



## Original Research Article

## Role of motivations for luxury cruise traveling, satisfaction, and involvement in building traveler loyalty

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## ABSTRACT

Given the lack of empirical research explicating luxury cruise travelers' post-purchase behavior, the present study attempted to test the relationship between cruise travel motivations and satisfaction, and to identify the impact of such association on traveler loyalty by considering the moderating effect of traveler involvement. Measurement instruments for study variables were identified to include a sufficient level of validity and reliability. Results of the structural model assessment generally supported the hypothesized associations. Our theoretical model had a satisfactory level of prediction power for loyalty. Each research variable played a crucial role either as a predictor or mediator. Traveler satisfaction was of utmost importance in building loyalty. Findings from the structural invariance assessment supported the moderating impact of traveler involvement on satisfaction and loyalty. This relationship was stronger when luxury cruise travelers' involvement level was high. Implications for cruise practitioners and researchers are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Loyal customers bring enormous advantages to every firm (Brunner et al., 2008), allowing for a continuous profit stream and reduction of marketing/promotion costs (Korte, 1995; Lee et al., 2017; TaghiPourian and Bakhsh, 2015). The expenses regarding acquiring new and non-loyal patrons are undoubtedly higher than those expenses of keeping the existing repeat and loyal patrons (Korte, 1995; Reichheld and Teal, 1996). The criticality of customer loyalty is thus not overemphasized in the competitive tourism marketplace (Chua et al., 2017; Mechinda et al., 2010). Particularly, in the cruise industry, increasing competition is a main concern for every cruise operator (Chua et al., 2017; Han et al., 2016; Shim et al., 2017). For past few decades, the fast expansion of the cruise tourism has accelerated the severe competitions among cruise companies in the marketplace (Han and Hyun, 2017). Despite cruise traveling is one of the most preferred vacation types (Brida et al., 2015), a significant increase in passengers' switching behaviors has increasingly becoming a challenging issue in the cruise industry (Chua et al., 2015; Han and Hyun, 2017; Hwang and Hyun, 2016; Shim et al., 2017). Given this competitive market situation and increased customer switching, improving passenger loyalty is fundamental for any cruise line's success (Lee et al., 2017; Hwang and Hyun, 2016) as loyalty patrons show behavioral tendency of repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth behaviors that are favorable for a company (Mechinda

et al., 2010; Oliver, 1997, 1999; TaghiPourian and Bakhsh, 2015).

The cruise line industry is undoubtedly considered as one of the most popular, profitable, and rapidly growing segments of the global tourism industry (Brida et al., 2012b; Brida et al., 2014; Chua et al., 2017). The cruise tourism generates considerable social and economic impacts on destinations (Brida et al., 2012b; Brida et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2014), creating a significant number of jobs in such destinations (Sun et al., 2014). With the growth of the cruise tourism market, many cruise lines recently center on improving passengers' vacation experiences more than ever as their marketing/service strategies for attracting new customers and retaining existing customers (Chua et al., 2017; Han and Hyun, 2017). Thus, while cruise traveling, passengers not only experience different cruise port destinations but also experience/enjoy diverse entertainment programs, facilities, foods, and beverages (Chua et al., 2015).

In recent decades, many existing studies in diverse sectors comprising hospitality and tourism claimed that purchase motivations (Caber and Albayrak, 2016; Han and Hyun, 2017; Hsu et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017) and customer satisfaction (Brida et al., 2012b; Brida and Coletti, 2012; Brunner et al., 2008; Han and Hyun, 2015; Ostrowski et al., 1993; Park et al., 2004) are major constructs in explaining customer retention and customer loyalty generation procedure. These researchers repeatedly identified that motivations and satisfaction are key driving forces of customer post-purchase behaviors, and thus should be

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incorporated into a framework explicating customer loyalty. While these motivations are believed to be important, research about cruising motivations and its role in decision formation has been rarely explored in the luxury cruise sector. In addition, little research has made an empirical integration of a higher-order framework of purchase motivations into the loyalty generation model in hospitality and tourism. Studies that examine the combined effect of purchase motivations and satisfaction on traveler loyalty are also not abundant in the cruise industry. Moreover, the criticality role of traveler involvement has often been stressed by tourism researchers (Chua et al., 2017; Iwasaki and Havitz, 2004; Pritchard and Howard, 1997). Unlike other research constructs driving customer loyalty/retention in a direct/indirect manner, involvement has a moderating nature that affects the associations between loyalty and its possible predictors (Han et al., 2017). In spite of its importance, the role of traveler involvement in the cruise sector has hardly been explored. Furthermore, an integrative approach including this higher-order nature of travel motivations, traveler satisfaction, and the moderating nature of traveler involvement has not been made for explanation of traveler loyalty formation, particularly in the luxury cruise context.

