

Synthesizing Research Themes in Cruise Tourism: A Scoping Review of the Literature from 2015-2019

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Abstract

This paper presents a scoping review of the literature from 2015-2019 to synthesize research themes in cruise tourism before the Covid-19 pandemic. The review identified five main issues related to customer research, supply-side research, cruise ship research, overview research, and employee management research. The study suggests that future research should examine the relationship between the perceived quality of cruise port and destination, perceived value, overall satisfaction, and behavioral intention of cruise passengers. Additionally, there is a need for more research in Thailand to identify success factors in developing cruise tourism. The paper proposes two parts for future research, including customer research, which can be applied to quantitative analysis, and supply-side research, cruise ship research, overview research, and employee management research, which can be applied to qualitative research. By synthesizing study results through quantitative and qualitative research methods, a policy for developing Thailand cruise tourism in the future can be formulated.

Keywords:

Scoping Review, Cruise Tourism, Future Research Themes

Research Summary

Cruise tourism is a distinct mode of transportation that integrates transportation, accommodation, and destination (Brida et al., 2015; Kizielewicz, 2012). It encompasses multifunctional and interdisciplinary components such as on-board entertainment, recreational facilities, infrastructure, and onshore activities (Monpanthong & Choibamroong, 2016; UNWTO, 2012a). According to several studies, cruise tourism prioritizes enjoyment and safety, as well as onboard facilities and onshore activities (Dowling, 2006; European Commission, 2009; Kizielewicz, 2012; Monpanthong & Choibamroong, 2016; Ogawa et al., 2009; UNWTO, 2012a; Willis, 2012). It transports passengers from their homeport (starting point) to any planned ports of call (Monpanthong & Choibamroong, 2016).

From 1990 onwards, the cruise industry has experienced exponential growth (Chen, 2016; Wang et al., 2014). It has become one of the most active and rapidly expanding sectors since the 1980s. This industry has shown an average annual economic growth rate of 8% (CLIA, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020, 2019b, 2018a, 2019a, 2018b), proving to be a significant driver of regional economic development. Cruise passengers increased from 17.8 million in 2009 to 22.1 million in 2014. Under normal circumstances, this number was expected to rise over the next three years (Willis, 2012). It was anticipated that 8 million cruise passengers would come from Asia, with China accounting for half of the total in 2020, in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, leading cruise lines such as Royal Caribbean Cruises, Costa Cruises, and Celebrity Cruises have relocated portions of their fleets to Asia to bring cruise lines closer to key customers. Cruise tourism has a significant social and economic impact on destinations (Brida et al., 2015; Brida et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2014), creating a significant number of jobs in such destinations, especially for new Asian target groups (Stieghorst, 2012), and sharing the economic benefits not only for cruise lines but also for the destination or port.

However, the COVID-19 epidemic in the past two years has caused the cruise industry to grind to a halt. Cruise lines had to cease operations and attempt to adapt to survive this crisis. During this disruption, the cruise industry needed to refocus its research on the past to prepare for the future by drawing lessons from research studies. This would broaden the perspective from the past for further development in the future under this crisis. Therefore, this study applied academic principles to gather knowledge from past research. A scoping review (SR) process was used to synthesize and summarize the research themes in the context of cruise tourism from 2015 to 2019 in the international research database (ISI-SSCI) and compare it with research in the context of cruise tourism in Thailand to identify academic gaps and future research themes by specific objectives as follows:

1. Customer Research (Sub-topic including Expenditure, Spending Pattern, Willingness-To-Pay, Cruise Passenger Behavior, Customer Loyalty, Cruising Experience, Customer satisfaction, Cruise Branding, Perception, Mo-

tivation, Crisis Management, Over Tourism, Sense of Responsibility, Cross Views, and Twitter Data)

