents, and questionnaires were given only to those who expressed interest in participating; 650 questionnaires were distributed, and 396 were returned. Gender representation was 56.1% male and 43.9% female. Almost 35% were 18-35 years old, and 65% were over 35. Nearly half of the respondents (46.3%) reported an annual income ranging between \$30,000 and \$49,999. Almost half of the respondents (47.1%) held a bachelor’s degree. So, generally, cruise vacationers who participated in the study had relatively high household income levels and were well-educated. Moreover, 56.6% of participants indicated that they had spent four to six days on the cruise vacation, and 64.3% had taken at least two cruise vacations. It suggested that they were experienced cruise travelers. Using the G Power Analysis, this sample size fulfills the necessary condition of the required sample size (143 respondents) by considering a 99% confidence level, standard deviation of 0.5, and $\pm 1\%$ margin of error. Moreover, negating the widely used criteria to determine the minimum sample size using ten responses per indicator, Westland (2010) illustrated that the requisite sample size is not a linear function solely of indicator count (Westland, 2010). Using Westland’s (2010) software statistical algorithm for computing the absolute minimum sample size, the lower bound on sample size for our structural equation model (SEM) is 182 cases. It is based on seven latent variables and 19 indicator variables with a statistical power of 0.80 and a significance of 0.05. Therefore, our sample of 396 fulfills the recommended minimum sample size for sampling adequacy (Westland, 2010). Moreover, the entire dataset contained six missing values (>.001%), apparently missing entirely at random. Data from these 396 respondents were used for further data analysis.

3.3.2. Results

SmartPLS was used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis and assess the validity and reliability of the measurement scale. Scores for Cronbach’s alpha were above the value of 0.7, implying adequate internal consistency and reliability. To assess the convergent validity, item loadings were utilized. For this study, all the item loadings were statistically significant and were higher than 0.7 (See Table 3), implying adequate convergent validity (Ali et al., 2018). Additionally, the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) values were higher

than the correlation coefficients between constructs, confirming discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, a strong correlation among all the variables implies nomological validity (criterion-related validity). As such, Study 3 confirmed the validity and reliability of the cruise traveler's experience scale as a measurement scale.

Table 3
Confirmatory factor analysis

Dimensions and items	Loadings	AVE	CR. dev
CTE - Hedonics and escapism			
HE1	0.739	0.545	0.825
HE2	0.763		
HE3	0.609		
HE4	0.824		
CTE - Social interaction			
SI1	0.747	0.625	0.869
SI2	0.764		
SI3	0.852		
SI4	0.795		
CTE - Recognition and self-esteem			
RS1	0.883	0.677	0.893
RS2	0.897		
RS3	0.760		
RS4	0.740		
CTE - Activities and facilities			
AF1	0.854	0.648	0.846
AF2	0.684		
AF3	0.865		
Satisfaction	0.713	2.21	1.162
S1 Dissatisfied-Satisfied	0.925	0.867	0.939
S2 Terrible-Pleased	0.937		
Behavioral intentions			
BI1 I intend to continue travelling on a cruise ship	0.974	0.880	0.936
BI2 I will recommend my friends and others to travel on a cruise ship	0.901		

3.3.3. Nomological validity

To confirm the nomological validity of the scale, two additional variables, i.e., satisfaction and behavioral intentions, were added to the model. The literature suggests that social interactions; relaxation and Hedonics; recognition and self-esteem; and activities and facilities are dimensions of customer experience that influence both satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Ahn et al., 2021; Calza et al., 2020; Castillo-Manzano et al., 2018; Han & Hyun, 2018; Hwang & Hyun, 2015; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Oh et al., 2007). A satisfactory tourist experience comes about because travel meets hedonic needs (Kim, 2008). Cruise traveler experiences are closely associated with satisfaction, so a pleasant experience will positively affect overall cruise satisfaction. Satisfaction level helps generate positive behavioral intentions, such as positive word of mouth and revisit intentions (Casado-díaz et al., 2021; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Huang & Hsu, 2010). Moreover, in-depth interviews in Tung and Ritchie's (2011) research determined four dimensions of experience and found a positive relationship between experiences, satisfaction, and revisit intentions. Hosany and Witham (2010) identified five dimensions of cruiser experience: sensory, feeling, cognition, physical (behavior and lifestyles), and social identity. These dimensions are highly associated with satisfaction and revisit intentions. Oh et al. (2007) also demonstrated that customer experience was significantly related to satisfaction and revisit intentions. Based

on the earlier arguments, we argue that cruise travel experience dimensions cause travelers' psychological satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Cruise traveler experiences have a significant influence on their satisfaction.