In order to fill these gaps existing in the extant tourism literature, this study aimed to develop a robust theoretical framework of traveler loyalty comprising cruise travel motivations ([a] self-esteem and social recognition, [b] escape and relaxation, [c] learning, discovery, and thrill, and [d] bonding) and traveler satisfaction by considering the moderating impact of involvement. Specifically, we attempted (1) to unearth the clear role of travel motivations and satisfaction in building loyalty, (2) to identify the adequacy of the higher-order structure of motivations and its function within the proposed theoretical framework, (3) to test the mediating impact of satisfaction, (4) to discover the relative criticality of study variables in determining traveler loyalty, and (5) to identify the moderating role of traveler involvement in the luxury cruise industry. In the following section, a thorough review of the literature is presented. Subsequently, methods used in this research and results of the findings are provided. Lastly, discussion and implications are stated.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Motivations in tourism

Motivations, which have long been a critical topic in tourism and consumer behavior (Caber and Albayrak, 2016; Mak et al., 2009), are a significant internal variable that arouses and guides individuals' behaviors (Crompton and McKay, 1997). According to Crompton and McKay (1997), motivations of tourism indicate an active process of internal factors such as needs/wants that create a psychological state of tension within individuals. In a similar manner, Lee et al. (2017) described tourism motivations as individuals' activated psychological states that direct them toward the fulfillment of tourism needs (Lee et al., 2017). When travelers' needs are stimulated, they form travel motivations, which drive these travelers to take actions to meet their tourism needs and decrease tension (Hsu et al., 2017). In travelers' decision-making process, individuals choose, encode, process, and remember most information in the way coherent with their motivations of travel (Crompton, 1979; Lee et al., 2017). Motivations are hence of utmost criticality in traveler behavior (Hsu et al., 2017).

### 2.2. Travel motivations in the cruise industry

In a cruise context, in order to comprehend passengers' motivations for travel, Hung and Petrick (2011) used a psychometric procedure based on Churchill's (1979) widely accepted paradigm for developing measures. According to them, motivations for cruising differ from travelers' motivations for common traveling. Hung and Petrick's (2011) qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches identified four

major categories of cruise travel motivations, namely "escape/relaxation", "self-esteem and social recognition", "learning/discovery and thrill", and "bonding", and they demonstrated that these four factors are adjuncts of one global construct of motivations for cruising. These identified motivation categories cover most factors of Hong Kong cruise tourists' motivations (i.e., "escape from normal life", "self-discovery", "cultural understanding", "social status", "health and exercise", "self-discovery", "business purpose", and "beautiful environment and scenery") explored by Qu and Ping's (1999) research and are in general coincided with those cruising motivations identified and utilized in Jung and Han's (2016) recent research in a cruise sector. Jung and Han (2016) asserted that self-esteem and social recognition (the first factor), escape and relaxation (the second factor), learning, discovery, and thrill (the third factor), and bonding (the fourth factor) are important constituents of passengers' motivations for cruise traveling, which contribute to strengthening their emotional experiences while cruising and loyalty intentions for the cruise line. Overall, these motivations factors have been widely utilized to understand the motives of traveling and its role in the cruise industry (Han and Hyun, 2017; Hung and Petrick, 2011; Jung and Han, 2016; Qu and Ping, 1999). Consistently, the present study employed these four dimensions of travel motivations in the luxury cruise sector.

Self-esteem and social recognition are vacationers' strong motives of traveling with a cruise (Han and Hyun, 2017; Qu and Ping, 1999). The dimension of self-esteem and social recognition is associated with travelers' self-worthy feeling as well as with feeling of consuming a certain tourism product (e.g., luxury cruise product) to impress others, which eventually enhances these travelers' perception of self-enhancement and social approval (Hung and Petrick, 2011). Thus, in the cruise context, self-esteem and social recognition have often been categorized into one common dimension (Hung and Petrick, 2011; Jung and Han, 2016). The category of escape and relaxation is the next dimension of cruise travel motivations. The crucial constituents of pleasure traveling are escaping, which refers to the transient change of individuals' ordinary/routine environments by engaging in traveling, and relaxing that indicates psychological/emotional and bodily states of reducing fatigue (Crompton, 1979; Qu and Ping, 1999). Individuals often want to escape from the environment in which they work/live in everyday lives and to relax by lessening physical and mental stress/exhaustion obtained from such routine environment (Jung and Han, 2016). Individuals' such aspirations can be an important motive of cruise traveling (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Han and Hyun, 2017).

The learning, discovery, and thrill are another category of vacationers' motivations for cruise traveling. Seeking for learning, discovery, and thrill is undoubtedly one of the critical motives for pleasure vacation (Duman and Mattila, 2005) such as cruise vacation (Lee et al., 2017). Conceptually, this dimension is consistent with novelty that indicates travelers' desire to seek new and unique/different knowledge and experiences and lessening boredom from their everyday lives (Lee et al., 2017; Lee and Crompton, 1992). The last category of vacationers' motivations of traveling with a cruise is bonding. Crompton (1979) conceptualized this factor as the procedure of building/developing a close interpersonal relationship between/among an individual and his/her family members, friends, or others by traveling together. When enjoying cruise vacation and its related activities together, the relationship closeness between passengers and their accompanying family, friends, or other travelers is often enriched (Hung and Perick, 2011; Jung and Han, 2016). Unlike a simple feeling of individuals' liking, bonding is a strongly interactive and reciprocal process (Lee et al., 2017).

### 2.3. Traveler satisfaction

Ensuring consumer satisfaction along with increase in consumer retention and loyalty generation is paramount for firm's profit increase and its long-term success in the service industry (Rychalski and Hudson,

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