

MY PARADISE IS OVER THE OCEAN: BRAND EXPERIENCES AND SUSTAINABILITY ORIENTATION IN THE CRUISE INDUSTRY

Abstract:

The global market for hospitality and tourism is increasingly influenced by the consumer's appetite for personal and authentic 360-degree experiences that are increasingly placed at the center of marketing activities to create an emotional customer-brand relationship. Particularly the cruise industry as the fastest growing sector of the travel, tourism and leisure market can be considered as a prototypical form of experiential tourism where the ship represents both the journey as well as the destination. However, in particular the cruise industry is confronted with increasing public pressure related to sustainability considerations. Reflecting the rising consumer concern about ethical and environmental issues, "*even the most cynical of luxury travellers are aware of the need to go green*" (Pedro, 2013). Consumers with sustainability attitudes are concerned about the environmental impact of their travel and are willing to pay higher prices for products that assure environmental responsibility.

Against this backdrop, the main focus of our study is on the influence of sustainability excellence and brand experience in the travel and tourism industry. Incorporating relevant theoretical and empirical findings, this study explores eleven experience- and sustainability-related antecedents of tourist perception and behavior in the context of cruise vacations. The results give evidence that incorporating sustainability orientation and brand experience is a promising way to create successful differentiation strategies that respect natural beauty and local cultures – the main attractions on this type of traveling.

Keywords:

Tourism Industry, Luxury Cruises, Sustainability Excellence, Customer Experience

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