

Perceptions and behaviour of cruise tourists during their visit to a port of call

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Abstract

The purpose of the present research is to assess the perceptions of authenticity and crowding of cruise tourists visiting a port of call and its influence on their future behavioural intentions. The research was carried out in the city of Valencia, because it is one of the main Spanish cruise ports and is a representative city of the Mediterranean ports of call for the cruise business. A total of 467 valid interviews were obtained. For the analysis of data, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 22.0) was used. The findings reveal that Valencia is perceived as an authentic destination with moderate levels of human and spatial crowding. The analysis also demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between the assessed perceptions and the post-visit behavioural intentions, although, in the case of crowding, the association varies depending on the nature of crowding.

Keywords: *Perceptions, behaviour intentions, cruise tourists, destination, port of call*

1. Introduction

The European region that most attracts cruise tourism is the Mediterranean, with Spain positioned as the country with the second largest volume of passengers (9,270,000 in the year 2017) (Ministry of Development 2018). The evolution experienced by some Spanish Mediterranean ports (Valencia and Barcelona, among others) in recent years, has turned them into modern and contemporary cities that, together with their rich history and culture, have enabled the growth of this type of tourism (Garay 2015; Sanz and Buzova 2014). According to reports published by the International Association of Cruise Lines (CLIA), the



impact of the economic activity of the cruise ship industry in Spain is a turnover of more than 1.481 billion euros, generating a total of 31,233 jobs (CLIA Europe 2018).

Past research on cruise tourists' perceptions and behaviours onshore has focused on traditional variables such as satisfaction, expenditure, motivations or tourist activities (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis 2010), while studies exploring emerging constructs gaining increasing attention in the recent tourism literature, such as destination authenticity and perceived crowding, are scarce (Knudsen et al. 2016; Sanz et al. 2019). The existing body of research shows that these types of perceptions may condition the perceived destination attractiveness, diminishing the quality of the experience and affecting positively or negatively tourists' post-visit behavior (Sanz et al. 2019).

Considering all the aforesaid, The purpose of the present research is to assess the perceptions of authenticity and crowding of cruise tourists visiting a port of call and its influence on their future behavioural intentions.

2. Methodology

The study's target population was cruise tourists visiting the city of Valencia. Finally, a total of 467 valid interviews were obtained.

Of the total survey responders, 45.4% were men and 54.6% women. The average age was 57 years, 64.1% of the sample represented tourists over the age of 55 years. In terms of education, 38.8% had completed high school studies, with 54.4% having university studies. Almost half of the respondents were retired or retiring (49.5%), with a significant percentage (33%) of employed people. With regard to nationality, European tourists predominated, coming from the United Kingdom (43%), Germany (15%), France (2.8%) and Italy (11.8%), whilst 10.1% and 3.2% respectively came from the US and Canada; the remaining 11.7% are citizens from other parts of the world.

For the analysis of data, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 22.0) was used, which offers several statistical procedures for the descriptive analysis of the information.

3. Results

3.1. Authenticity and perceived crowding

Table 1 collates the score given by the respondents to the items that allow an assessment of authenticity of Valencia as a port of call.

Table 1. Perceptions of authenticity by cruise tourists

	Mean	Standard Deviation
AUTHENTICITY		
I liked the information I received about Valencia and found it interesting.	5.39	1.33
This visit provided me with insights about Valencia's heritage.	5.39	1.41
During the visit to Valencia, I felt connected with the history, legends and historical personalities.	5.00	1.45
I enjoyed the unique atmosphere/ambience of Valencia.	5.67	1.34
I felt connected with the locals and their culture during the visit to Valencia.	5.05	1.50
I liked the way Valencia blends attractive landscape/ scenery/ historical town.	6.15	1.34

Font: own elaboration

The results permit the conclusion that, in general, Valencia is perceived as a genuine port of call, as it offers a combination of modernity and history (6.15 of average), together with a unique environment (5.67 of average), aspects that evoked the greatest feelings of attraction.

In relation to crowding, Table 2 collates this perception, differentiating between human crowding (the number of people) and spatial (mobility problems), since both types can affect tourists' satisfaction and their behaviour in very different ways (Díaz-Sauce et al. 2015; Zehrer and Raich 2016).