2. Supply-Side Research (Sub-topic including Destination Management, Positive and Negative Impact on Destination, Sustainability and Green, Cruise Port, Network and Inter-Alliances, Constraints, Slow Tourism, and Residents' Perception)
3. Cruise Ships Research (Sub-topic including Product Development, Cruise Lines' Efficiency, Corporate Social Responsibility, Cruise Lines' Marketing, Cruise New Trend, Cruise Itinerary, and Liminality)
4. Overview Research (Sub-topic including Cruise Tourism Demand, Literature Review, Practice Theories, Aggressive Hospitality, and Current Issues)
5. Employee Management Research (Sub-topic including Job Motivation and Cruise Ship Experience)

Moreover, previous studies on cruise tourism in the past five years need to explore both the demand and supply sides sufficiently. Specifically, most demand-side studies solely concentrate on increasing customer loyalty and retention as an essential goal for service providers and, thus, need more comprehensive research (Toh et al., 2005). It is widely accepted that acquiring new customers is three to five times more expensive than retaining existing ones (Jang & Mattila, 2005; Kotler et al., 2003; Rungroueng & Suveatwatanakul, 2015b; Toh et al., 2005). Reichheld and Sasser, 1990 noted that cost benefits derive from reduced service and marketing costs, decreased customer price sensitivity, increased customer spending, and word-of-mouth recommendations. Thus, in the current competitive market, customer retention is becoming a key factor for service firms' survival and success that reduces costs and increases profitability (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Rungroueng, 2015, 2016; Rungroueng & Suveatwatanakul, 2015a; Varki & Colgate, 2001). However, only some studies have investigated the supply-side, particularly those that combine demand and supply-side variables for investigating the relationship. Thus, future research aims to address this gap and examine the model of the relationship between the perceived quality of cruise port and destination (supply-side variables), perceived value, and overall satisfaction (mediator variables), and behavioral intention of cruise passengers (demand-side variables) (Rungroueng, 2020; Rungroueng & Monpanthong, 2021).

Meanwhile, Thailand also lacks a specific study on cruise tourism development using qualitative and quantitative mixed research methods to provide insights for cruise tourism support plans (Rungroueng, 2023). Therefore, future research should build on existing studies by investigating the supply side and using the obtained data to support Thailand's cruise tourism development. Moreover, reviewing international literature from the last five years is also essential to study the development and apply it to Thailand suitably.

From the literature review, it is evident that in the number of research in the ISI database with high impact factors, there are three elements of variables used in research, which are:

1. Independent variables, such as perceived port quality and perceived destination quality
2. Mediating variables, such as the perceived value of Thailand's cruise tourism and overall satisfaction with Thailand's cruise tourism
3. The dependent variable, such as the behavioral intention of cruise passengers

Combining Thailand's potency to be a cruise destination analysis and factors that will make Thailand successful in cruise tourism in the future is a significant key to guiding cruise tourism in Thailand.

Applied in future research studies, it is divided into two crucial parts: Customer Research, the first part, is applied to quantitative research methodology and used as a demand-based concept by synthesizing variables used in research from this literature review to fill research gaps in Thailand and assess the potential of Thailand's cruise tourism and test the relationship model of the variables. The second part is Supply-Side Research, Cruise Ships Research, Overview Research, and Employee Management Research in the cruise industry applied as an issue in qualitative research to study the success factors in the development of cruise tourism in Thailand using the supply-based concept in the synthesis of supply variables in the subsequent research study. Thus, it suggests a future policy for developing Thailand's cruise tourism by conducting complete research studies that synthesize study results through quantitative and qualitative research methods, filling academic and tourism industry gaps in Thailand.

Note

Kindly consider reading the complete paper published in the Khon Kaen Business School Journal of Business Administration and Accountancy (KKBSJ) at the following link: [A Systematic Literature Review of Cruise Tourism Comparing with National and International Research in 2015 – 2019 before COVID-19 Pandemic for Indicating Academic Gap of Future Research.](#)

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