H2: Cruise traveler experiences have a significant influence on their behavioral intentions.

Several empirical studies in the context of hospitality and tourism have noted the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in resort hotels (Ali & Omar, 2014), wine tourism (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012), and cruise ship holidays (Hosany & Witham, 2010), and heritage tourism. Moreover, within this research area, the literature has revealed a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and recommending to others and revisiting a destination (Ali & Omar, 2014; Kim, 2008). By considering these arguments, we postulate the following hypothesis:

H3: Cruise traveler satisfaction has a significant influence on their behavioral intentions.

Satisfaction and behavioral intentions were measured using two items taken from Hosany and Witham (2010) and Hung and Petrick (2011). For the measurement model, all the loadings were above the threshold of 0.7 (Table 3). Next, a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 iterations was performed to test the statistical significance of the weights of sub-constructs and the path coefficients. As shown in Figure 2, cruise traveler experience explained 40.1% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.401$). Moreover, cruise travelers' experience and satisfaction explain 43.6% of the variance in behavioral intentions ($R^2 = 0.436$). Next, effect sizes (f^2) were assessed, and as shown in Table 4, all relationships had a medium effect. Table 4 presents the complete results of the structural model and hypotheses testing. All three hypotheses were strongly supported, indicating that cruise traveler experience was a good predictor of tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Moreover, the findings indicate that satisfaction can also predict behavioral intentions. As such, the results confirm the predictive validity of the cruise traveler experience scale.

Table 4

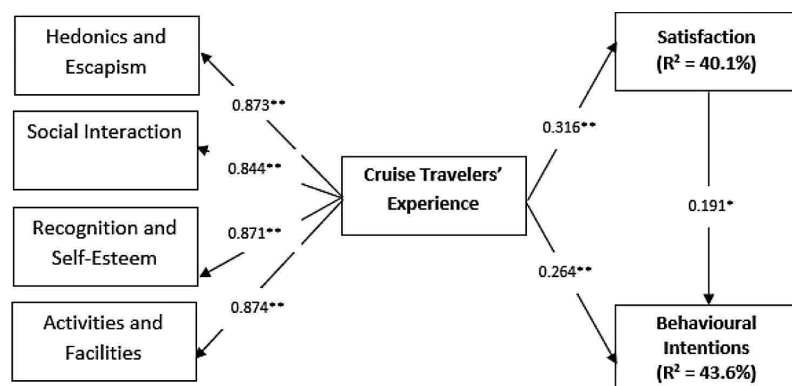
Structural estimates (hypotheses testing)

Hypothesis	Beta	T Value	f - square	Decision
H1 Cruise traveler's experience -> Satisfaction	0.316	3.586*	0.210	Supported
H2 Cruise traveler's experience -> Behavioral Intentions	0.264	2.773*	0.196	Supported
H3 Satisfaction -> Behavioral intentions	0.191	2.765*	0.177	Supported

*2.58 (P<0.01).

Figure 2

Structural model



**P<0.01; *P<0.05.

→ Supported

4. Discussion and conclusion

To develop satisfying customer experiences, the tourism industry offers tourists opportunities for active participation and engagement (Lee & Ramdeen, 2013). Cruise tourism also uses the same methods, becoming more customer-oriented as it has developed; in particular, great attention has focused on traveler preferences and experiences (Yi et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential to study the elements of cruise traveler experiences and their post-consumption behavior. However, cruiser experiences remain relatively understudied. Moreover, according to related academic literature, cruise experiences are a complex construct related to customer cognition, making it difficult to model (Hung & Petrick, 2011). In addition, most of the research on cruise travelers has noticeably focused on motivation to cruise and cruiser expectations (Fan & Hsu, 2014; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Juan & Chen, 2012), ignoring their onboard experience. The only exception to this argument is Hosany and Witham's (2010) study, where the researchers adopted a generic scale of *'experience economy'* to assess cruiser experience. However, specific scales to assess cruise traveler experience are hard to find in the literature. Hence, this study aimed to bridge this research gap by developing a scale for assessing cruise traveler experience and validating the scale by examining its effects on cruise traveler satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