Table 2. Cruise tourists' perception of crowding

	Mean	Standard Deviation
HUMAN CROWDING		
Valencia seems very crowded to me.	4.09	1.72
Valencia was a little too busy.	3.74	1.69
There were a lot of tourists in Valencia.	4.71	1.64
There was much traffic of people in Valencia.	4.29	1.76
SPATIAL CROWDING		
I felt suffocated during my visit in Valencia.	2.61	1.73
I felt nervous about being surrounded by too many tourists during my visit in Valencia.	2.57	1.78
I was disturbed by the contact of too many people while visiting Valencia.	2.48	1.75
I felt that space was missing in the tourist areas because of the many tourists in Valencia.	2.69	1.78
Moving around at tourist areas was inconvenient in Valencia.	2.61	1.77

Font: own elaboration

As may be seen in Table 2, the perception of overcrowding does not yield results that are too alarming (the highest mean value is positioned at 4.71 up to 7), although clearly the evaluations of human crowding are markedly higher than those of spatial crowding. The cruise tourists interviewed were more of the opinion that there are very many tourists in Valencia, rather than with a lack of space or mobility problem.

3.2. Post-visit behavioural intentions

The intention to revisit and any recommendation of the destination (see Table 3) are considered key variables of a tourist's post-visit behaviour (Papadimitriou et al. 2015).

Table 3. Port-visit behavior

	Mean	Standard Deviation
REVISIT INTENTION		
I would visit Valencia again on a cruise trip.	5.84	1.37
I would visit Valencia again as a land tourist.	5.67	1.54
INTENTION TO RECOMMEND		
I would recommend Valencia to my friends and relatives.	6.01	1.27
I would recommend Valencia for a cruise trip to my friends and relatives.	5.96	1.33
I would recommend Valencia as a cruise destination on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).	4.69	2.20
I would recommend Valencia as a holiday destination on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).	4.69	2.19
I will post photos about Valencia on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).	4.48	2.31
I will post positive comments about Valencia on tourist review sites (e.g. Tripadvisor, cruise critics).	4.26	2.37

Font: own elaboration

In general, tourists expressed a desire to visit again and to recommend Valencia to their friends and family, both as a tourist destination and a cruise one. However, online recommendation did not score as high (mean below 5) as the traditional “word of mouth”, which may be explained by the interviewees being of a more advanced age and, therefore, less familiar with social media.

3.3. Relationship between post-visit perception/behaviour

It is especially relevant not only to know the individualised behaviour on the variables discussed above, but also to understand the relationship between them. To do this, and in response to the nature of the variables analysed, different correlation analyses were performed, obtaining the results shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Correlations: perceptions-post visit intentions

	Authenticity	Human crowding	Spatial crowding
INTENTION TO RETURN			
Pearson's correlation	0.524	0.065	-0.115
Sig (bilateral)	0.000	0.163	0.013
INTENTION TO RECOMMEND			
Pearson's correlation	0.546	0.110	-0.178
Sig (bilateral)	0.000	0.033	0.000

There is a clear relationship between the perception of destination authenticity and behavioural intentions. Thus, the more authentic Valencia is perceived to be, the more likely it is to receive a return visit in the future, and to be recommended to others.

In relation to over-crowding, it is clear that the relationship with behavioural intention varies according to the type of crowding perceived (human or spatial). Thus, cruise tourists who perceive heightened levels of crowding due to reduced space have a weaker intention of returning and recommending Valencia to other people.

However, being in Valencia, whether with many or few people (human crowding) does not seem to affect the intention to return in the future. Nevertheless, the results obtained in relation to the human crowding, and the intention to recommend, are surprising, since a positive relationship between both variables is shown. The fact that a tourist perceives a destination as crowded with many people could influence positively at the moment of it being recommended, and perhaps it is the case in levels of not too serious over-crowding, such as those obtained about Valencia.

4. Conclusions

In relation to perception analysis, this research moves away from the study of more habitual factors such as: the satisfaction, the average expenditure, the motivations or the activities carried out in destination, by offering information on other variables, the study of which is scarce, or non-existent, in relation to cruise tourists.

In general terms, tourists consider Valencia to be an authentic destination, perceived as a port of call with a unique atmosphere, combining perfectly its modernity and history. This fact contributes in a very positive way to reinforce the tourist's post-visit behaviour, since

the greater the authenticity perceived, the more likely is the intention to return, and to recommend Valencia as a tourist and cruise destination.

The values obtained on the perception of over-crowding have not been too high, so it may be concluded that it really does not present a major problem in Valencia city. Despite not being identified as a major problem, it is a variable that requires special attention, since the results have shown that it can affect tourist behaviour both positively and negatively. Thus, it is clear that the lower perception of marked spatial crowding, the higher the intention to return to Valencia, and to recommend it as a port of call. However, the perception of human crowding only seems to influence the intention to recommend the destination and, surprisingly, in a positive way; perhaps this is due to the fact that the level of human crowding tolerated by the tourist was not surpassed.

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