This study makes significant theoretical contributions. The results revealed that the scale developed by this study was valid and reliable. It is essential because the initial study suggests a specific reliable, and valid scale for assessing cruise traveler experiences, particularly cruise line management. From a theoretical perspective, this instrument will help conduct empirical research on how cruise traveler experiences affect image, emotions, memories, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, all of which are consequences of those experiences. This study proposed a second-order multidimensional construct of cruise traveler experiences with four primary dimensions: Hedonics and escapism; social interaction; recognition and self-esteem; and activities and facilities. This construct differs substantially from existing scales in the academic literature. For example, to study cruise traveler experiences, Hosany and Witham (2010) used a generic scale that includes the following four dimensions: education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism. While Hosany and Witham (2010) considered some aspects of cruise traveler experiences in their study, they did not cover other essential aspects like activities and facilities, social interaction, and self-esteem. The differences between the dimensions proposed in Hosany and Witham's (2010) work and the dimensions of experience developed in this study, which are specific to cruise travel. The differences in the dimensions proposed in their study and the current research are that this study primarily developed dimensions of experience specific to cruise travel.

Also, the study results indicated that cruise traveler experiences were a good predictor of cruiser satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Moreover, those respondents who were satisfied with their cruise experience were more likely to revisit and recommend cruises to others. These results are like the findings of previous studies (Fan & Hsu, 2014; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hung & Petrick, 2011; Navarro-Ruiz et al., 2020). In this context, Hosany and Witham (2010) indicated that aesthetics and entertainment were significant factors of cruise traveler experiences affecting their satisfaction and intentions to recommend. However, the current study suggests that the activities, facilities on board, Hedonics, and escapism are the strongest influences on satisfaction and intentions to recommend. Of course, the other significant predictor of positive behavioral intentions is customer satisfaction. This study supported that claim and confirmed that cruise traveler satisfaction positively influenced behavioral intentions (i.e., revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth).

The results of this study have some important implications for marketers and service providers in the cruise industry. First, cruise line managers could use our instrument to understand the experiences of cruisers specifically and holistically. This study's results indicate that activities, onboard facilities, Hedonics, and escapism are the most substantial factors in cruise traveler experiences. Kwortnik Jr (2006) reported similar results, noting that the ship scape—the leisure cruise service environment—affected cruiser consumption

satisfaction and behaviors. Likewise, scholars have also found that facilities significantly influence satisfaction and behavioral intentions as part of the physical environment (Ali & Omar, 2014). Recently, with the advent of mega-ships, cruise marketing has shifted its focus away from promoting destinations on a cruise itinerary (Hung et al., 2020). Instead, cruise lines prefer to differentiate themselves from competitors through design, layout, activities, and onboard facilities (Kwortnik, 2008; Sanz-blas et al., 2019). For example, some cruise ships have shopping plazas, amusement facilities, or expensive art collections.

Furthermore, escapism and Hedonics are also substantial factors in cruise traveler experiences. Therefore, in their promotions, cruise lines should focus on the onboard activities and facilities and emphasize the perceived escape, Hedonics, recognition, and self-esteem in every detail of these activities and facilities. The tourism literature views escapism as an essential motivator for personal travel and vacations (Calza et al., 2020; Snepenger et al., 2007). For example, escaping from normal life is often the primary motivation to cruise (e.g., Qu & Ping, 1999). Similarly, escapism has been recognized as an important motivation in leisure travels and service experiences (Pine et al., 1999). The findings of this study also showed that escapism strongly influenced cruise traveler experiences, which is not surprising because travelers, while cruising, escape from their daily routines and problems and feel as if they are in a different world. Further, during a cruise where people seek to consume experiences rather than simply products (Ahn & Back, 2019), hedonic values are more salient than utilitarian values (Babin et al., 1994). This study's results show that hedonic values are fundamental in cruise lines. Cruise lines provide their passengers with a wide variety of onboard activities, which help achieve hedonic value; the findings reported in this study support this. Thus, cruise travelers desire not only onboard activities and facilities but also escapism and Hedonics.

Moreover, recognition and self-esteem are also crucial to cruise traveler experiences. Self-identity or internal gratification is notable in the cruise travel context. Wang (1999) stated that self-making and bodily feelings determine the achievement of existential authenticity during travel. Thus, in this study, respondents may be motivated by self-esteem and recognition, as suggested by Navarro-Ruiz et al. (2020). The importance of recognition and self-esteem in cruise traveler experiences in this study contradicts the work (Ahn et al., 2021), who thought that tourism falls short of legitimate reasons for the recognition. The respondents of this study pointed out that feeling consistent recognition during their travel was extremely important for them. Thus, providing recognition in combination with fulfilling the need for escapism and self-esteem can be a more effective tactic in providing positive cruiser experiences. Perceived escapism should be paid the most attention to and reflected in every service delivery and performance detail.

Moreover, interaction with the passengers may help ensure that they are deeply involved in the experience; it is vital to satisfy their hedonic needs. In turn, tourists immersed in the experience are relaxed and more likely to accept the cruise ship's offerings. Naturally, tourists pursue hedonism during their travels. Therefore, from a pragmatic viewpoint, cruise travelers require more variety of on-site activities to evoke and stimulate their hedonic motivation and help them receive better service experiences. For example, exciting onboard water rides or unique cabins, such as Havana cabanas with outdoor patios, may make travelers feel excited as if they are escaping ordinary life.

Finally, cruise lines should engage travelers in the process of travel service delivery. Since ports of call are essential components of cruises, cruise lines should provide their customers with engaging activities at these ports. For example, local tour guides can be invited to deliver exciting information about the destination. Moreover, different cultural performances by local performers can be organized. These kinds of activities will fulfill travelers' need to interact, escape, and keep them involved. In turn, such enjoyable moments stimulate travelers to share their memorable experiences with others and to revisit. These kinds of activities should not be included in the cruise package price but may be offered optionally. Cruise line managers may need to put all their efforts into encapsulating holistic experiences for travelers to achieve customer satisfaction and positive behavioral intention.

Moreover, the cruise traveler experience must be multidimensional to achieve overall traveler satisfaction, additional travel purchasing, and positive word-of-mouth. More recent research has shown that satisfaction with services may be enough to engender future business for a company (Hung et al., 2020). However, this study showed that the experiential aspect of service performance is the cause of satisfaction and, thus, behavioral intention. Hence, marketing will be successful only if experiential elements are added to promotions and marketing plans. Furthermore, by following this pragmatic approach, cruise companies may benefit financially. Finally, it is also important to emphasize that cruise traveler experiences require the cooperation and collaboration of different industries (e.g., entertainment, retail, and hospitality). Therefore, joint efforts can generate memorable experiences with the service for cruise travelers. One more reason for such cooperation is that better performance in the cruise industry may positively affect these other industries. Thus, these suggestions on generating holistic experiences for cruise travelers also apply to other industries seeking business from cruise travelers.

As with any study, this one had some limitations. First, the study survey was conducted using cruise travelers at Malaysian ports right after debarkation. Therefore, their perceptions might be very fresh; with time flow, the perception may change. Further studies should explore this issue in more detail. Furthermore, this study was conducted at only two cruise ports in Malaysia; therefore, the results may not be generalized. To obviate this shortcoming, a large-scale study conducted in more cruise ports may be needed. Furthermore, future research should explore how memorability in the cruise traveler experiences affects cruise traveler experiences and behavior. Lastly, this study was conducted before COVID-19. Hence, respondents and the researchers did not account for any discussions or implications arising in the wake of this pandemic. This scale may further be developed to consider changes due to the pandemic to see how cruise travel experience (onboard and ashore) may have changed.

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